

Reporting in Writing on the National Standards in Plain Language

AUTHOR:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I acknowledge the support of the Board of Trustees, my leadership team and the community of Marian Catholic School, Hamilton in allowing me this opportunity to learn and to research beyond the walls of our local community over this time.

I thank the NZEI and Ministry of Education for their vision in developing this opportunity for our principals to research and to learn.

Thank you to the many schools and my colleagues who provided their time, their report formats and their professional insight, to support my growth and learning, particularly around a topic that could be seen as political and difficult in this time of education.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Plain language reporting in writing is essential to not only meet the legal requirements of Nag 2A, it is essential if parents and schools are to engage and work in partnership for better learning outcomes for all students. This report summarizes a ten week research project undertaken in 2011 considering the formats and processes schools have developed to meet these requirements. Reporting processes and formats vary greatly from school to school. Recognition is given to the understanding that written reporting is one part of a reporting process and does not stand alone. Practitioners have worked hard, with some limitations presented around the clarity of requirements and supportive processes to develop written formats. A significant resource is available to leaders to support this development, however it appears relatively unknown and could enhance the professions' understanding of plain language reporting if accessed. An effort must be made to build confidence and knowledge in school leaders, particularly principals. This will provide for well-led reviews and the development of plain language reports to the community. Engaging the community in the process of the development of reports, working alongside school leaders in a co-construction environment, could go some way to ensure the format reaches the community the school serves.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this research is;

- To compare best practice in reporting to the community on student achievement in relation to the National Standards and lead a review of how our school is currently reporting to our community.
- Through professional reading, visiting schools and talking to colleagues, to gain a better understanding of the National Standards and how best to report in plain language on pupil progress against the standards.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE:

In 2009 the Ministry of Education gazetted a change to the National Administration Guidelines with the introduction of Nag 2(a).

“Changes to the National Administration Guidelines” (NAG 2A)

Where a school has students enrolled in years 1-8, the board of trustees, with the principal and teaching staff, is required to use National Standards to:

(a) Report to students and their parents on the student’s progress and achievement in relation to National Standards. Reporting to parents in plain language in writing must be at least twice a year” (Ministry of Education, 2009).

The Ministry of Education then define this further;

“Reporting to students, parents, family and whānau:

In 2010 schools need to provide at least two plain language written reports to students and their parents on students’ progress and achievement in relation to National Standards. Boards should work with their principal and teachers to ensure this is done.

They should work with their school community including students, parents, families, whānau and iwi, to understand what information they would like to see in school reports. School assessment systems and processes may need to be reviewed to ensure they can provide the information and data to support school planning for 2011.

Schools can choose what format to use for reports. Reports could include:

- The student’s current learning goals.
- What the school will do to support the student’s learning.

- What parents, families and whānau can do to support the child's learning.“ (Ministry of Education, 2009)

More guidance about school reports was found in 'Reporting to parents, families and whānau' (Ministry of Education, 2011).

The guidelines required schools to use plain language in their reporting and to clearly show each child's progress and achievement in Reading, Writing and Mathematics, in relation to the National Standards.

It is stated that the report is required to inform the parent whether or not their child is working, in relation to their age for the first three years of school, a year level beyond that, at, above or below the expected National Standard.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND:

Acting in good faith, Marian School having followed the above guidelines and having used the examples from Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI), consulted their community and have developed a mid-year written report for the junior (appendix 1) and senior school (appendix 2)

This report is accompanied by a detailed explanation of how to read the report, defining stanine levels, curriculum levels and other sections of the report (appendix 3).

An end of year report was also developed.

Having sent these reports home for the first time in 2010, there was mixed reaction from the community, with some parents having difficulty reading the report and relating the provided explanation to it. This then left me with the bigger question as to what plain English reporting looked like and the community comments challenged me to look further at this topic.

METHODOLOGY:

Given the limitations of this research due to the time constraint of ten weeks and scope this would allow, the research methodology will be limited to the following sources:

1. School visits to seven schools undertaking one-to-one interviews with principals and other leaders. Questions in these visits will be generalised to the key questions:
 - a. Tell me how your school is implementing Nag 2a.
 - b. How do you report in plain language in a written form to your community?
 - c. How were the report and the reporting process developed?
 - d. What influenced your format and process? (Key resources, professional learning or understandings)
2. Collation and review of copies of written reports from schools interviewed
3. Review of current resources discussed in interviews and support processes from the Ministry of Education.

Confidentiality of interviews and material will be maintained and all documentation provided, including interview transcripts and formats will be destroyed following the compilation of this report.

Schools selected in this review will range from Decile 1A-Decile 10, selected solely by knowledge of communities and schools known to the researcher.

FINDINGS:

A number of schools were visited ranging in decile rating from 1A to 10, viewing their methods of reporting in writing and discovering what works best for them. What I discovered was that there was a wide variance in the ways that schools were reporting and that there were many forms of reporting in writing.

For many schools reporting in writing started with the School Entry Assessment data which was relayed to parents through a conference and a copy of the results given to them. This process was repeated after the administration of the 6 year net survey.

Pupil portfolios are another way schools are complimenting their methods of reporting in writing to parents in plain language. In fact it was found that some schools used nothing more than pupil portfolios to report on student progress to parents while another school used parent/student/teacher conferences as a mechanism for writing agreed statements between all parties on student achievement and the next steps for learning. More and more schools are using e-portfolios so that parents have up to date information on their child by accessing a computer at any time. This is more intensive for the teacher and requires a considerable amount of extra workload. Some parents were said to find e-portfolios as teacher driven, impersonal and 'yet another screen to consult' rather than personalised, plain language hands-on reporting formats.

For many students with significant learning needs, schools are using the writing and review of Individual Learning Plans as methods of reporting.

In my research I have extensively used from the TKI website 'A Snapshot of Written reporting Practice and a Review Tool' from the Practitioners Reporting Group 2010 – 2011. (Ministry of Education, 2011a)

This was a fascinating piece of research from this Practitioners' Reporting Group as their research covered the content of my sabbatical application. In their research they have identified the following components as desirable when reporting to parents in writing on pupil progress;

- A purpose statement.
- Guidelines that help the reader understand the report.
- Assessment evidence.
- Progress of the student clearly shown.
- Coverage of all learning areas.
- Key competencies.
- Goal setting and next learning steps.
- Student voice.

Their report puts forward a series of questions which have been designed for the leadership teams of schools to reflect and use when looking at their current methods of reporting in a plain language written form using plain language in general and in relation to the National Standards.

Key Tools:

“Tool 2: Reflective Questions” (Ministry of Education, 2011a, pp. 23-24)

‘A Snapshot of Written reporting Practice and a Review Tool’ from the Practitioners Reporting Group 2010 – 2011.’

“These reflective questions are to stimulate staff discussion and report analysis. These questions use the same order as the framework and include questions focusing on the development of the school’s written reporting templates, and the explicit and implicit aspects of the content.

Reflective Questions- Purpose Statement:

1. Does the report include a purpose statement?

If not – Why not?

If so - Is the report aim clear?

Is the intended audience clear?

Is it clear what aspect of the reporting process is being addressed?

Reflective Questions – Guidelines:

1. Does the report provide guidelines?

If not – Why not?

If so - Are the guidelines appropriate to the audience?

- Are the guidelines placed appropriately for the whole school community and easily accessed?
- Will the guidelines answer typical/topical queries?
- Are the guidelines brief and to the point, and help the reader clearly understand?
- Do the guidelines include a key or reference point? If not, why not?

Reflective Questions – Assessment Evidence:

1. Does your report provide quality assessment evidence? That is, where the student is 'at' and 'where to next' with their learning?
2. Is the assessment evidence trustworthy and meaningful?
3. Is the assessment evidence based on one or multiple test data?
If it is based on only one test data – what other evidenced is provided to ensure a true judgement of student learning is ascertained? Can the assessment evidence be easily understood by a student?

Reflective Questions – Progress:

1. Is progress related to a short term goal/s?
2. Is the progress of the student shown against levelled progressions?
If so, are the levelled progressions described as school interpreted progressions?
3. Do any diagrammatical representations fo progress sho/refer to multiple sources of evidence?
4. Is language of assessment for learning used (e.g. feedback, feed forward, goal setting)?

Reflective Questions – Learning Areas:

1. Does the report include information of student progress and achievement in all of the Essential Learning Areas (ELA)?
If not – why not?
2. In the report has each ELA retained its unique discipline, language, understandings and skills?
3. Is the reporting across ELAs about desired outcomes rather than curriculum coverage?

Reflective Questions – Key Competencies:

1. Is information included on the student's development of the key competencies?
2. Do the key competencies retain their integrity or are they subsumed into personal and social development criteria?

Reflective Question – Goal Setting and Next Learning Steps:

1. Does the report provide quality feedback to the learner?
2. Are goals and next steps relevant to the learner and individualised?

Reflective Questions – Student Voice:

1. Does the report include student voice?
2. Has the student had input into the report?
3. Would the student understand the information, how it was reached and what their next steps will be?
4. Does the report include aspects of feedback, goal setting, self assessment, and/or student reflection?

Reflective Questions – other features of written reports:

1. Does the report contain clear, easily interpreted reference points and keys?
2. Is the overall report personalised to the student?
3. If yes – to what extent?
4. Do the written comments help the reader understand the student's progress?
5. Are the written comments – personalised?
 - Reflective of the teacher's knowledge about the student as a learner?
 - Specific to current learning?
 - Well constructed in plain language, jargon free and conventionally correct (spelling and grammar)?
 - Easily understood by the student and the parent/caregiver?
6. Are any tables/graphs appropriate, clear and concise?
7. Is information consistent across ELAs?
8. Is the format/layout/presentation consistent across ELAs?
9. Do page numbers, headings, font sizes, use of colour, technology, and space enhance ease of reading?
10. Overall, is the report reader friendly as a meaningful, stand-alone reporting document?

IMPLICATIONS AND BENEFITS:

Most schools have, with limited support made every attempt to report to their communities in plain English on student progress. These findings suggest this does vary from school to school.

There is a wide variation in forms, format, processes and understanding of reporting in plain language across schools. There appears to be confusion as to understanding of the standards, understanding of reporting requirements and a deficit in quality training to support professional learning to gain greater clarity and insight.

Plain language reporting requires a comprehensive reporting process and should not rely on a written report or e-portfolios alone. Not all schools have a comprehensive process around the written report or have chosen other formats instead of written reporting.

The use of parent focus groups is useful for direct feedback as formats are developed. Many reports are developed by the school staff and with good intention and much time and money spent, however added to by the lack of clarity in what is being developed, is the lack of consultation with parent groups in this process, to ensure the product developed is easily understood and meets the need of the

consumer. Many schools are 'doing reporting to' their students and community, rather than engaging with.

The snapshot tools are a resource that provides excellent support for review of processes for reporting. Many of these insights gained through this research can be aligned with this key resource. This resource is based on a wider source of formats and looks beyond National Standards, however is an untapped and not widely known resource of quality, that could well enhance the learning of leaders in the development of reporting, personalised to their communities.

CONCLUSIONS:

- Greater profiling, understanding and professional learning of the tools and resources of "A Snapshot of Written Reporting Practice and a Review Tool" from the Practitioners' Reporting Group, Ministry of Education, 2010-2011, would enhance the professions understanding of plain language reporting in their own communities.
- Recognise that written reporting is one part of a reporting process and does not stand alone.
- Clarity of the National Standards and reporting against this is required
- An effort to build confidence and knowledge in school leaders, particularly principals is required, to provide well-led reviews and the development of plain language reports to the community.
- Engage the community in the process of the development of reports, working with leaders to ensure the format reaches the community. Co-construct.

REFERENCES:

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APPENDIX 2:

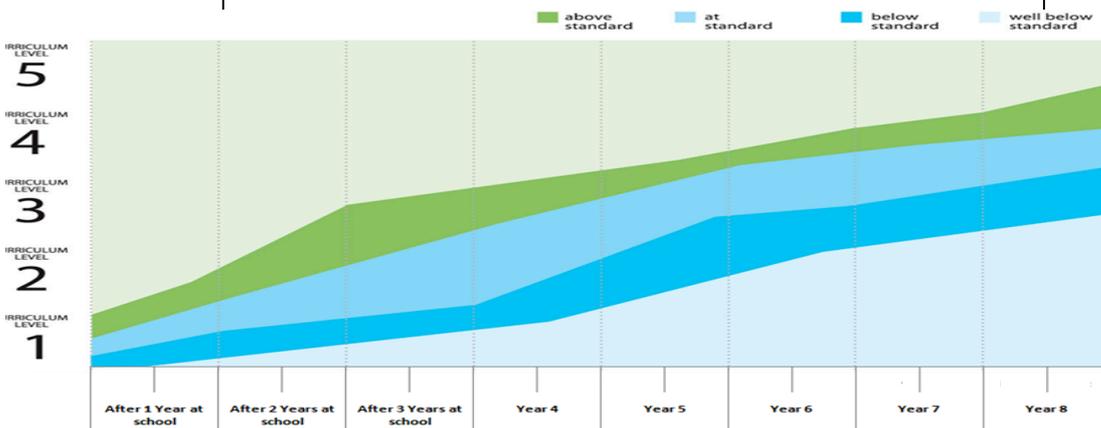


Marian Catholic School Mid Year Report 2010 - Senior

Child's Name:
Year Level:

Teacher:

**Achievement against the New Zealand Curriculum Standards
in Reading, Writing and Mathematics**



Key:

- Reading
- Written Language
- Mathematics

Achievement Level:
Working at ...
Level 1 - by the end of Year 2
Level 2 - by the end of Year 4
Level 3 - by the end of Year 6
Level 4 - by the end of Year 8

Reading Assessment

Current Reading Curriculum Level:

Reading Comprehension PAT:

Reading Vocabulary PAT:

STAR Reading:

Effort:

Writing Assessment

Writing Exemplar Level:

Effort:

Maths Assessment

Numeracy Stage:

Maths PAT:

Effort:

Next Learning Steps

Helping with Learning Steps at Home

Effort Key:

Always applies him/herself = 1
Sometimes applies him/herself = 4

Usually applies him/herself = 2
Rarely applies him/herself = 5

Generally applies him/herself = 3

General Comment:

Teacher:

AP/DP/ Principal _____

Date:

Marian Catholic School
Mid Year Report 2010
Explaining the Report



A. Achievement against the New Zealand Curriculum Standards in Reading, Writing and Mathematics Graph

The graph shows where your child is currently working at against the New Zealand Curriculum Standards. Progress will be plotted twice a year against the standards.

The mid year plots are a progress indicator only, with end of year plots indicating whether or not your child has met the standard for their year level.

Student achievement will be plotted on the graph from the end of one year at school onwards. Plots before this will only be at the teacher's discretion.

A range of testing, sampling, in- class work and observation is used to make an **overall teacher judgement** about where your child sits in relation to the standards.

B. Relating Curriculum Levels and Reading Standards to Year Groups

The first table below indicates the expected curriculum levels from year 1 to 8. The NZ Curriculum Standard reading level/ age for each year group is also indicated.

1. The colour chart beneath indicates progress in reading in the Junior Years at school. Students' progress from the left at the start of school, with Reading Standards indicated after the first, second and third year at school (Green, Turquoise, Gold).
2. The reading standards from year 4-8 are given as a curriculum level. The expectation is that students will be able to use a variety of texts for information purposes at the reading age given to meet the demands of the curriculum.
3. While the reading levels for year 5/6 and 7/8 are listed as the same, Year 6 and 8 are expected to approach these level texts with greater depth, independence and confidence to meet their standards.

Year Levels Related to Curriculum and Reading Levels

Year Level	After 1 st Year at School	After 2nd Year at School	After 3rd Year at School	4	5	6	7	8
Curriculum Level	1		2		3		4	
Reading Standard Level/Age	Green	Turquoise	Gold	8.5 – 9.5 yrs	10-12 yrs	10-12 yrs	12-14yrs	12-14yrs

Reading Standards After the First Second and Third Years of School

Magenta	Red	Yellow	Blue	Green	Orange	Turquoise	Purple	Gold
1 = Std After 1 Year at School				1		2		3
2 = Std After 2 Years at School								
3 = Std After 3 Years at School								

C. Reading, Writing and Maths Assessment

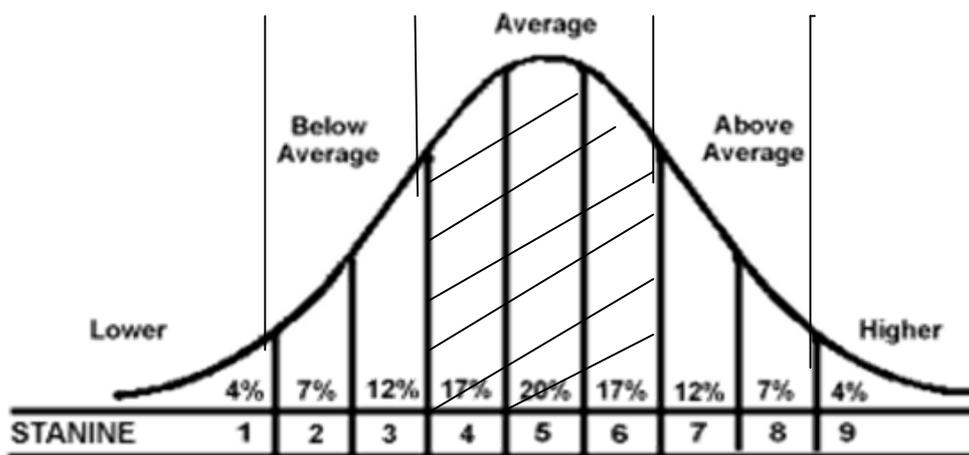
This information gives a summary of testing, (E.g. PAT), sampling (E.g. written language samples marked against the exemplars) and observations (e.g. Current numeracy level) to date.

This information and other in- class data has been used to make an **overall teacher judgement** about where your child sits in relation to the standards.

D. Understanding Stanines

Comparisons can also be done using what are known as stanines. Scale scores at each year level nationally are divided into nine levels of achievement, called stanines, with the lowest performance level being stanine one and the highest stanine nine.

For example, you may be told that when compared with all year 4 students nationally, your child is in stanine 7. Since the average stanine is stanine five, this indicates an above average performance.



E. Next Learning Steps

This outlines where your child needs to head next with their learning in Reading, Writing and Mathematics. Classroom programmes and where required, support or extension programmes will cater for these needs.

F. Helping with Learning Steps at Home

This outlines how parents and caregivers can assist at home to help their children in meeting next learning steps.

G. Effort

This indicates how much effort your child makes with their learning in Reading, Writing and Mathematics.

H. General Comment

This section offers comment on your child's work habits, relationships and other detail your child's teacher deems relevant to your child's learning.

