

The New Zealand Curriculum

Update



Teaching and Learning

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Welcome to *The New Zealand Curriculum Update*

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/curriculum_updates

This Update is designed to help schools ensure positive transitions, with continuity and clear direction, for learners in years 7–10.



Supporting learners in years 7–10

How can schools review their curriculum to ensure effective learning pathways for students in the middle years of schooling?

The New Zealand Curriculum describes the middle school years as a time of great change for learners as they move from childhood to adolescence. Most learners in these years also transition between different school settings. Rural students may move from a small country school to a large area school. Urban students may change schools twice – from their primary school to an intermediate school and from there to a secondary school.

Schools support students through these transitions by designing a curriculum that is responsive to their individual needs, strengths, interests, and stages of development:

During these years, students have opportunities to achieve to the best of their abilities across the breadth and depth of the New Zealand Curriculum – values, key competencies, and learning areas – laying a foundation for living and for further learning.

A responsive curriculum will recognise that students in these years are undergoing rapid physical development, becoming increasingly socially aware, and encountering increasingly complex curriculum contexts. Particularly important are positive relationships with adults, opportunities for students to be involved in the community, and authentic learning experiences.

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Some students may need more support than others to grow and achieve as confident and connected lifelong learners. Schools need to pay particular attention to ensuring successful transitions for Māori students, Pasifika students, and learners with special education needs.

This Update could be explored alongside Update 9, which focuses on effective learning pathways for students in secondary schools.



Learners in years 7–10

Learners undergo more rapid change in early adolescence than at any other stage except infancy (National Turning Points Center, 2003). Their physical changes are accompanied by emotional changes, leading to heightened sensitivity and self-consciousness. Learners in these years are searching for personal identity and are beginning to form their personal values. They want greater independence yet feel a strong need to fit into their peer group. Although their thinking is shifting from concrete to abstract, their intellectual development is slower than their physical development and they still need considerable adult support.

Reports from the Ministry of Education's Middle Schooling Research Programme (2007–2010) reveal that New Zealand students are generally positive about middle schooling and achieve relatively well (Durling, Ng, and Bishop, 2010). However, in these years, many learners' perceptions of school become increasingly negative and their overall engagement in learning declines. This "switching off" can be accompanied by behavioural problems that affect educational participation and achievement, as evidenced by increasing rates of truancy, expulsions, and stand-downs. Māori boys are the group most vulnerable to these experiences.

American researcher Robert Crosnoe (2011), who explores the social turbulence of adolescence, says that educators need to pay greater attention to the informal part of adolescents' education, which takes place within their school peer culture (and sub-cultures) and helps them develop the resilience to cope with social pressures. He shares tips for educators and parents in a set of video clips at <http://vimeo.com/20790988>

Improving the transition: Reducing social and psychological morbidity during adolescence

This recent report from the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor (2011) addresses New Zealand's high adolescent mortality and morbidity, reflected in our high rates of teenage depression, suicide, pregnancy, and binge drinking. The report highlights the contextual changes that create both challenges and opportunities for today's young people. For example, while social media and new technology can enhance well-being, they also promote the risk-taking behaviour associated with adolescence. The report recommends a "whole-of-life" approach to providing young people with the skills to transition smoothly from childhood to adulthood. By designing their curriculum around the key competencies, schools can develop meaningful life skills programmes that are relevant to their local communities.

Guiding questions He pātai

- What are the rewards of teaching students in the middle school years?
- What are the social, emotional, and academic needs of this age group? How does your school or classroom programme address these needs?
- How well are the programmes working? How do you know?
- How does your school ensure continuity and connection for students as they transition between different learning settings?

> CASE STUDY

Creating a culture of support at Hauraki Plains College

Hauraki Plains College is engaged in a continuing change process that aims to make new students quickly feel supported, connected, confident, and ready to learn. Its success is shown by NCEA results that are among the highest in New Zealand.

The process includes the college's leadership of a school cluster within which it has formed strong relationships with contributing schools, including regular conversations about student transitions and learning. The college has also introduced a Junior Diploma of Learning, which is designed to motivate and enhance student engagement, progress, and achievement. The diploma addresses the five key competencies so that students are well prepared for learning at senior level. A literacy focus supports underachieving year 9 and 10 students to improve their reading comprehension.

The college has also created a senior graduation programme, which requires students to set and attain learning goals, contribute through school and community service, and acquire valuable life skills such as producing a curriculum vitae and managing personal finances.

The college builds positive relationships between students, staff, and families through its "river group" programme, which aims to make every student believe that "they can, they matter, and they belong". Each group consists of around 14 students, who meet daily. A teacher coaches the group throughout the students' time at college, supporting them to build connections with one another and between home and school. Staff, families, and students are enthusiastic about the initiative:

The teachers seem to take a real interest in individual children ... They have built a huge relationship with individuals, and that is really neat, and it motivates the children to achieve.

Parent

For further information, see <http://keycompetencies.tki.org.nz/School-stories/Digital-stories/Hauraki-Plains-College>

Meeting the needs of learners in the middle school years

The Ministry's research programme in 2010 included a review of the literature on learners' engagement in the middle years of schooling (Gibbs and Poskitt, 2010). The reviewers identified three components of engagement: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive. The first two are preconditions of the third. That is, if students are to do the cognitive work of making meaning and building knowledge, they need to be present and participating in class and to feel comfortable and connected with their school, teacher, and peers.

Schools can improve middle school learners' engagement in schooling through:

- quality teaching
- building educative partnerships with families and whānau
- understanding learners' needs.

Quality teaching

Gibbs and Poskitt (2010) explain eight interconnected factors that influence student engagement:

- relationships with teachers and other students
- relational learning
- dispositions to be a learner
- motivation and interest in learning
- personal agency/cognitive autonomy
- self-efficacy
- goal orientation
- academic, self-regulated learning.

Unsurprisingly, positive relationships with teachers and other students are critical. The researchers (page 15) cite evidence from Te Kotahitanga (Bishop et al., 2007) suggesting the importance to Māori learners of: *manaakitanga* (building and nurturing a supportive, loving environment), *ngā whakapiringatanga* (the creation of a secure and well-managed learning environment), *wānanga* (engaging in effective teaching interactions with Māori students as Māori), and *ako* (both teachers and students learning in an interactive, dialogic relationship).

Another important factor is relational learning: providing guided opportunities for learning about relationships in the context of the peer group, which is so important to young people in early adolescence.

Gibbs and Poskitt then describe four interrelated pedagogical approaches that promote learning and achievement in the middle school years:

- nurturing trusting relationships
- engaging students in fun activities
- making learning meaningful
- enabling students to learn better and helping them take responsibility for their learning.

The reviewers discuss specific instructional strategies for each of these approaches. However, they remind teachers to consider these strategies in relation to their likely impact on the diverse groups of individuals in their classrooms.

Guiding question *He pātai*

- What connections can you see between the eight factors influencing student engagement and the five key competencies?



Building educative partnerships with families and whānau

Families and whānau are their children's first educators. There is clear evidence that effective partnerships between schools and their families and whānau help students to improve learning outcomes. Curriculum Updates 1 and 10 present this evidence and provide practical strategies and examples to support schools to work with families and whānau to improve student engagement and, in turn, their motivation and achievement.

Understanding learners' needs

As part of their study, Durling, Ng, and Bishop (2010, page 5) asked students what they value in their teachers. The students said they liked it when teachers:

- make lessons fun
- let us do practical, "hands-on" work
- know their stuff
- give us feedback to help our learning
- teach us new things that are relevant to our lives
- give us work that is challenging
- treat us fairly and consistently
- understand students of our age
- have a good sense of humour.

Career education and guidance

Linking curriculum learning to career and learning pathways improves learner engagement. Learners in years 7–10 need to understand the link between education and work and the importance of lifelong learning. As they get older, they become more aware of their personal strengths, interests, and values and begin to explore future pathways.

Careers Education and Guidance in New Zealand Schools (Ministry of Education, 2009) offers advice on effective career education and guidance to learners in years 7–13. It outlines a set of competencies for young people and suggests a model that can be used to develop these. You can find the guidelines, along with other information and resources, at New Zealand Curriculum Online (<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz>) under the links "Curriculum resources", "Learning and teaching resources", and "Career education".

Monitoring student engagement

Me and My School is a student survey designed by NZCER to measure and monitor the engagement of students in years 7–10. For details, see www.nzcer.org.nz/tests/me-and-my-school

Transitions between school settings

Learners' progress through middle school is marked by transitions between different school settings. The transition from primary to secondary school can be especially challenging. The Ministry's research (2010) shows that most students cope with the immediate transition but become more negative in the second half of year 9. For a significant minority, this is a time of considerable stress. Consequently, it is important to think of the year 8–9 transition as a process rather than an event. Supporting students through this process requires schools to know each learner well and to build positive relationships among students, teachers, families and whānau, and "feeder" and "receiving" schools.

The Ministry's research shows widening gaps in achievement at secondary school, with some students falling behind as the literacy and numeracy demands of the curriculum increase. Teachers may need support in understanding these demands and how they can help students meet them (Dinham and Rowe, 2007).

Transitions can be especially difficult for specific groups, such as Māori and Pasifika learners and learners with special needs. Students with sensory disorders such as autism, for example, need extra support to cope with changing classrooms and teachers.

Building interconnected learning communities

A significant finding of the Ministry's research was the importance of cross-sector partnerships. Structured, frequent, and collegial communication between feeder and receiving schools ensures that students experience continuity in their learning.

It is important to set up systems to ensure that information gathered about learners is relevant, presented in a useful form, and distributed to those who need it. Information about learners' social networks and development can be as important as data about their learning and achievement. Receiver schools can use this information to decide the best placement of students and plan how to cater to individual learning needs (including any special needs). Teachers and school leaders from feeder and receiving schools can learn about each other's curriculum and pedagogy and use this information to build greater coherence into their programmes.

> CASE STUDY

Building relationships at Glen Eden School

In an interview published on the TKI Middle Schooling site, Mark Whitford, associate principal at Glen Eden Intermediate School, describes his school's transition programme. He emphasises how crucial successful transitions are at this stage in learners' lives:

Transition for adolescents is incredibly important, and I think as middle school educators we need to make sure that we are giving these students every chance of succeeding ... They are going through so many changes – emotionally, physically, and socially – all those aspects of their lives are changing and it's vital that we give them the tools to succeed.

The school's focus is on building strong relationships with students, parents, and families, contributing and receiving schools, and outside agencies, as well as between students. The school follows a systematic process informed by ongoing research. The process includes the collection of meaningful information to support the transition process. Students with special education needs receive targeted support, including extra visits to the school before they start there, to help them build the relationships they need to succeed.

You can see Mark's interview at <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-stories/School-stories/First-steps-in-transition-programme>

> CASE STUDY

Invercargill schools collaborating on transitions

A story on the Educational Leaders site discusses the introduction of a single transition form for all Invercargill secondary schools. The form streamlines the process for contributing schools while ensuring that secondary schools get the information they need. This is one of several changes in the transition process, including an agreed timeline for key events such as interviews with parents and learners to ensure they are included in decision making. In addition, teachers and school leaders talk to each other and to any relevant support agencies. Secondary schools no longer do their own testing but use the data provided by the contributing schools. Invercargill's education community meets each year to review the process and make any necessary changes.

For the complete story, see www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Leadership-development/Professional-information/Stories-from-school-leaders/Invercargill-schools-collaborate

You can find references and useful resources for this Update in the online version at http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/curriculum_updates

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> References and useful resources

Useful resources

Publications

Cox, S. and Kennedy, S. (2008). *Students' Achievement as They Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Available at www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/31857

Cox, S. and Kennedy, S. (2008). *The Case of Emily: A Focus on Students as They Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Available at www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/31853

Research Division, Ministry of Education (2008). *A Study of Students' Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Available at www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/31844/31846

Research Division, Ministry of Education (2010). *Easing the Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling: Helpful Information for Schools to Consider*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Available at www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/76361

Websites

TKI: Middle Schooling

<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Ministry-curriculum-guides/Middle-schooling>

This website provides case studies, video clips, and research questions to help teachers and school leaders engage with the research about quality teaching for the middle school years and consider its application to practice.

Te Kotahitanga: Making a Difference in Māori Education

<http://tekotahitanga.tki.org.nz/About/The-Development-of-Te-Kotahitanga>

See particularly the section on a "Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Relationships".

The New Zealand Association of Intermediate and Middle Schools (AIMS)

<http://nzaims.co.nz/>

This association aims to be the "guardians of years 7–10 students".

References

Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Cavanagh, T., and Teddy, L. (2007). *Te Kōtahitanga Phase 3 Whanaungatanga: Establishing a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Relations in Mainstream Secondary School Classrooms*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Crosnoe, R. (2011). *Fitting In, Standing Out: Navigating the Social Challenges of High School to Get an Education*. New York: Cambridge University Press. See also the video clips in which Crosnoe shares his findings and tips for educators and parents. Available at <http://vimeo.com/20790988>

Dinham, S. and Rowe, K. (2007). *Teaching and Learning in Middle Schooling: A Review of the Literature. Report to the New Zealand Ministry of Education*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Available at www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/33825/2

Durling, N., Ng, L., and Bishop, P. (2010). *The Education of Years 7 to 10 Students: A Focus on Their Teaching and Learning Needs. Summary Report*. Report to the Ministry of Education. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Available at www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/75765

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Ministry of Education (2009). *Careers Education and Guidance in New Zealand Schools*. Careers Services: Wellington. Available at <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Ministry-curriculum-guides/Career-education>

National Turning Points Center: Center for Collaborative Education (2003). *At the Turning Point: The Young Adolescent Learner*. Boston: National Turning Points Center. Available at www.turningpts.org/pdf/YALGuide2.pdf

Office of the Prime Minister's Science Advisory Committee (2011). *Improving the Transition: Reducing Social and Psychological Morbidity during Adolescence. A Report from the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor*. Wellington: Office of the Prime Minister's Science Advisory Committee. Available at www.pmcsa.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/Improving-the-Transition-report.pdf