Curriculum Updates support school leaders and teachers as they work to design and review their school curriculum, in line with the New Zealand Curriculum and with current knowledge and understandings about effective classroom teaching.

Curriculum Updates are published in the Education Gazette and are available online at http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz

This Update is addressed to the school leadership team and describes the current range of literacy interventions in New Zealand schools. It will help you review your school’s current processes to ensure they are meeting the needs of students who are not progressing as expected in reading and writing.

1 Note that this range of interventions is currently under review.

Supporting literacy learning

How effectively is your school meeting the literacy learning needs of students who are not progressing as expected?

As you review the progress and achievement of your students in relation to The New Zealand Curriculum Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1–8, how confident are you that you are providing the most effective support for all learners in your school?

• Do the readers and writers who are not working at expected levels receive targeted, intensive teaching based on their learning strengths and needs?

• Do readers and writers receiving additional support make progress that narrows the achievement gap between them and their peers?

No? Then it is time to review how your school responds to the needs of these learners.

This resource will help you examine how you use interventions, and their impact on student achievement, in relation to the National Standards in reading and writing.

Continued on page 2
### Three Tiers of Support for Literacy Learning

Support for literacy learning in New Zealand schools can be viewed in terms of three tiers.

#### Tier 1: Effective Classroom Teaching

Effective classroom teaching involves:
- All students engaging in effective classroom programmes and working with skilled, knowledgeable, and observant teachers.
- Teachers delivering appropriate, timely, and explicit literacy instruction with plenty of opportunity for students to acquire and practise literacy skills.
- Teachers making connections to students’ prior knowledge and learning experiences, using them as the foundation for new learning.
- Teachers regularly monitoring progress against expected levels of achievement and ensuring that their instruction is responsive to the learning strengths and needs of all their students.

Classroom teaching is deemed effective when few students require Tier 2 support.

#### Tier 2: Intensive Support

Effective intensive support involves:
- Short-term, focused interventions to accompany and complement the effective class programme.
- Early intervention (which is associated with better student outcomes).
- Specific guidance for classroom teachers, helping them to promote rapid student progress by increasing their range of teaching strategies.
- Students making accelerated progress, as measured against the National Standards in reading and writing, in order to achieve across curriculum areas.

Intensive support is deemed effective when very few students require Tier 3 support.

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You and your teachers need to make the most appropriate decisions, particularly in the first years of schooling, to ensure that all students develop the foundation knowledge they need to become successful readers and writers in English.

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Principals and senior school leaders have a central role in guiding the school’s practice for students at risk of not achieving. Most importantly they determine the rationale for the school’s provision [for the type and range of interventions]. Asking the questions about how best to meet the needs of this group requires informed decision-making about the organisation and resourcing that will offer the greatest leverage in improving achievement outcomes for students in the context of their school.

Tier 1: Effective Classroom Teaching

Guiding questions  He pātai

- What evidence do you have that classroom teaching is highly effective for readers and writers in your school?
- How do you involve parents/whānau in decisions around their child’s learning?

All your students should be engaged in effective classroom programmes and be working with skilled, knowledgable, and observant teachers.

These teachers will use The Literacy Learning Progressions or The English Language Learning Progressions, and the guidelines in the Effective Literacy Practice handbooks (years 1 to 4 and years 5 to 8), to constantly evaluate each student’s progress. They will begin this as soon as each student enters school, carefully monitoring how effectively their teaching programme meets the student’s specific literacy learning needs.

At any stage, the teacher needs to intensify support for a student whose rate of progress is causing concern.

Readers and writers who are not progressing as expected

The National Standards in reading and writing, underpinned by The Literacy Learning Progressions, provide clear signposts that describe students’ achievement at specific year levels. A small percentage of students don’t progress as expected in their reading and writing despite high-quality, responsive teaching; regular monitoring of the students’ progress; and some additional support. There are a range of reasons for this at different stages of schooling.

In the early years of schooling, low reading and writing performance may be the result of one or more of the following.

- Teachers are not clear about how to recognise and build on a student’s prior knowledge and experience.
- The literacy programme focuses too much or too little on:
  - immersion in rich and supportive language experiences, oral and written
  - explicit teaching of phonological awareness
  - opportunities to practise speaking, listening, reading, and writing for authentic purposes.

In later years of schooling, the reasons that students do not make the expected progress will change. For a range of reasons, they may not be developing the more in-depth skills and knowledge required to understand and respond to increasingly complex texts.

An ineffective programme most clearly impacts on the students who are most at risk. Research\(^2\) suggests that successful readers develop other skills and strategies to complement what the teacher has explicitly taught them. Underachieving readers rely heavily on what they have been taught. For example, they may attend only to meaning or only to letter sounds and not develop a balanced system for approaching print.

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**English Language Learners**

Some of your students will come from backgrounds where they are using languages other than English. Some of your students may be transitioning into English-medium schools, for example, from kohanga reo or ā'oga 'āmata. These English language learners need to be well supported with multiple and structured opportunities for learning and practising language.

The most experienced teachers (your school’s internal expertise) should access additional guidance and support to expand their teaching skills. As part of the school leadership team, you may need to help teachers set up appropriate programmes for these students and monitor their progress.

The English Language Learning Progressions provides both the classroom teacher and the specialist teacher with extensive guidance on meeting the needs of English language learners. In many cases, effective practice for native English speakers, such as opportunities to engage with rich texts, benefits English language learners. Similarly, effective scaffolding and practice for English language learners often benefit all students.

It is important to note that learning an additional language is a long process. It can take between five and seven years for a learner to acquire academic proficiency in an additional language and reach the same level as a native speaker of the same age. Acquiring the social and academic language of their peers is a complex process for English language learners. Because of this, they may appear to be having difficulty in literacy learning when the real problem is understanding the language.

Schools most effectively address the needs of English language learners from diverse backgrounds when they:

- identify students who have English language learning needs
- set up appropriate programmes for these students and monitor their progress
- support diversity and encourage the use of first languages
- provide relevant professional development, including support for teachers to undertake TESSOL scholarships
- develop links with these students’ families and communities.

You and your teachers may need to consider intensive support that is specific to English language learning. Students with high language learning needs are eligible for ESOL funding for a limited time. More information about this funding is available on the Ministry of Education website at ESOL Funding and Support Initiatives.

When an English language learner has received timely and appropriate language support but has not made the expected progress, you should consider providing a bilingual assessment. This can be administered by a trained RTLB (with appropriate assistance as needed) and consists of dual assessment in the student’s first language/s and in English. The dual assessment helps you to distinguish between language learning needs, additional special learning needs, and social/emotional needs. You can find more information about the bilingual assessment service on the Ministry of Education website at Bilingual Assessment Service Information.

Schools use assessment information about the individual language learning needs of their English language learners to develop and implement appropriate support programmes. These should be:

- linked to the New Zealand Curriculum and to classroom programmes
- based on English language learning principles as described in the English Language Learning Progressions (ELLP)
- planned by ESOL specialists and classroom teachers working together
- delivered by teachers, English language assistants, or bilingual teacher aides who have participated in relevant professional development (see below).

Supporting English Language Learning in Primary Schools, English Language Intensive Programme: Primary Resource, and English Language Intensive Programme: Years 7–13 will be useful resources in developing these programmes.

The Ministry also offers a range of professional development options including TESSOL scholarships, training for English language assistants (ELAs), and Pasifika bilingual teacher aide training programmes.

More information about professional development is available on the Ministry of Education website at English for Speakers of Other Languages – Professional Development.

In addition, Ministry-funded ESOL/Literacy advisors can assist schools with planning, implementing, and monitoring specialist support programmes for English language learners.

See ESOL Online for more information.

Note that when an English language learner has ESOL funding, it is important to monitor your resourcing decisions and ensure that the support you are providing is having a positive impact on the student’s progress and achievement.

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Some of your students may have been diagnosed with dyslexia. The underlying theme, in all definitions of dyslexia, is unexpected and persistent difficulty in learning to read and write that cannot be explained by any other factors. Although some of these students may be struggling with phonological awareness, the wide diversity in these students’ strengths and needs means that there is no single approach to helping them achieve educational success. Inclusive, innovative teaching that responds to the individual and the strengths and interests they bring to their learning is the key factor in their progress.

As part of the school leadership team, you may need to help teachers access additional guidance and support to expand their teaching skills. The most experienced teachers (your school’s internal expertise) should be your first port of call. You could also support teachers by:

- helping them to work with small groups of colleagues to focus on particular aspects of literacy
- connecting them with speech language therapists (SLTs) for advice on effective literacy programmes for students who are not progressing as expected with oral language
- providing specific guidance for parents/whānau, grandparents, or teacher aides to help them give students more opportunities to practise their reading.

Professional development is available to support the ongoing professional learning of trained teachers. Study awards are also offered by the Ministry of Education to support further professional learning.

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1 The period of five to seven years applies to an English language learner who has strong foundations in their first language and an effective language support programme.
2 See the online version of this update to access the hyperlinks.
Tier 2: Intensive Support

Guiding questions He pātai
- Do you and your board use high-quality student achievement information to make and review your resourcing decisions?
- If your school doesn’t offer Reading Recovery, what decisions are you making to ensure that students at age six who need extra support get it?

If diagnostic assessment confirms that students who are not making suitable progress require intensive support, you need to make immediate decisions about what kind of support they need. At times, it may be most appropriate that this is provided within the classroom programme. Your school’s classroom teachers are trained professionals, and they are best equipped to provide intensive classroom support for a student who needs it. It is not appropriate for a teacher aide to be the primary source of instruction for an underachieving reader and writer.

Commercial packages may also be of limited benefit; you will need to evaluate them carefully and establish whether any that you invest in are accelerating students’ progress in reading and writing. This is especially important if using the commercial package means the students are missing out on other important learning opportunities.

Reading Recovery
One of the choices available to you is to offer a student a place in a Reading Recovery programme. This may benefit a student who has completed one year at school and who is not making expected progress in learning to read and write. If your school chooses not to offer Reading Recovery, you need to make clear and appropriate decisions about what alternative support to offer when it is needed.

Reading Recovery has two main purposes:
- to accelerate the student’s progress in reading and writing so they can work at the appropriate level for their year after about 12–20 weeks
- to identify those students who will require further intensive support beyond the short-term Reading Recovery intervention.

Conditions for ensuring maximum impact from Reading Recovery
- Reading Recovery is in addition to effective classroom instruction and is not a replacement for it.
- A student begins Reading Recovery as near as possible to the end of the first year of school. Delaying entry for any reason increases the achievement gap and results in the student requiring longer in the intervention to catch up with their peers.
- The Reading Recovery teacher holds regular discussions with the classroom teacher to ensure that the intervention is part of a seamless learning programme.
- The Reading Recovery teacher is a classroom teacher and an integral member of the school’s teaching staff. This teacher can then advocate for the Reading Recovery student at syndicate or staff meetings, and other teachers share responsibility for the student’s learning.
- School leaders carefully monitor the student’s progress and help the Reading Recovery teacher to identify and solve problems when that progress slows.
- Well-informed and involved parents and whānau have appropriate expectations for achievement. They know how to support their child at home and understand the importance of good school attendance. The lowest-achieving students are prioritised for places. The reasons for all decisions about who has access to the intervention are transparent and based on clear guidelines.
- School resources, including funding from the Operations Grant and Targeted Funding for Educational Achievement (TFEA), are directed to ensure that there are enough Reading Recovery places available for all students who need this intervention.
- The Reading Recovery is closely monitored and that immediate action is taken if progress is not maintained.

These conditions are an integral part of the Reading Recovery design, but most also apply to any other intensive intervention.

The student’s intensive support may be discontinued when they:
- are working at a level appropriate for their time at school
- are showing signs of independent learning

The Reading Recovery teacher, the classroom teacher, and the parents/whānau need to develop a transition plan to ensure that withdrawing intensive support does not disrupt the student’s learning. You and the teacher then continue to closely monitor the student’s progress. The class teacher promptly acts on any concerns and, if necessary, involves the school leadership team for further action.

Some students may require ongoing support – see Tier 3 (on page 8).

Note that even highly effective interventions cannot ensure that learners who require intensive support will have no further difficulties. Learning challenges may appear later on as texts, learning contexts, and tasks become more complex and require different skills and knowledge. You need to monitor these students regularly and ensure that, where necessary, they continue to receive early intervention so that any difficulties they encounter don’t become major obstacles to their progress.
Guiding questions  He pātai

- How do you support your RT:Lits and RT:LB management committees to ensure that they make equitable resourcing decisions for the students most in need in your school’s cluster?
- How effectively does your school make decisions about who gets additional help? Are the reasons for the decisions transparent and based on clear guidelines?

Resource teachers: literacy (RT:Lits)

RT:Lits work with clusters of schools to provide specific advice and support on meeting the needs of year 0–8 students who are considered at risk in acquiring literacy. They provide this advice and support in collaboration with other literacy professionals. RT:Lits help principals, literacy leaders, and classroom teachers monitor and maintain effective practice for the students referred to them.

A management committee assists the RT:Lits in meeting the priorities of the cluster. Depending on the specific needs of each student, RT:Lits can work at either Tier 2, providing intensive support, or at Tier 3, providing specialist support.

Resource teachers: learning and behaviour (RT:LBs)

Primary schooling

The main role of RT:LBs in primary schools is to work with students and teachers by providing itinerant specialist support. They have a pivotal role to play in helping cluster schools to improve education outcomes for students with moderate learning and/or behaviour difficulties. RT:LBs may support a specific intervention through Learner Support Funding (see the Ministry of Education website at, School Operations: Resourcing for more information).

Secondary schooling

RT:LBs are available to support a student’s learning and behaviour as they move to secondary school. As in primary schools, RT:LBs work proactively to support positive transitions, analyse achievement data with relevant teachers, and set up supports such as reading tutor schemes. They may also work with individual teachers around curriculum adaptation, catering for diverse needs, and classroom management, as well as within school-wide initiatives addressing teacher capability or school culture. Some RT:LBs can help students to access a reader/writer when required for NCEA examinations. For more information about help with assessment, see the NZQA web page Special assessment conditions.

RT:LBs can work at either Tier 2 or Tier 3, depending on the particular needs of each student.

Speech-language therapists (SLTs)

Speech-language therapists can help teachers of students in years 1–8 (with priority given to years 1–3) to support oral language development as a foundation for effective literacy learning.

SLTs can do this by:
- working alongside teachers to build their knowledge, confidence, and capability in supporting oral language development
- educating teachers so that they can promptly identify communication problems that may prevent effective literacy learning
- providing classroom strategies to enhance students’ development of communication skills
- working collaboratively with RT:Lits and RT:LBs, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), and other professionals to identify any speech and language problems that could affect a student’s literacy development and to plan appropriate ways to resolve them.

The Ministry of Education resources Learning through Talk in Years 1–3 and Years 4–8 (2009) will be useful in developing support for student’s oral language.

Some of your students may have been identified as having severe learning needs. Progress for these students may represent significant achievement even though it seems small when compared with their peers. Their progress can be planned for and tracked through an individual education programme (IEP). For further information on meeting the needs of these students, please refer to the Ministry of Education web page Individual Education Programme (IEP).

It is important that services work together to ensure that those students with learning or behaviour needs receive appropriate co-ordinated support.
Using intensive support within and alongside the classroom programme

The principal and board of trustees at an urban primary school were worried about some students’ progress in reading and writing. They communicated their concerns to parents and initiated an intervention focused on these students.

The first step was to contact the Literacy Development Officer (LDO), who worked with the principal to make a plan to meet the needs of students who were underachieving in literacy. They approached the RT:Lit working in the school. In consultation with the school’s leadership team, the RT:Lit put in place a whole-school literacy intervention, which she initially led. Once the intervention was established, the Reading Recovery teacher worked with the junior teachers while the RT:Lit worked with the years 3–6 teachers.

Identifying and responding to individual needs

The intervention began in 2009 and is ongoing. The school identifies students in all classes who are not progressing as expected in literacy. Each teacher then dedicates a 15–30 minute block in the day to working with one of their underachieving readers. Typically, they work with the student while the other students are working in small groups, pairs, or independently on literacy activities.

In these one-to-one sessions, the teacher firstly takes time to build a stronger relationship with the child and to find out about their interests and their world. The teacher takes care to notice specific literacy strengths and challenges for the child, and in particular, what reading comprehension strategies they are and aren’t using. Specific and ongoing assessments are used. The teacher (with the support of the Reading Recovery teacher or the RT:Lit) then develops prompts to help the student with their use of comprehension strategies. These prompts target the student’s specific needs, but the teacher also uses them when they work with that student as part of the guided reading programme. This reinforces the learning for the student and brings it into the context of the everyday reading programme. The prompts are also often relevant for other students and so benefit the whole reading group.

Changing teaching practice

During coaching sessions, the RT:Lit and Reading Recovery teachers shared the insights they have gained over years of teaching students who are not progressing as expected in literacy. With this ongoing mentoring, classroom teachers were then able to build on their own knowledge of what makes effective teaching practice. They made changes to their practice in order to work with underachieving students to accelerate their progress in literacy learning.

In working with one of her students, one teacher’s specific goals were to:

• slow the lesson down
• co-construct learning goals
• focus on giving clear feedback and engaging the student with her feedback
• model using strategies
• use explicit prompts to scaffold the student in using comprehension strategies effectively.

The student progressed steadily throughout the intervention. He moved from Green 2 at 84 weeks, which was well below the expected level of Turquoise, to Gold 2 at 120 weeks, well within the expected levels. (The wedge graph below shows his progress as assessed by five running records taken over the year.)

Monitoring progress school-wide

As part of the intervention, the Reading Recovery teacher and the RT:Lit observe teachers and have conversations with them. The teachers analyse their practice and review their students’ progress with the support of these two experienced colleagues.

Working with the two leaders of the intervention, the principal has been documenting the process, assessing its impact on students’ achievement and monitoring individual students’ progress and achievement, especially after they come off intensive support.
**Tier 3: Specialist Support**

If Reading Recovery is working effectively in your school, it will help you identify the students who have persistent learning needs. Their progress in the Reading Recovery programme will show that they need longer-term specialist support to become successful readers and writers.

Other students may need specialist support to help them with the increasing complexity of literacy learning as they go through school or because of their own moderate to severe learning needs.

When a student is identified as needing specialist support, a senior leader co-ordinates a case conference that involves all those concerned with the student’s learning, including the senior leader, specialists, the class teacher, and parents/whānau. As a result of the case conference, an individual education plan is developed, which is based on all available assessment information and knowledge of the student’s learning history.

The individual education plan may lead to the school accessing support from resource teachers: literacy (RT:Lits), resource teachers: learning and behaviour (RT:LBs), and speech-language therapists (SLTs). (See page 6.)

The school may also draw on Supplementary Learning Support.

### Supplementary learning support teachers

Supplementary Learning Support (SLS) is a Ministry of Education initiative to help the small number of students who have significant and ongoing needs but who are not eligible for ORRS (see box below). These students could have a range of cognitive, physical, or communication needs or general global developmental delays (so that they often remain within level 1 of the curriculum). The SLS initiative provides additional teacher time from a learning support teacher (LST).

Learning support teachers are employed by host schools that are responsible for managing the Supplementary Learning Support for specified clusters of schools.

Additionally, Ministry of Education special education staff provide specialist input for the students and their teachers, for LSTs, and for the host school Supplementary Learning Support management committees.

### High-needs students

Special Education Support is provided for those students (approximately three percent) who have severe communication, behaviour, and/or complex needs through Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS).

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**Reviewing Your Decisions**

If large numbers of students require long-term ongoing support, you and your teachers need to consider a careful review and evaluation of your classroom programmes and interventions. Detailed assessment information showing how each student is progressing as a reader and writer is essential for this.

### Guiding questions  He pātai

- How effectively does your school monitor students’ progress and case-manage their learning during and following interventions?
- How effectively does your school evaluate literacy interventions and use the resulting information to make strategic decisions and to improve interventions?