Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand

Matatū. Tū Mataora.
Stand tall. Shape the future.

A guide to the standards and focus areas of the *2026 Standards for the Teaching Profession*

October 2025

Contents

Introduction

If you're looking for the definitive word on every standard and focus area in the 2026 Standards for the Teaching Profession, this isn't it!

The standards speak for themselves[1], with each focus area as an entry point for interpreting the broader headline standard.

Ultimately, every educational setting, including Initial Teacher Education providers, must interpret the 2026 Standards in ways that make sense and hold integrity in its own context.

This document has no standing as – and does not purport to be – the single correct way of reading the standards and focus areas.

Think of it instead as a set of drafters' notes: a record of what Matatū Aotearoa | Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand had in mind when wording the standards, taking account of the wealth of valuable and detailed feedback, we had received from the profession during drafting.

We hope this perspective proves useful for teachers, principals, professional leaders, and teacher educators— especially as you begin embedding the 2026 Standards into practice, processes, and programmes.

It's longer than we expected, so don't feel obliged to read cover to cover. Dip into the focus areas that puzzle you and return later when new questions arise.

(Hot tip: it pairs well with the one-pager that lays out all standards and focus areas side by side.)

In short, it's intended to be an aid, not a burden.

Good luck on your 2026 Standards journey!

Ngā mihi,

Lesley Hoskin
Tumu Whakarae | Chief Executive

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1   As recorded, at the time of writing, in the publication Introducing the 2026 Standards for the Teaching Profession,
https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Code-and-Standards/Introducing-2026-Standards-Teaching-Profession.pdf.

Key terms

(Cross-references to other key terms in these definitions are highlighted through <u>underlining</u>.)

The 2017 Standards: In this guide, this phrase refers to Ngā Paerewa mō te Umanga Whakaakoranga | Standards for the Teaching Profession, which were approved by the Teaching Council in 2017. The 2017 Standards were published as part of the document *Our Code, Our Standards | Ngā Tikanga Matatika, Ngā Paerewa*. While the elaborations of the 2017 Standards included in that document did not have formal standing, they are discussed in this guide as being part of the overall package of content that made up the 2017 Standards.

The 2026 Standards: In this guide, this phrase refers to the 2026 Standards for the Teaching Profession, which were approved by the Teaching Council in 2025, and which are intended to come into widespread use in 2026 and come into full effect in 2027. The phrase 'the 2026 Standards' is intended to encompass the eight <u>standards,</u> the three <u>domains</u>, and the 33 <u>focus areas</u>.

Descriptor: Each <u>standard</u> and <u>focus area</u> has both a <u>title</u> and a <u>descriptor</u>. The descriptor is the second line, below the title, and sets outs out what the standard /focus area is about in more detail than the title. The descriptors of standards often connect the standard to the focus areas that sit underneath it. The descriptor is formally considered part of the standard or focus area.

Domain: Each of the <u>standards</u> is identified as sitting within one or more of the three professional domains. The domains are discussed further in the following section of this guide.

Educational setting: The <u>2026 Standards</u> use the phrase 'educational setting' and it is also used in this guide. The term refers to the wider physical and organisational context that the teacher works in, beyond the immediate <u>learning setting</u>. In most contexts, this will mean an early learning service for early learning teachers and a school for primary and secondary teachers. See also discussion under the entry for Focus area 8.3 'Actively contribute to the wider educational setting'.

Focus area: Each of the <u>standards</u> has 3-6 focus areas sitting under it, which have the effect of interpreting that standard. The focus areas are considered to be part of the <u>2026 Standards</u>. Much of this guide is focused on explaining the intent behind the wording of each focus area.

Learning setting: The <u>2026 Standards</u> use the phrase 'learning setting' and it is also used in this guide. The term refers to the group(s) of learners that the teacher interacts with and the physical environment(s) in which this occurs. It sits within a wider <u>educational setting</u>. For primary and secondary teachers, this will usually equate with classes and/or classrooms, depending on context.

Standard(s): In this guide, other than when phrased as <u>the 2026 Standards</u> or <u>the 2017 Standards</u>, the terms 'standard' or 'standards' refer to one or more of the eight top-level elements of the 2026 Standards. These are numbered 1 to 8 and incorporate both a <u>title</u> and <u>descriptor</u>.

Title: Each <u>standard</u> and <u>focus area</u> (q.v.) has both a title and a <u>descriptor</u>. The title is the first line, above the descriptor. When a standard or focus area is cited in this guide, it will be called by its numbering (e.g. "Standard 4" or "Focus area 3.2") and title. Nevertheless, the descriptor is also formally considered part of that standard or focus area.

The three domains

The 2026 Standards have added a set of three professional 'domains', which is a new way of grouping the standards that the 2017 Standards did not have.

These domains do not have standing as something teachers need to be accountable for, in and of themselves. Rather they are a means of thinking about and interpreting the eight standards and the focus areas that sit within each of these. The brief discussion of each domain below is intended to assist that process of interpretation (as are the references to the domains throughout this guide).

Two of the standards sit within the *Professional knowledge* domain, three within the *Professional practice* domain, and two within the *Professional engagement* domain. Standard 1, 'Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership', sits across all of the domains with its focus areas reflecting different domains as described below.

Professional knowledge

Standards 2 (Know the content and how to teach it) and 3 (Know the learner and the learning process) sit within the *Professional knowledge* domain.

Standard 1, Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership, sits across all domains, with Focus areas 1.1 'Understand and recognise the unique status of tangata whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand' and 1.2 'Understand and acknowledge the histories, heritages, languages, and cultures of partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi' in particular reflecting professional knowledge.

These standards and the focus areas underpinning them relate primarily to ideas and information that teachers can be expected to know and understand. This knowledge and understanding then flows into (and out of) aspects of the teacher's practice, in ways that is captured across the three *Professional practice* standards (see Figure 1 overleaf for the most direct instances of this).

Having said that, however, for practising teachers, the way that principals or professional leaders may be best able to recognise these aspects of professional knowledge is by the way this knowledge is (or is not) embodied in their practice. For student teachers, knowledge and understanding might get assessed more directly through tests or assignments.

Professional practice

Standards 4 (Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning), 5 (Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments) and 6 (Assess, provide feedback, and report on learning) sit within the *Professional practice* domain.

Standard 1, Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership, sits across all domains, with Focus area 1.3 'Design teaching and learning experiences that reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in New Zealand including affirming for all learners the knowledge, identity, language, and culture of te ao Māori and tangata whenuatanga' in particular reflecting professional knowledge, and focus area 1.4 'Practise and develop the use of te reo and tikanga Māori, including in support of positive engagement with Māori learners and their whānau and communities' reflecting both professional practice and professional engagement.

Figure 1 *Professional practice* Standards that draw directly on *Professional knowledge* Standards

Professional knowledge	Professional practice

Professional knowledge

Standard 1, Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership

1.1 Understand and recognise the unique status of tangata whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand

1.2 Understand and acknowledge the histories, heritages, languages, and cultures of partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Standard 2: Know the content and how to teach it

2.1 Understand the content

2.2 Understand how to enact the curriculum

2.3 Understand evidence-informed teaching strategies and practices

2.4 Understand how to foster literacy and numeracy as foundational capabilities

Standard 3: Know the learner and the learning process

3.1 Understand how learning happens

3.2 Understand how diverse needs can be met

3.3 Understand culturally responsive teaching

3.4 Understand own assumptions and beliefs

Professional practice

Standard 1, Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership

1.3 Design teaching and learning experiences that reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in New Zealand including affirming for all learners the knowledge, identity, language and culture of te ao Māori and tangata whenuatanga

1.4 Practise and develop the use of te reo and tikanga Māori, including in support of positive engagement with Māori learners and their whānau and communities

Standard 4: Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning

4.1 Set high expectations

4.2 Prepare learning experiences that are coherent and well organised

4.3 Advance the progress and achievement of all learners

4.4 Use and adapt teaching strategies

4.5 Enable learning-focused capabilities

4.6 Māori succeeding as Māori

Standard 5: Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments

5.1 Support learners to feel safe to participate in learning

5.2 Ensure the learning setting meets diverse needs

5.3 Manage the learning setting and promote positive behaviour

5.4 Use equipment and technologies appropriately and effectively to support learning

Standard 6: Assess, provide feedback, and report on learning

6.1 Monitor the extent and pace of learning

6.2 Identify progress and respond to learners' needs

6.3 Provide constructive and understandable feedback

6.4 Communicate assessment information

These standards and the focus areas underpinning them relate primarily to the teaching activity itself,[2] the way the teacher interacts with the learner, planning and preparation, and assessment and feedback. This practice is informed by the knowledge and understanding that is reflected in the two *Professional knowledge* standards (see Figure 1 on page 7).

For student teachers, there will be some opportunities to assess practice directly, but to some extent their preparedness for practice might also be assessed indirectly based on their knowledge and understanding of good practice.

Professional engagement

Standards 7 (Engage in professional learning) and 8 (Engage in productive professional relationships) sit within the *Professional engagement* domain.

Standard 1, Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership, sits across all domains, with Focus area 1.4 'Practise and develop the use of te reo and tikanga Māori, including in support of positive engagement with Māori learners and their whānau and communities' in particular reflecting both professional practice and professional engagement.

These standards and the focus areas underpinning them relate to two sets of activities that complement, are informed by, and inform, the teaching and learning activities of the Professional practice domain.

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2   As it is colloquially defined; many teachers and educationalists use a more encompassing definition of the term 'teaching' that includes all of the other aspects of practice listed here.

Standard 1:

Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership

Demonstrate commitment to tangata whenuatanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The object of this standard is that teachers will "demonstrate commitment" to "Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership".

The descriptor elaborates on "Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership" in two ways.

Firstly, it extends this to also encompass "tangata whenuatanga". The standing of tangata whenua and the concept of "tangata whenuatanga" are returned to Focus areas 1.1 and 1.3.

Secondly, it adopts the frame of "Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand". This can be interpreted as emphasising the centrality of Te Tiriti and of Te Tiriti partnership to understanding (and teaching about, or within the context of) our country, Aotearoa New Zealand. This connects to Focus areas 1.2 and 1.3.

As described in the previous section, this standard sits across all three of the professional domains. This is manifested by (as described in that section) Focus areas 1.1 and 1.2 relating most closely to the *Professional knowledge* domain, Focus area 1.3 relating to the *Professional practice* domain, and Focus area 1.4 relating to both the *Professional engagement* domain and the *Professional practice* domain.

This structuring of the focus areas also interprets the "demonstration" of "commitment" as having two aspects.

The first aspect is through signalling assent to this commitment. Such assent is made meaningful by being underpinned by an understanding of what that commitment means and why it is necessary and important. This is the role of the two *Professional knowledge* focus areas (1.1 and 1.2).

The second aspect to demonstrating this commitment is through a teacher's actions. This is the role of the two focus areas relating to the *Professional practice* and *Professional engagement* domains (1.3 and 1.4).

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Focus area 1.1
Understand and recognise the unique status of tangata whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand

[Note – this focus area is unchanged from the 2017 Standards]

This focus area is about Māori as tangata whenua. Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand says:

> Tangata whenua – literally, people of the land – are those who have authority in a particular place. This is based on their deep relationship with that place, through their births and their ancestors' births. As tangata whenua express themselves in that place, they gain the authority and confidence to project themselves into the world. This idea, in turn, underpins the notion of mana whenua – spiritual authority in a given area.

The focus area talks about tangata whenua's "unique status . . . in Aotearoa New Zealand". There are a range of accounts, and some controversies, about the nature of the "status" of tangata whenua and its implications for law and public policy. The phrasing of this focus area, however, frames this "status" in terms of its "uniqueness" in relation to Aotearoa New Zealand. This can be interpreted as indicating that a technical understanding of the intricate implications of that status is less important than a recognition that being "tangata whenua" does give Māori a unique role that is central to life in, and understanding of, Aotearoa New Zealand.

The focus area calls for teachers to "understand and recognise" this unique status. The weaving together of understanding and recognition reflects that this is a *Professional knowledge* domain focus area. As discussed above in relation to the standard as a whole, teachers having an understanding of what "tangata whenua" means and about the "unique status of tangata whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand" gives weight and meaning to their willingness to "recognise" this status.

Further reading:

- Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand (website), "Page 4: Whenua – the placenta", *Story: Papatūānuku – the land*, https://teara.govt.nz/en/papatuanuku-the-land/page-4.

- Ministry of Education (website), How do the foundations of Kōwhiti Whakapae impact on this area?, *Kōwhiti Whakapae: Strengthening progress through practice*, https://kowhiti-whakapae.education.govt.nz/how-do-foundations-kowhiti-whakapae-impact-area.

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Focus area 1.2
Understand and acknowledge the histories, heritages, languages, and cultures of partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

[Note – this focus area is unchanged from the 2017 Standards]

This focus area is about an awareness of key characteristics of the "partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi".

Teachers are called on to "understand and acknowledge" these characteristics, which are outlined as being "histories", "heritages", "languages", and "cultures".

One of the partners to Te Tiriti is Māori. Therefore, in part, the histories, heritages, languages, and cultures that teachers are expected to "understand and acknowledge" are those of Māori. Similarly to the previous focus area, the weaving together of understanding and acknowledgement reflects that this is a *Professional knowledge* domain focus area.

This is reinforced by Focus area 1.4 which expects teachers to "practise and develop the use of te reo and tikanga Māori" (heritage, language, and culture), and by the need in Focus area 1.3 to be able to represent te ao Māori and tangata whenuatanga to a range of learners.

Teachers having at least a broad understanding of Māori history, in addition to what is needed for Focus areas 1.3 and 1.4 , gives weight and meaning to their willingness to "acknowledge" Māori history, heritage, language, and culture.

The other partner to Te Tiriti is the Crown. While the Crown is often associated with the United Kingdom and Aotearoa New Zealand's citizens of British ancestry, the phrasing of this focus area can be interpreted as encompassing all people who are Tangata Tiriti ('people of the Treaty') i.e. all non-Māori people living in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Viewed this way, we would not interpret that teachers are being expected to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of all histories, all heritages, all languages, and all cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand. Instead, this aspect of the focus area can be seen as having two dimensions.

Firstly, teachers can be regarded as needing to "understand and acknowledge" the breadth of "histories, heritages, languages, and cultures" of the non-Māori people living in Aotearoa New Zealand. In other words, this can be seen as an appreciation of cultural diversity.

Secondly, Focus area 3.3 ('Understand culturally responsive teaching') calls on teachers to know "how to richly contextualise teaching and learning experiences to learners' culture, backgrounds, and interests". (Of course, Focus area 3.3 applies to Māori learners too.) The depth of understanding and acknowledgement that teachers need to develop with regard to particular groups may reflect what Focus area 3.3 and its *Professional practice* domain counterparts (especially Focus areas 4.3 and 5.1) require of them in their particular contexts.

Further reading:

- Bolstad, Rachel, Bright, Nicola, Palmer, Georgia, Durie, Keita and Barnes,Alex (2025), *Teaching and learning about the histories of Aotearoa New Zealand—School leaders and kaiako experiences with early curriculum implementation*, NZCER, https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/teaching-learning-histories-aotearoa-new-zealand.
- Tikanga Tuku Iho | Living Heritage (website), https://www.livingheritage.org.nz/.

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Focus area 1.3
Design teaching and learning experiences that reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in New Zealand including affirming for all learners the knowledge, identity, language, and culture of te ao Māori and tangata whenuatanga

Footnote: Tangata whenuatanga (place-based, socio-cultural awareness and knowledge) is one of the five cultural competencies outlined in Tataiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners (Education Council and Ministry of Education, 2011), https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Code-and-Standards/Tataiako-cultural-competencies-for-teachers-of-Maori-learners.pdf.

This focus area is about the role of Te Tiriti as an influence on the teaching and learning that every learner experiences.

More specifically, and carried over from the 2017 Standards, it uses the phrase "Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in New Zealand". It is acknowledged that a sole focus on partnership is not always the preferred formulation in relation to the Te Tiriti. The usage of the full phrase "reflects Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in New Zealand" is interpreted as primarily emphasising the centrality of Te Tiriti to the identity, culture, and political and legal framework of Aotearoa New Zealand. This phrasing is not intended to limit any interpretation of the focus area that is genuinely focused on honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The focus area reflects the *Professional practice* domain. In particular, it is centred on the "design" of "teaching and learning experiences". This connects it to Focus area 4.2 ('Prepare learning experiences that are coherent and well organised').

The second half of the focus area outlines a particular practice that teachers are called on to undertake, which is "include[d]" as part of designing "teaching and learning experiences that reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in New Zealand".

This relates to "te ao Māori" and "tangata whenuatanga".

"Te ao Māori" refers to "the Māori world" or a "Māori world view". As well as te reo and tikanga Māori (which are also addressed in Focus area 1.4), te ao Māori also encompasses "mātauranga Māori" (Māori knowledge): "The body of knowledge originating from Māori ancestors, including the Māori world view and perspectives, Māori creativity and cultural practices" (Te Aka | Māori Dictionary).

"Tangata whenuatanga" is cited in a footnote to the focus area as being "place-based, socio-cultural awareness and knowledge". In this context, set alongside "te ao Māori", the use of "tangata whenuatanga" was intended to denote knowledge, ideas and practices that are associated with Māori based in a particular locality.

The focus area references the range of "knowledge, identity, language, and culture" that is embodied in these two concepts. It sets an expectation on teachers to be "affirming" that range of knowledge, identity, language, and culture. And it specifies that they should do so "for all learners". This is not primarily about supporting Māori learners by validating their culture and identity – that is the purpose of Focus area 4.6, "Māori succeeding as Māori". Rather it is about exposing the diverse cultural range of learners to "te ao Māori" and "tangata whenuatanga".

This is not intended to suggest that every teacher in every setting would, or could, be giving their learners an in-depth understanding of the full wealth of "te ao Māori" and "tangata whenuatanga".

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Rather, the term "affirming" is intended to suggest that the teacher's practice, which designs "teaching and learning experiences that reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in New Zealand", will involve building at least a familiarity with and appreciation for the breadth and value of Māori customs and knowledge, both in general and locally.

Further reading:

- Education Council and Ministry of Education (2011), *Tataiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Maori learners*, https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Code-and-Standards/Tataiako-cultural-competencies-for-teachers-of-Maori-learners.pdf.

- Finn, Karen (2022), Mana ōrite: Supporting equal status for mātauranga Māori as a Pākehā teacher, Ipu Kererū: Blog of the *New Zealand Association for Research in Education*, https://nzareblog.wordpress.com/2022/09/20/mana-orite/.

- Mead, Hirini Moko (2022), Understanding Mātauranga Māori, *E-Tangata*, https://e-tangata.co.nz/comment-and-analysis/understanding-matauranga-maori/.

- Te Aka | Māori Dictionary (website). https://maoridictionary.co.nz/.

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Focus area 1.4
Practise and develop the use of te reo and tikanga Māori, including in support of positive engagement with Māori learners and their whānau and communities

This focus area is about te reo and tikanga Māori.

The phrasing of the first half of this focus area is that teachers should "practise and develop the use of" te reo and tikanga Māori. This places the focus on a process of continuing to maintain and grow one's capability in these areas, which primarily locates this focus area within the *Professional engagement* domain, where it is closely associated with Standard 7, 'Engage in professional learning'. (The second half of the focus area also connects to *Professional engagement* – see below).

The reference to "use of" is intended to indicate, however, that this is not just a matter of practising and developing their capability in private. Rather, teachers should be making use of te reo and tikanga Māori within the context of their teaching. This brings the focus area also within the *Professional practice* domain. The phrasing is not intended to be prescriptive about what amount of te reo and tikanga Māori use is appropriate and reasonable to expect, and this will depend to some extent on the individual teacher's context.

The second half of this focus area highlights a particular use of te reo and tikanga Māori that teachers are expected to undertake. The term "including" makes clear that this is not the only use that would be appropriate and valuable (for instance, use of te reo and tikanga Māori with all learners may benefit them including in terms of affirming te ao Māori and tangata whenuatanga for them, as per Focus area 1.3).

Teachers are called upon to use te reo and tikanga Māori in support of "positive engagement" with "Māori learners". This relates to the *Professional practice* domain and is closely associated with Focus areas 4.6, 'Māori succeeding as Māori', and with Focus area 5.1, 'Support learners to feel safe to participate in learning', which involves "build[ing] genuine, respectful relationships. . . so that all learners feel their identities, languages, cultures, and abilities are valued and respected".

Teachers are also called upon to use te reo and tikanga Māori in support of "positive engagement" with the "whānau and communities" of Māori learners. This relates to the *Professional engagement* domain and is closely associated with Focus area 8.1, 'Relate effectively with parents/caregivers and whānau'.

The wording of this focus area does not specify any particular level of capability that teachers need to attain with te reo and tikanga Māori. As noted above, the focus is more upon a commitment to ongoing maintenance and growth than on baseline capability. Nevertheless, the expectation that the teacher be able to use te reo and tikanga Māori to support "positive engagement" (and in service of related focus areas like 1.3, 4.6, 5.1 and 8.1) may in effect set a minimum viable level of capability. Exactly where that level is set may, however, differ according to context.

Further reading:

- Education Review Office (2022). Poutama Reo: *The Improvement Journey – Te Reo Māori in English-medium schools*, https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/poutama-reo-framework.

- Tamihana, Aroha (2023). The Importance of Respecting and Pronouncing Names Correctly: A Guide for Teachers, *Maimoa Creative*, https://maimoa.nz/blogs/news/the-importance-of-respecting-and-pronouncing-names-correctly-a-guide-for-teachers.

- Williams, Ngaroma. M. and Te Rongopatahi, Kari Moana (2023). *A set of te reo Māori rerenga kōrero (everyday phrases) and waiata used within 27 curriculum areas and activities within the daily programme*, https://ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre/ki-te-hoe-indigenising-practice/resource-set-te-reo-maori-rerenga-korero-and-waiata.

Know the content and how to teach it

Understand how to design learning based on content, curriculum, and pedagogical knowledge.

There are two parts to this standard:

- Know the content and
- Know how to teach the content.

Both are requisites for meeting this standard.

The descriptor elaborates on this in a way that connects to the focus areas for this standard. The teacher should have content knowledge (Focus area 2.1), curriculum knowledge (2.2) and pedagogical knowledge (2.3). (Focus area 2.4 draws upon both content and pedagogical knowledge in relation to a particular area.)

Moreover, they have an understanding of how to bring all of this knowledge to bear to "design learning". (Again, though, this standard relates to their *understanding* of designing learning; their actual practice of designing learning is covered in Standard 4.)

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Focus area 2.1
Understand the content

Demonstrate a developed understanding of the knowledge relevant to the content being taught.

The first focus area under Standard 2 relates to 'content'. Specifically, the descriptor talks about 'the knowledge relevant to the content being taught'.

So, what is meant by 'content'? The intent in drafting Standard 2 was that a broad interpretation be taken of 'content' as encompassing any aspect of what is being taught.

Importantly, this will generally include not simply information in the form of a series of rules and facts but the concepts that are needed to make sense of that information. The term 'schema' is often used to describe this combining of facts/rules and their associated concepts in a way that helps the learner to understand what they have been taught. Cognitive load theory suggests that information held in the form of schema is more readily recalled from long-term memory and able to provide context for, and be built upon with, further learning.

The descriptor for this focus area specifies that the teacher should demonstrate a 'developed understanding' of the knowledge relevant to the content being taught. This phrasing is deliberate. In many other parts of the Standards, a teacher is expected to have an 'understanding' but without an amplifying adjective. This signifies that here, as in Focus area 3.1 which also uses the 'developed' adjective, something a little more is being called for. These are areas where more than a simple working understanding should be expected.

Alongside this, the teacher should understand (i.e. not merely have committed to memory) the knowledge "relevant to" the content being taught. It's not enough that the teacher understands precisely what they're teaching; they should also hold knowledge of associated and contextual matters. But "relevant" is also a moderating factor – if you're teaching high school physics, you ought to understand aspect of physics relevant to what's taught at high school, but that doesn't necessarily mean knowing everything there is to know about the subject of physics.

This connects to a more general point, that what this focus area means for a teacher is context-dependent.

The shape and scope of how to interpret 'the knowledge relevant to the content being taught' may be different in early learning from in (even the early years of) schooling. Here it may be particularly useful to understand 'content' as above i.e. incorporating concepts rather than simply a series of facts.

A "developed understanding of the knowledge relevant to the content being taught" should also be interpreted somewhat differently for a primary teacher covering the full range of learning areas to a secondary teacher teaching particular subjects. Moreover, nuances of interpretation can and should usefully be made for a secondary teacher between a specialist subject that they have qualifications in and are teaching throughout their career, and a subject they have been asked to cover for a period time to meet organisational needs. This doesn't mean they have no content knowledge obligations in the latter case, but their obligations would tend to be interpreted more expansively in the former case.

As with all the standards, there is a crucial role for each setting to develop its own considered understanding of what Focus area 2.1 means in their context.

Further reading:

- Education Hub (2023). STEM learning through nature play, *The Education Hub: Early childhood education resources*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/stem-learning-through-nature-play/.

- Education Hub (2024). Using cognitive load theory to inform teaching and learning, *The Education Hub: School resources*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/using-cognitive-load-theory-to-inform-teaching-and-learning/.

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Focus area 2.2
Understand how to enact the curriculum

Know how to teach the mandated curriculum and its progressions in learning, effectively and in a way that supports every learner to succeed.

Footnote: For teachers in state schools, the mandated curriculum refers to national curriculum statements and foundation curriculum policy statements issued under section 90 of the Act (at the time these standards were approved these statements make up the New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa).

For teachers in early childhood education, the mandated curriculum refers to the early childhood curriculum issued under section 23 of the Act (at the time these standards were approved this is the Te Whāriki curriculum framework).

For teachers in charter schools and private schools, the mandated curriculum refers to the curriculum for teaching, learning, and assessment developed by the school (which is required to meet tuition standards at least equivalent to those at state schools of the same year level).

The Teaching Council acknowledges that Māori medium education may also be undertaken using other curricula including Te Aho Arataki Marau, Te Marautanga o Te Aho Matua and Te Marautanga o ngā Kura ā-iwi.

The 'content' focus area (2.1) is complemented by this focus area on 'curriculum'. It is worth beginning by explaining what was intended as the difference between the two. As the footnote to Focus area 2.2 spells out with in some detail, this focus area is about 'the mandated curriculum'. For most teachers the mandated curriculum will have been set by the Government, although in charter schools and private schools, the mandated curriculum is the curriculum for teaching, learning, and assessment developed by the school.

A key intent of having separate focus areas on 'content' knowledge and 'curriculum' knowledge is to acknowledge that they are not necessarily identical. There may be aspects of content knowledge applicable to a particular level of learning or to a particular discipline that are deemed essential by the profession, but which aren't explicitly set out in the curriculum document in force at a particular time. This knowledge is captured in Focus area 2.1.

Similarly, there potentially could be some aspect of the curriculum in force at a particular time that may not otherwise have been regarded as an essential item of knowledge by the profession as a whole or within a particular educational setting. Focus area 2.2 makes it clear that, in terms of meeting the Standards, a teacher is nonetheless expected to know how to teach their part of the curriculum in its entirety.

(For the avoidance of doubt, teachers, in secondary schools or elsewhere, whose teaching responsibility lies within specific learning areas are not expected to know how to teach all areas of the curriculum.)

It's important to be clear that 'curriculum knowledge' isn't just knowing what a curriculum document says. The heading of Focus area 2.2 makes it clear teachers need to know what is required to "enact the curriculum". The concept of 'enacting the curriculum' is widely used internationally: it refers to the process of translating the intended curriculum into actual teaching and learning experiences in the classroom. An understanding of how to enact the curriculum requires a teacher to have considered how the

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curriculum content can be applied within the reality of an educational setting and with some thought to the needs of learners.

The descriptor for Focus area 2.2 highlights certain aspects of enactment to pay attention to.

Firstly, a teacher needs to understand the "progressions in learning" set out (implicitly or explicitly) in the curriculum.

Secondly, a teacher must know how to teach the mandated curriculum "effectively" and "in a way that supports every learner to succeed". In general, this reflects an expectation that teachers will develop some facility with the curriculum. While "effectively" and "in a way that supports every learner to succeed" can be seen as having similar meaning, the intent of including both provisos is to emphasise both the general effectiveness that is expected of a teacher's enactment of the curriculum and also its inclusiveness. These are themes that are returned to in the *Professional practice* standards.

Further reading:

- Ministry of Education (website). Te Whāriki Online, *Tāhūrangi*, https://tewhariki.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/.

- Ministry of Education (website). Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, *Tāhūrangi*, https://kauwhatareo.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/.

- Ministry of Education (website). New Zealand Curriculum Online, *Tāhūrangi*, https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/.

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Focus area 2.3
Understand evidence-informed teaching strategies and practices

Know how to apply research, evidence, and innovations related to pedagogy, inclusive teaching, and the teaching of particular content.

Focus area 2.3 is about knowledge of "teaching strategies and practices".

It reflects the second part of the title of this standard, "How to teach it" ("it" meaning, as explained above, "content" in a broad sense, i.e. whatever is being taught). It also reflected the aspect of the standard descriptor calling on teachers to "understand how to design learning based on . . . pedagogical knowledge".

The title of Focus area 2.3 emphasises that the teaching strategies and practices should be "evidence-informed". The descriptor elaborates that teachers should know how to apply "research" and "evidence" to support their teaching practice. It also calls on them to understand how to apply "innovations", which was intended to reference an ongoing openness to new ways of doing things.

The second half of the descriptor references three types of teaching strategies and practices that are relevant to this strategy.

The first is "pedagogy". In context, this was intended to refer to what is often called 'general pedagogical knowledge' a term coined in 1987 by the U.S. educational psychologist Lee Shulman who called it ' . . . knowledge, with special reference to those broad principles and strategies of classroom management and organisation that appear to transcend subject matter.'

The second is "inclusive teaching". This complements and reinforces the aspects of inclusiveness in Standard 3, albeit the Standard 3 focus areas come at this issue from the lens of understanding learner needs whereas the focus here is on understanding pedagogical practices.

The third is "the teaching of particular content". This was intended to refer to what Shulman called "pedagogical content knowledge" i.e. knowledge about teaching and learning a specific subject. However, in context, it can also be taken to include pedagogical knowledge relevant to particular settings or levels of learning, such as early learning.

In summary, therefore, this focus area looks for teachers to be able to interpret research and evidence in a practical way in relation to teaching strategies and practices of various types.

Further reading:

- Aitken, Graeme (2018). The importance of knowledge for teaching, *The Education Hub*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/The-importance-of-knowledge-for-teaching.pdf.

- Eames, C., Williams, J., Hume, A., & Lockley, J. (2011). *CoRe: A way to build pedagogical content knowledge for beginning teachers. Wellington: Teaching and Learning Research Initiative*, https://tlri.org.nz/research/core-a-way-to-build-pedagogical-content-knowledge-for-beginning-teachers/.

- Äli Leijen, Liina Malva, Margus Pedaste & Rain Mikser (2022). What constitutes teachers' general pedagogical knowledge and how it can be assessed: A literature review, *Teachers and Teaching*, 28:2, 206-225, https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2022.2062710.

Focus area 2.4
Understand how to foster literacy and numeracy as foundational capabilities

Demonstrate understanding of oral language, literacy, and numeracy as foundational capabilities that are integrated throughout all learning areas and levels, and knowledge of relevant evidence-informed teaching practices that are effective at fostering these proficiencies.

Focus area 2.4 focuses on numeracy and literacy. The wording of the descriptor broadens this to explicitly include "oral language", which is often but not always defined as an element of literacy. Oral language may be a particularly important aspect of this focus area for early learning teachers.

The wording of the focus areas invites teachers to understand oral language, literacy, and numeracy as "foundational capabilities" that support learning across the breadth of subject areas. This is important in order to understand why these capabilities have been singled out for attention.

The wording specifically calls upon teachers to understand these capabilities as being "integrated throughout all learning areas and levels". This is central to the interpretation of this focus area – its focus is not the teaching of literacy within the English or Te Reo Rangatria learning areas or numeracy within the Mathematics & Statistics or Pāngarau learning areas – these are already covered by Focus area 2.2. Rather, it is about understanding how all teaching and learning is supported by, and helps to, advance literacy, numeracy, and oral language.

This focus area sits within a *Professional knowledge* standard and the wording of the expectations set out here reflects that: the focus is on knowledge rather than practice. Teachers should have, and be able to demonstrate, an understanding of these capabilities and how they relate to the setting they are teaching in.

They should also be able to demonstrate "knowledge of relevant evidence-informed teaching practices that are effective at fostering these proficiencies". Once again, the reference to "relevant" encourages teachers to focus on practices that relate to their learning area and level. And the qualifier "evidence-informed" is a reminder that teachers should not just know the practices but understand and be able to articulate on what basis they can rely on these practices to be effective.

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Further reading:

- Bailey, Judy, Cowie, Bronwen, & Cooper, Beverley (2020). "Maths outside of maths": Pre-service teachers' awareness of mathematical and statistical thinking across teachers' professional work. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(1). http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2020v45n1.1.

- Education Review Office (2024). *Guide for ECE teachers: Oral language development in the early years,* https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/guide-for-ece-teachers-ora-language-development-in-the-early-years.

- Hitchcock, Denise (2021). Literacy across the curriculum at secondary school, *The Education Hub,* https://theeducationhub.org.nz/literacy-across-the-curriculum-at-secondary-school/.

- Luxton, Julie (2023). It's a mind shift. A cross-curricular approach to NCEA literacy, Evaluation Associates, https://www.evaluate.co.nz/blog/it-s-a-mind-shift-a-cross-curricular-approach-to-ncea-literacy.

- nrich (website). Enriching mathematics for all learners, University of Cambridge https://nrich.maths.org/.

- Ministry of Education (website). Rich resources for maths thinking, *Te Whāriki Online,* https://tewhariki.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/rich-resources-for-maths-thinking/5637221099.p.

- Ministry of Education (website). Literacy Kaiako Guide, *Te Whāriki Online,* https://tewhariki.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/te-whariki-online/literacy-kaiako-guide/5637219789.p.

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Standard 3:

Know the learner and the learning process

Understand the learning process and the diversity of learners' strengths, needs, languages, cultures, identities, and interests.

This standard sets a knowledge expectation with regard to "the learner" and "the learning process". The draft version of this standard was entitled "Know learners and how they learn" and gave rise to an impression that the standard was about teachers knowing and relating to individual learners – that was not the intent: relationships with learners is covered by Standard 5, specifically Focus area 5.1). The changed wording is intended to reduce the risk of this misconception.

The descriptor elaborates on the title and connects it to the focus areas. As well as the learning process (Focus area 3.1), teachers are expected to understand the diversity of learners' strengths and needs (Focus area 3.2) and of their languages, cultures, identities, and interests (Focus area 3.3). An aspect of that understanding is how the teacher's own identity intersects with these learner characteristics; this is covered in Focus area 3.4.

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Focus area 3.1
Understand how learning happens

Demonstrate a developed knowledge and understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and social factors that affect how children and young people learn, and their application to teaching practice, informed by the science of learning.

The focus on 'the learning process' itself, or 'how learning happens', is a new feature of the 2026 Standards, and reflects a growing awareness of and knowledge about this aspect of the teaching context both in New Zealand and internationally. Previously, insights about learning from the learner perspective would likely have been grouped under pedagogy. That was a valid approach, but grouping the 'learner factors' separately gives them greater prominence.

As with Focus area 2.1 (see above), the descriptor for this focus area specifies that the teacher should demonstrate a 'developed' knowledge and understanding. This phrasing is deliberate. In many other parts of the Standards, a teacher is expected to have an 'understanding' but without an amplifying adjective. This signifies that here, as in Focus area 2.1, something a little more is being called for. These are areas where more than a simple working understanding should be expected.

Specifically, teachers are being asked to demonstrate that they know and understand the "cognitive, emotional, and social factors that affect how children and young people learn". Each of these factors has been called out deliberately. There is a growing knowledge base about the cognitive factors that expedite or impede learning, and teachers should aim to be able to demonstrate a developed knowledge and understanding of this. But equally they should understand the role that emotional and social factors play.

They should also be able to demonstrate a developed knowledge and understanding of how these factors apply to teaching practice.

The Teaching Council has deliberately avoided being prescriptive about there being a single way to interpret the expectation set out in the standards and focus areas. Nevertheless, we did feel that it was worth being explicit that a teacher's understanding of how learning happens should be "informed by the science of learning".

Even this is not intended to stipulate a specific 'canon' of knowledge, however. Science of learning proponent Carl Hendrick characterises it as "a loose and evolving body of interdisciplinary research, drawing from cognitive psychology, neuroscience, education, and design". Nevertheless, that does not mean that body of knowledge lacks recognisable features. Hendrick continues:

> . . . those different disciplines often converge on similar instructional implications such as the importance of managing cognitive load, using retrieval practice to enhance memory, providing worked examples to reduce unnecessary problem-solving strain, spacing learning over time, and ensuring that novices receive explicit, guided instruction before being asked to solve problems independently.

It is worth adding that the focus area calls for teachers' understanding of "how learning happens" to be "informed by" the science of learning. This leaves open the prospect that it will be informed by other understandings as well. For instance, at present much of what is generally referred to as 'the science of learning' focuses on the cognitive factors that affect how children and young people learn; this focus area expects that teachers should also have a developed understanding of the emotional and social factors as well. (This wider lens, incorporating the science of learning, has sometimes been characterised as 'the science of learning and development'.)

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Further reading:

- Hendrick, Carl (2025). Defending the Science of Learning, *The Learning Dispatch*, https://carlhendrick.substack.com/p/defending-the-science-of-learning.

- Learning Policy Institute (website), *Science of Learning and Development*, https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/topic/science-learning-and-development.

- Teaching Council (2024). The 'Science of Learning' needs a strong profession, *Matatū,* 27 June, https://teachingcouncil.nz/about-us/news-advocacy/news/the-science-of-learning-needs-a-strong-profession/.

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Focus area 3.2
Understand how diverse needs can be met

Demonstrate understanding of the diverse needs of learners - including those associated with neurodivergence, disabilities, and trauma – and of the learning strategies that can support them, while being willing to seek specialist support where needed.

Focus area 3.2 relates to the diverse needs of learners. There are two (linked) aspects to the focus area – understanding the needs; and understanding how these needs can be met.

Throughout the 2026 Standards we have been conscious to avoid 'othering' particular groups of learners, such as disabled people.[3] In general, the Standards has framed inclusiveness expansively around meeting the needs of "all learners". This has been particularly the case with *Professional practice* domain standards.

However with Standard 3, and this focus area and the following one in particular, we felt it was important to avoid ambiguity and to ensure that teachers were clear about what they should know and understand to underpin that expansive approach.

This focus area is focused on learner needs, while the following focus area is focused on culture and identity, acknowledging that there is overlap (and intersectionality) between the two.

The term 'diverse needs of learners' is deliberately open-ended rather than limited in scope, but the descriptor then goes on to specify that this includes needs "associated with neurodivergence, disabilities, and trauma". These are important learner populations for teachers to be able to demonstrate understanding about, in order to inform their practice. Recognition of needs associated with disabilities is relatively long-standing within education, (albeit still imperfect), but more recently there has been increasing awareness of the roles of neurodivergence[4] and trauma[5].

Nevertheless, this list is not comprehensive and teachers should legitimately be expected to understand other categories of learner need and how they can be met as well, especially if those needs are prevalent in the learner population that the teacher has responsibility for.

Teachers are expected have an appreciation of the nature of learners' needs. They are also expected to be able to demonstrate understanding of the "learning strategies that can support" these needs. Once again, this includes (but need not be limited to) learning strategies that can support needs associated with neurodivergence, disabilities, and trauma.

As is the case throughout the Standards, we have not endorsed particular learning strategies. That is not our role, and the best advice in particular areas may change over the time that the 2026 Standards are in place.

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3   At the time of writing (July 2025) the advice on the Whaikaha website regarding 'Language about disability' is that, "The current consensus, based on advice from the New Zealand Disability Strategy Revision Reference Group, is 'disabled people'. In future, it is possible disabled communities will decide to revise the way to describe themselves collectively. If this happens, the language may change to reflect this." https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/resources/guidance-and-advice/about-disability/supporting-the-dignity-of-disabled-people-things-to-know-and-do.

4   Whaikaha (*ibid.*) notes that, "Neurodivergent people may not self-identify as disabled people."

5   Karen Martin and Emily Berger (2022a; see further reading) cite several types of potentially traumatic events in childhood that "can impact a child's functioning and mental, physical, social or emotional wellbeing", including child physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect and maltreatment, and household adversity, such as parent mental illness, family violence, substance abuse, incarceration, and separation and divorce. "Other events described as potentially traumatic are motor vehicle accidents, disasters such as floods, bushfires and earthquakes, bullying and community violence, and trauma from illness or exposure to war."

But, at the time of writing (July 2025), the Teaching Council has released, in draft form, an *Inclusive Teaching Practice Guidance* resource, designed to support teachers and education leaders in building more inclusive, equitable learning environments, places where all learners feel accepted, supported, and able to thrive. This guidance was designed to align directly with the 2026 Standards (Teaching Council, 205, see further reading).

We have been conscious in drafting this focus area that understanding and responding to the diversity of learner need can feel overwhelming for teachers. We do feel that all teachers should have an understanding of needs such as those associated with neurodivergence, disabilities, and trauma, and what an appropriate response entails.

At the same time, fully meeting the diverse needs of all learners is a *collective* responsibility for the profession and the system as a whole and it is emphatically not the intention of these Standards to create an expectation that individual teachers should shoulder those responsibilities on their own.

This is why the title of this focus area is "Understand how diverse needs can be met" rather than "Understand how to meet diverse needs". And it is why the Standard expressly calls upon teachers to recognise their limitations and to see themselves as part of a wider response: "while being willing to seek specialist support where needed". It is not sustainable for teachers nor is it in the interests of the learner for teachers to try to continue to take full responsibility for needs that they may not have the capacity or expertise to address.

Further reading:

- Julies, Yolanda. (2024). Trauma-informed practice as a component to improve student wellbeing. *Set: Research Information for Teachers*, 2, 25–30, https://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/set/articles/trauma-informed-practice-component-improve-student-wellbeing.

- Martin, Karen, and Berger, Emily (2022a). Childhood trauma and its impact, *The Education Hub*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/childhood-trauma-and-its-impact-2/.

- Martin, Karen, and Berger, Emily (2022b). What is trauma-informed practice?, *The Education Hub*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/what-is-trauma-informed-practice/.

- Education Review Office (2022). *Thriving at School? Education for Disabled Learners in Schools - summary*, https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools-summary.

- Education Review Office (2022). *A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood – summary*, https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/a-great-start-education-for-disabled-children-in-early-childhood-education-summary.

- Teaching Council (2025), *Inclusive teaching practice guidance: Casting an inclusion lens across Ngā Paerewa mō te Umanga Whakaakoranga | Standards for the Teaching Profession*, https://teachingcouncil.nz/resource-centre/inclusive-teaching/.

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Focus area 3.3
Understand culturally responsive teaching

Demonstrate an understanding of how to richly contextualise teaching and learning experiences to learners' culture, backgrounds, and interests to bring the curriculum to life and help them progress their learning.

This focus area is about "culturally responsive teaching". One New Zealand description of culturally responsive teaching/pedagogy is:

> Culturally responsive pedagogy involves teachers adapting and transforming their practice as a result of a deep engagement with and understanding of children's and families' diverse cultures. Culturally responsive pedagogy affirms, values and draws from children's cultures, and actively supports and maintains children's cultural identities and practices. (Education Hub, website b; see further reading).

This *Professional knowledge* focus area sets an expectation that teachers "understand culturally responsive teaching".

The descriptor elaborates that this entails "an understanding of how to richly contextualise teaching and learning experiences".

This should be with regard to learners' "culture, backgrounds, and interests". The use of all three of these characteristics, rather than "culture" alone, reflects an intent to recognise that, within a specific culture, there will be a range of diverse backgrounds and interests.

The purposes of this culturally responsive teaching are described as being twofold. Firstly, to "bring the curriculum to life" for learners by connecting the teaching and learning experiences to their frameworks of reference, supporting engagement and a sense of belonging. And secondly (and flowing from the first) to help the learners to "progress their learning". These two purposes will help to guide the kind of cultural contextualisation that is most valuable in the educational setting.

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Further reading:

- Berryman, Mere, Egan, Margaret, Haydon-Howard, Jay, & Lamont, Robbie (2023). Rongohia te Hau: Better understanding the theories underpinning cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy *Set: Research Information for Teachers*, 1, 8–15, https://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/set/articles/rongohia-te-hau-better-understanding-theories-underpinning-cultural.

- Education Hub (website a). *Culturally responsive pedagogy*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/school-resources/culturally-responsive-pedagogy/.

- Education Hub (website b). *Culturally responsive pedagogy in early childhood education*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/ece-resources/culturally-responsive-pedagogy-ece/.

- Education Review Office (2023). *Education For All Our Children: Embracing Diverse Ethnicities: A Guide for School Leaders and Teachers*, https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/education-for-all-our-children-embracing-diverse-ethnicities-a-guide-for-school-leaders-and-teachers.

- Ministry of Education (website). Cultural diversity principle, *Tahurangi*, https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/cultural-diversity-principle/5637160326.p.

- Teaching Council (website). *Unteach Racism*, https://www.unteachracism.nz/.

Focus area 3.4
Understand own assumptions and beliefs

Critically examine how one's own assumptions and beliefs, including cultural beliefs, impact on one's practice, and on the achievement of learners including those with different abilities and needs, backgrounds, genders, identities, languages, and cultures.

Focus area 3.4 calls on teachers to see themselves from the perspective of the learner, and reflect on how their own assumptions and beliefs, and resulting actions, affect learners and their achievement.

It parallels Commitment Statement 2.6 of *Ngā Tikanga Matatika mō te Haepapa Ngaiotanga | Code of Professional Responsibility,* under the "Commitment to Learners", which says that the teacher will "work in the best interests of learners" by "being fair and effectively managing my assumptions and personal beliefs." The *Examples in Practice* publication for the Code gives as an example of "behaviour that demonstrates" this commitment statement, "critically reflecting on how my own beliefs or bias may impact on my teaching practice and the achievement of learners with different abilities and needs, backgrounds, genders, identities and cultures." This is very similar to the phrasing to the 2017 Standard elaboration that this focus area is adapted from.

Nevertheless, Standards Focus area 3.4 and Code Commitment Statement 2.6 are located within quite differing contexts. The Code is about conduct and forms a basis against which disciplinary investigations can occur. The Standards are about professional knowledge and practice and forms the basis against which to judge competence and professional growth.

Furthermore, this focus area is part of the *Professional knowledge* domain. Therefore, in the first instance, what is being called for is understanding and "critical" self-examination. This is intended to flow through into behaviours that are identified within the *Professional practice* standards, particularly Standard 5, "Standard 5: Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments".

The focus of that understanding and "critical" self-examination is identified as the teacher's own "assumptions and beliefs", primarily insofar as they "impact on" the teacher's practice and, through that, on the achievement of learners.

The teacher's "assumptions and beliefs" are specifically noted as including "cultural beliefs". However, they are not limited to cultural beliefs. Any "assumptions and beliefs" that might negatively impact on practice and/or adversely affect learner achievement can and should be within scope.

However, the second part of the descriptor particularly highlights the potential for impact on learners with "different abilities and needs, backgrounds, genders, identities, languages, and cultures."

The intention of this wording is to emphasise the potential for learner characteristics that might differ from those of the teacher to result in problematic practice if the teacher's "beliefs and assumptions" are left unexamined. This is intended to complement the preceding focus areas which call for understanding of diverse needs (3.2) and of learners' culture, backgrounds, and interests (3.3).

The reference to "different . . . genders" may in some instance refer to sexist beliefs and assumptions. However, it is also intended to encompass adverse beliefs and assumptions about learners who are transgender, non-binary or have other gender identities that may differ from those of the teacher. Again, the focus of "critical examination" is on the how the teacher's assumptions and beliefs could impact on practice and on learner achievement.

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Further reading:

- Teaching Council (2017). *The Code of Professional Responsibility: Examples in Practice,* https://teachingcouncilnz-uat.cwp.govt.nz/assets/Files/Examples-in-Practice-.pdf.

- Teaching Council (no date). *Unteach Racism Synthesised Insights Report,* https://www.unteachracism.nz/uploads/1/3/2/5/132535537/what_we_heard_-_unteach_racism_ synthesised_insights_report.pdf.

- Teaching Council (no date). *Guidance for Teachers: Managing Personal Beliefs,* https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Code-and-Standards/Managing-beliefs-Guidance-for-teachers.pdf.

Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning

Plan for learning, teach, and respond to learners during teaching to progress their learning at an appropriate depth and pace.

This Standard relates to both "planning' and "implementation". It also refers to both "teaching" – the actions of the teacher – and "learning" – the outcomes for the learner. (It is worth remembering that exposure to knowledge in itself does not necessarily equate to learning something in an enduring way.)

The descriptor elaborates on this in a way that connects to the focus areas for this standard. Teachers should "plan for learning", including what is to be learnt and how it is to be learnt (see Focus area 4.2). They should "teach" but also "respond to learners during teaching" – this is an interactive process (see Focus areas 4.4 and 4.5). And all of this should be done in a way that causes learners to "progress their learning at an appropriate depth and pace" (Focus areas 4.1 and 4.3). (Focus area 4.6 sets out a particular responsibility, across all the aspects of practice set out in the preceding focus areas, to enable Māori to "succeed as Māori".)

Moreover, Standard draws on the teacher's understanding, as set out in Standard 2, of how to bring their knowledge to bear to "design learning".

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Focus area 4.1
Set high expectations

Set high expectations for the learning outcomes of every learner.

Focus area 4.1 is about the setting of expectations, which informs all of the aspects of practice set out in the other focus areas across Standard 4 and the other *Professional practice* Standards.

During consultation, some respondents queried the focus on expectations being "set", noting correctly that what is most important is that those expectations be "met". However, the "meeting" of expectations for learning outcomes is the object of all the aspects of practice set out in the subsequent focus areas. And a teacher cannot be held solely and individually accountable for learning outcomes.

The intent of this focus area is to specifically account for the act of setting expectations, emphasising that it is important and that it should be deliberate. This is not to prescribe a particular way that the act of expectation-setting should be undertaken, and whether and how it should be recorded. Practice in this regard may differ between educational settings.

The focus area relates in particular to expectations in relation to "learning outcomes" i.e. about the results of teaching and learning activities rather about what happens during them. Expectations about learner behaviour are covered by Focus area 5.3 and expectations about the way learners participate in teaching and learning activities are associated with other focus areas such as 4.5 and 5.1.

It is specified that expectations set should be "high" and that this should be the case for "every learner". As discussed under Focus area 3.2, the drafting of these Standards has been conscious to avoid 'othering' particular groups of learners, and in this focus area and often throughout the *Professional practice* domain the imperative of inclusiveness is represented by emphasising a duty to "all learners".

The wording of "high expectations for . . . every learner" is not intended to suggest uniform expectations across the full diversity of learners. What constitutes "high expectations" for the "learning outcomes" of one learner may be different from what constitutes "high expectations" for the "learning outcomes" of another. The intent, rather, is to expect of teachers that, for each learner, they think about that person's needs and about their potential, and challenge themselves and (implicitly or explicitly) the learner to be ambitious about what learning outcomes they can accomplish. This should and can be done without setting completely unrealistic expectations that the learner cannot relate to and/or which set them up to fail.

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Further reading:

- Ministry of Education (website). Have high expectations for all learners and celebrate their successes, *Inclusive Education: Guide to inclusive classroom culture*, https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/developing-an-inclusive-classroom-culture/have-high-expectations-for-all-learners-and-celebrate-their-successes/.

- Ministry of Education (website). High expectations principle, *Tāhūrangi - New Zealand Curriculum*, https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/high-expectations-principle/5637210590.p.

- Rubie-Davies, Christine (2023). Teacher Expectations: Impact on Student Academic Outcomes, *Royal Society of New Zealand*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDyESU3u1Cc.

- Smith, Kylie M. (2016). *"We are all just family": Exploring teachers' views of infants and toddlers as capable and competent contributors in a mixed-age setting*, Master of Education thesis, https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/bitstreams/5d8364dc-a638-49e9-9ceb-3258c16e01f3/download.

Focus area 4.2
Prepare learning experiences that are coherent and well organised

Use a mixture of forward planning and planning in action to ensure that the curriculum is enacted in an intentional way for each learner.

This focus area relates to planning for learning as set out in the title and descriptor of the standard. The wording has been carefully constructed to try to be applicable to a range of educational settings without becoming so broad that it doesn't mean anything.

Teachers are expected to "prepare learning experiences". This might in a number of cases be a lesson plan, but the phrase "learning experiences" is inclusive of a broad range of possible approaches consistent with a range of settings and centred on what happens for the learner.

Nonetheless, the verb "prepare" sets an expectation that it involves some consideration and effort in advance of the "learning experience" taking place. The descriptor elaborates this as involving "a mixture of forward planning and planning in action" – the latter recognises that the value of spontaneity, adaptiveness and the seizing of 'teachable moments', but the former recognises that not all planning can be "planning in action". We deliberately used phrasing from teaching practice in early learning, identified as part of consultation feedback, which was nonetheless applicable to schooling – this was to mitigate a sense, based on earlier drafting, that this focus area may not fit well with early learning. The right mixture between "forward planning" and "planning in action" will depend on the context and may differ between different types of educational setting.

The second halves of both the focus area title and focus area descriptor characterise the purpose of the planning and preparation.

They should result in learning experiences that are "coherent and well-organised". Again, what this means may depend on the educational setting and other contextual factors.

However, cumulatively, these learning experiences should "ensure that the curriculum is enacted in an intentional way for each learner" (see Focus area 2.2 for more about enacting the curriculum). The way that Te Whāriki is structured and progression is articulated may be very different from the New Zealand Curriculum in schooling. Nonetheless, in each case a learning journey is articulated, and planning should aim to support that journey over a learner's time in the educational setting.

Moreover, the enactment should be "intentional" rather than just making use of opportunities that arise. (A setting may be play-based and organic, but there should be a guiding hand ensuring that over time curriculum objectives are met.)

And this should be the case for every learner. Whatever the learning areas or level, teachers should plan "for each learner" to have learning experiences over time that progress them in relation to the curriculum. Initiating a series of learning experiences that are designed to meet the needs of, say, two-thirds of the class or group of learners is not enough.

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Further reading:

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Focus area 4.3
Advance the progress and achievement of all learners

Teach in ways that ensure sufficient progress for the diverse range of learners, providing additional support or extension when needed.

This focus area is about teaching practice being oriented to progress and achievement. (For many learners in some settings, it will make sense to interpret 'achievement' as being about the attainment of particular credentials, but that is not the only form of achievement, is unlikely to be appropriate for all learners, and may be irrelevant in some settings.)

The title of the focus area sets its objective as being to "advance" progress and achievement. The descriptor describes this as "ensur[ing] sufficient progress". The phrase "sufficient progress" is of course imprecise, but that reflects that it needs to be interpreted in relation to each teacher's circumstances. In consultation, some respondents worried that the connotations of "sufficient" were too onerous and others that they were not ambitious enough. In practice, though, what is "sufficient" will depend on the setting, a number of contextual factors, and the individual learners. Nevertheless, it is intended to be interpreted in light of the "high expectations" of Focus area 4.1 and to reflect the teacher's knowledge of the progressions in learning of the curriculum for their educational setting (Focus area 2.2).

The descriptor also elaborates that this focus areas is in particular about teaching practice (i.e. "Teach in ways that . . . ").

The title emphasises that the advancement of progress and achievement should be for "all learners" and the descriptor refers to "the diverse range of learners". This continues the theme of inclusiveness of practice set out in the preceding focus areas. Once again, a related message is that "achievement" and "sufficient progress" are not one-size-fits-all objectives, but should be appropriate (in a "high expectations" way) to each learner.

The final part of the descriptor spells out that this means that good teaching practice will involve providing "additional support" in some circumstances and "extension" in other circumstances. This continues the theme (from Focus area 4.2 and into 4.4) of the learning experience needing to be tailored in order to advance the progress of each learner. Focus area 6.2 returns to this theme, addressing the interplay between this and assessment.

The reference to "extension" may be relevant to learners who have been identified as gifted and/or highly proficient. However, neither the need for "additional support" nor the need for "extension" have been presented as being inherent characteristics of a particular learner. This leaves open the possibility that a learner may need "additional support" (or "extension") in some aspects of their learning or at some points in time, but not in others. The same learner may need both "additional support" and "extension" in particular circumstances.

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Further reading:

- Ministry of Education (website). Accelerating progress – Leadership guidance, *Tahurangi*, https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/accelerating-progress-leadership-guidance/5637253340.p.

- Ministry of Education (website). *Kōwhiti Whakapae: Strengthening progress through practice*, https://kowhiti-whakapae.education.govt.nz/.

- Ministry of Education (website). *Mānawatia te iho pūmanawa - Acknowledging and supporting gifted tamariki in intentional ways*, https://tewhariki.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/m-nawatia-te-iho-p-manawa---acknowledging-gifted-tamariki/5637206944.p.

- Ministry of Education (2025). Supporting Teachers of Gifted Learners: A Toolkit for Learning Support Coordinators (LSCs), *Tahurangi*, https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/5637271338.p.

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- Pole, Nicholas (2024). Preparing for a differentiated approach to curriculum implementation in the classroom, *Sharing the Mahi Newsletter*, https://www.ero.govt.nz/news/preparing-for-a-differentiated-approach-to-curriculum-implementation-in-the-classroom.

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Focus area 4.4
Use and adapt teaching strategies

Make use of a range of evidence-informed teaching strategies, approaches, and learning activities and use them adaptively in response to the needs of individuals and groups of learners.

There are two parts to this focus area. The first part is about use of teaching strategies. The second part is about teaching adaptively.

The descriptor expands upon "teaching strategies" to also include teaching "approaches" and "learning activities".

The focus area sets the expectation that teachers should use "a range" of strategies, approaches and activities, rather than (for instance) being overly reliant on a single strategy or approach.

It also qualifies that the strategies, approaches and activities should be "evidence-informed".

In relation to all of this, Focus area 4.4 is very much the *Professional practice* domain counterpart of Focus area 2.3 ('Understand evidence-informed teaching strategies and practices') in the *Professional knowledge* domain.

The second aspect of this focus area is about "adapting" one's teaching strategies. Teachers are expected to use their teaching strategies, approaches, and learning activities "adaptively".

The purpose of such adaptation is to respond, "to the needs of individuals and groups of learners". This continues the theme of practice that is tailored to the needs of, and supports the progress of, the diverse range of individual learners, as already referenced in Focus areas 4.1-4.3. It is also intended to relate back to an awareness of the needs of learners more generally, in light of an understanding of 'how learning happens' (Focus area 3.1).

This focus area extends that theme by talking about adaptation to the needs of "groups of learners" as well as individuals. This raises the prospect that a distinct approach may be appropriate for particular groups – this may connect to an understanding of diverse needs (Focus area 3.2), cultural responsiveness (Focus area 3.3), Māori succeeding as Māori (Focus area 4.6), or other factors.

Further reading:

- Education Hub (2024). *Insights from the research behind the Great Teaching Toolkit*, Insight article, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/insights-from-the-research-behind-the-great-teaching-toolkit/.

- Education Review Office. *He rautaki whakaako e whai hua ana | Teaching approaches and strategies that work: Keeping children engaged and achieving in the upper primary school*, https://www.ero.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-05/Teaching-Strategies-that-work-WEB.pdf.

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Focus area 4.5
Enable learning-focused capabilities

Enable learners to be active participants in their learning, so that they are well placed to develop self-regulation, agency, collaborative capabilities, self-reflection, and critical thinking.

While the focus of the preceding focus areas within this standard is on teachers supporting learners to progress with their learning and looking at the outcomes from that, this focus area is about the capabilities that learners develop that also position them to support their own learning.

These are described as "learning-focused capabilities", and teachers are called upon to "enable" them.

The descriptor presents this as beginning with teachers enabling "learners to be active participants in their learning".

This active participant role is intended to position learners to be "well-placed to develop" the "learning-focused capabilities", which are listed as being:

- self-regulation
- agency
- collaborative capabilities
- self-reflection, and
- critical thinking.

The phrasing "well-placed develop" is important. It is not expected that every teacher will develop each of those capabilities in each learner over the time that they have together. This range of capabilities relates to differing points on a learner's developmental journey, and it is unlikely that they would be actively developing all five simultaneously. (While there is no definitive periodisation of the development of these categories, they have been ordered according to a rough sequence from the capability often developed earliest – self-regulation – to the capability that may take the longest to fully develop – critical thinking.)

Rather, the intent of the way the focus area is worded is to present the development of these learning-focused capabilities as a multi-year journey for each learner. Each teacher in each year of the learner's journey is expected to support that journey, in general, by enabling "learners to be active participants in their learning" and, more specifically, as part of that "active participation", by helping to cultivate those learning-focused capabilities that are relevant and appropriate in that setting.

This focus area is consistent with a variety of different approaches to the right balance between teacher-directed learning and learner-inquiry-based or 'discovery' learning. It is also consistent with the concept of 'gradual release of responsibility' (cf. Teaching Council, 2024).

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Further reading:

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- Education Hub (website). Social and emotional competence in early childhood education, *Early childhood education resources,* https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/ece-resources/social-and-emotional-competence-in-ece/.

- Evaluation Associates (2016). Developing and encouraging active learners, *EA Blog,* https://www.evaluate.co.nz/blog/developing-and-encouraging-active-learners.

- Law, Shu-Yen (2020), Critical literacy in early childhood education: Questions that prompt critical conversations, *He Kupu,* https://www.hekupu.ac.nz/article/critical-literacy-early-childhood-education-questions-prompt-critical-conversations.

- Teaching Council (2024). Explicit Teaching model Key Teaching Task, Changes to the *ITE Programme Requirements policy,* pp. 11-16, https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/ITE/Changes-to-the-ITE-Programme-Requirements-policy.pdf.

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Focus area 4.6
Māori succeeding as Māori

Specifically support the educational aspirations for Māori learners, taking shared responsibility for these learners to achieve educational success as Māori.

This focus area is about meeting the needs of Māori learners. Rather than outlining an additional aspect of professional practice, the purpose of this focus area is to create an expectation that a teacher will, throughout all aspects of their professional practice, "specifically" act to meet the needs of Māori learners.

Moreover, meeting the needs of Māori learners is described in a specific way. The title of the focus area is "Māori succeeding as Māori". The descriptor talks similarly about Māori learners "achiev[ing] educational success as Māori" and also more broadly about the need to "support the educational aspirations for Māori learners".

These formulations have an important common element: that the desired outcomes (what "success" means) are subjective and defined in terms of what matters to Māori learners rather than solely having regard to how the wider education system defines success.

This is not intended to suggest that teachers work to a two-tier system, where non-Māori learners should get good grades whereas Māori success is defined in other, potentially less academic, terms. The intention is that the expectations of all the other focus areas in terms of learning outcomes (and "high expectations") *also* apply to Māori learners. The imperative to think also in terms of "succeeding as Māori" is additional to, rather than instead of, those expectations.

(It's also worth noting that, for a wide range of learners the learning goals or outcomes identified, as per Focus area 6.2, might contain elements that are specific to their particular needs, aspirations, and identity.)

The terms "Māori succeeding as Māori" and "educational success as Māori" have been in widespread use in the education system for a number of years. Nevertheless, as Mere Berryman and Elizabeth Eley (2017, see further reading) have noted, these terms do not have a fixed definition. However, when "Māori enjoying education success as Māori" was first adopted as the objective of *Ka Hikitia | The Māori Education Strategy* in 2008, the document stated:

> 'Māori enjoying education success as Māori' means having an education system that provides all Māori learners with the opportunity to get what they need to realise their own unique potential and succeed in their lives as Māori. Succeeding as Māori captures and reflects that identity and culture are essential ingredients of success.

The Kia Eke Panuku school reform initiative in 2015 asked a group of eight educational experts (both Māori and non-Māori) and a group of 150 Māori senior secondary students to both describe "success as Māori". Berryman and Elley summarised their responses, as follows:

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'Success as Māori' as described by the Expert Advisory Group	'Success as Māori' as described by Māori students
• Living confidently—with affinity to whakapapa and at ease with a growing cultural competence in language, tikanga and identity • Connected to and in harmony with the people, the environment and systems around about them • Articulate and confident in expressing thoughts, feelings and ideas • Skilled in building and navigating relational spaces • Thinking respectfully and critically about the world and ideas • Achieving qualifications from school and wider life that lead to future options and choice	• Being able to resist the negative stereotypes about being Māori • Having Māori culture and values celebrated at school • Being strong in your Māori cultural identity • Understanding that success is part of who we are • Developing and maintaining emotional and spiritual strength • Being able to contribute to the success of others • Experiencing the power of whanaungatanga • Knowing, accepting and acknowledging the strength of working together • Knowing that you can access explicit and timely direction • Being able to build on your own experiences and the experiences of others

The wording of this focus area calls for teachers to not only "specifically support" Māori learners but also to "tak[e] shared responsibility" for Māori learners to achieve educational success as Māori. This taking of responsibility for outcomes, as opposed to simply making the best possible contribution to supporting outcomes, is unusual across these Standards, and is deliberate given a widespread recognition that the education system needs to become more effective at meeting the needs of Māori learners. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that this is presented as a collective ("shared") responsibility across the teaching profession. The intention is not to hold individual teachers accountable for outcomes for particular Māori learners, but rather that they should be able to demonstrate a commitment to actively recognising this "shared responsibility" and that they have acted in accordance with that.

There is a connection between Focus area 4.6 and Focus area 1.3. One aspect of Focus area 1.3 is affirming tangata whenuatanga (place-based, socio-cultural awareness and knowledge) for all learners. Tangata whenuatanga is noted in a footnote as being one of the five cultural competencies outlined in *Tataiako* (2011, see further reading), where it described (p. 10) as being integral to affirming Māori learners as Māori. Tangata whenuatanga can therefore be seen as an obligation of teachers towards all learners under Focus area 1.3 but also an important component of meeting Focus area 4.6.

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Further reading:

- Berryman, M., & Eley, E. (2017). Succeeding as Māori: Māori students' views on our Stepping Up to the Ka Hikitia Challenge. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 52(1), 93–107, https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/entities/publication/7202e83c-fe73-4d73-b23c-5901b3988c0f.

- Education Council and Ministry of Education (2011). *Tataiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Maori learners* https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Code-and-Standards/Tataiako-cultural-competencies-for-teachers-of-Maori-learners.pdf.

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Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments

Develop a culture where learners feel safe, have their needs met, and are focussed on learning, with appropriate use of equipment and technologies.

This standard is about the "culture" or "learning environment" and the role that the teacher has to "create" ("develop") and then "maintain" that. Culture/learning environment are intended in a broad way that doesn't exclude any aspects of the context in which learners learn, except that it would not generally include factors that occur outside the educational setting (e.g. in the home).

The kind of learning environment sought is one that is both "safe" and "supportive". The descriptor elaborates these characteristics in a way that connects to the focus areas for this standard: learners should "feel safe"(see Focus area 5.1), "have their needs met" (see Focus area 5.2) and be "focused on learning" (see Focus area 5.3). Another element that contributes to both the safety and supportiveness of the learning environment is "appropriate use of equipment and technologies" (see Focus area 5.4).

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Focus area 5.1
Support learners to feel safe to participate in learning

Build genuine, respectful relationships with and among learners so that all learners feel their identities, languages, cultures, and abilities are valued and respected, fostering trust, cooperation, and confidence to participate fully in learning.

The focus area is about learners' sense of feeling "safe" in the learning environment, which is identified as an important precursor for them to effectively "participate in learning". In an important sense, though, it is also about "relationships".

The phrasing is deliberately focused on learners' subjective experience (how the learner "feels") rather than an assessment of physical safety (which is more closely associated with Focus area 5.4.) It sets an expectation on teachers to "support" this sense of safety.

The descriptor for this focus area guides the teacher in meeting this expectation by identifying: contributors to a sense of safety; aspects of a sense of safety; and consequences of a sense of safety.

The identified contributors to a sense of safety are "genuine, respectful relationships with and among learners".

This phrasing locates "relationships" as being at the heart of an environment that is conducive to learning.

The focus area calls on teachers to "build" relationships with the learners that they have responsibility for. These relationships should be "respectful" i.e. the teacher should show respect for the learners, and should also expect (and behave in ways that foster) respect from the learner to the teacher. These relationships should also be "genuine", which is intended to imply that they are characterised by some genuine warmth and empathy, rather than being purely formal.

The focus area also calls on teachers to "build" relationships "among" the learners. A "safe" learning environment depends not only on a bilateral relationship between each learner and the teacher, but also requires learners to treat one another in a "respectful" manner and in a "genuine" way that exhibits some kindness and companionship as they work, learn and play with and alongside each other. The teacher is identified as having a key role in fostering ("building") this dynamic.

The identified aspects of a sense of safety are a subjective experience ("feeling") on the part of each and every learner that their "identities, languages, cultures, and abilities are valued and respected". This sheds important light on the nature of the relationships "with and among learners" that the teacher should be building – acceptance and inclusiveness would need to be significant components of them. The learner characteristics listed ("identities, languages, cultures, and abilities") connect to the understandings that teachers should have developed as per Focus areas 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4. And it is deliberate that the goal is that learners should feel that these characteristics are not only "respected" but also "valued" by both their teachers and their peers.

The identified consequences of a sense of safety are "fostering trust, cooperation, and confidence to participate fully in learning". Again, this sheds important light on the nature of the learning environment and type of relationships that the teacher is asked to foster, but also on how the teacher might make use of the benefits from doing so.

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The first, and likely most immediate, result from this feeling of safety and being valued and respected is "trust", towards both the teacher and the other students. This is in turn provides a good basis for "collaboration" within the learning environment (Focus area 4.5 also seeks the development of a capacity for collaboration). And, more fundamentally, trust and a feeling of wellbeing resulting from the sense of safety that has been created also provide the basis for each learner to have the "confidence to participate fully in learning".

Establishing and maintaining the learning environment that Focus area 5.1 envisages in a way that is inclusive of every learner is a challenging, demanding, and often elusive task. It is not fully within the control of the teacher: it depends in part on the active collaboration of all learners (which the teacher can influence but not guarantee), and success is judged in terms of the subjective assessment of each learner.

It is important to note, therefore, that the operative verbs in the title and descriptor are "support" and "build". The teacher's accountability in terms of this focus area is for the effort, skill and perseverance with which they work on an ongoing basis to try to establish and maintain the kind of safe learning environment that is described here.

It is also worth acknowledging that the nature and depth of the "genuine, respectful relationships" that a teacher has with learners will be influenced by factors such as the level of learning they are teaching at and the amount of contact they have with a particular group of students. This focus area is not intended to set a particular yardstick for what a "genuine, respectful relationship" entails, but rather to identify it as an important basis for a learning environment where learners feel safe, valued, and respected. In learning environments where a group of learners interacts with multiple teachers (either at once or in sequence), then the efforts of these teachers to build that kind of learning environment will be complementary to one another.

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- Education Gazette (2025). Building and strengthening positive relationships to foster engagement, *Education Gazette*, https://gazette.education.govt.nz/articles/building-and-strengthening-positive-relationships-to-foster-engagement/.

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Focus area 5.2
Ensure the learning setting meets diverse needs

Establish workable routines and learning environments that support different physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development needs to ensure access to learning for all.

This focus area is about the role of the learning setting in meeting the diverse needs of learners. The stated object of this focus area is "to ensure access to learning for all".

This complements Focus area 3.2 which is about understanding the diverse needs of learners and how they can be met, Focus area 4.3, which is about teaching in ways that advance the progress of the diverse range of learners, and Focus area 6.2, which covers the role of assessment in identifying and responding to diverse needs.

The role of the teacher in ensuring the learning setting plays its role in this respect is outlined in the descriptor as being to "establish workable routines" and "learning environments" that meet diverse needs.

"Workable routines" refers to the way the teacher structures the learning experience taking these needs into account.

The role of the teacher in establishing "learning environments" that meet diverse needs refers to elements such as the culture that the teacher helps to build (in a similar way to Focus area 5.1) and the way the teacher arranges and operationalises the physical learning space. There will of course be aspects of the physical environment, such as wheelchair access, that are very relevant to meeting diverse needs, but of which the individual teacher has limited influence.

The descriptor also elaborates what meeting diverse needs entails in this context, i.e. support for "different physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development needs". As previously discussed, the drafting of these Standards has been conscious to avoid 'othering' particular groups of learners, and in most case the imperative of inclusiveness is represented by emphasising a duty to "all learners". For this focus area, however, (similarly to Focus area 3.2) we felt that outlining some broad areas of need was important to avoid ambiguity. The need to ensure the learning environment meets learners' differing physical needs is definitely an important part of this focus area, but so are differing social, emotional, and intellectual development needs.

It is worth noting that, while different social and emotional development needs are included, this is not intended to cover identities, languages, and cultures in this focus area – the need for these to be valued and respected is covered in Focus area 5.1

Further reading:

- Education Review Office (2022). *Education for Disabled Learners in Schools: Examples of Good Practice for Teachers,* https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools-examples-of-good-practice-for-teachers.

- Ministry of Education (website). Create structure and routine, *Inclusive Education: Guide to behaviour and learning,* https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/behaviour-and-learning/create-structure-and-routine/.

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Focus area 5.3
Manage the learning setting and promote positive behaviour

Develop a shared understanding of positive behaviour, with clear boundaries and a framework for effectively responding to challenging behaviour, including a range of preventative and restorative approaches.

This focus area is about "managing the learning setting" in terms of learner behaviour.

The drafting has been careful to talk about this issue in a balanced way that is not overly prescriptive, recognising that approaches might legitimately differ across different types of educational settings, levels of learning, and pedagogical philosophies.

Learner behaviour has been framed in the positive in terms of "promot[ing] positive behaviour", although the converse ("challenging behaviour") is also recognised.

The phrasing does not place the focus on isolated, reactive instances of a teacher's practice. Rather, it emphasises the proactive aspects of managing the learning setting.

Teachers are called on to, in their learning setting(s), "develop a shared understanding of positive behaviour". This phrasing is intended to indicate that this involves more than promulgating a set of rules – the aim should be that learners should both understand and feel some ownership of how they are expected (and expect one another) to behave.

Nevertheless, these expectations should include "clear boundaries".

This "shared understanding of positive behaviour" should also incorporate a shared understanding of what is to be done when things don't go smoothly, in the form of a "framework" for "responding to challenging behaviour" and doing so effectively.

However, the framework that a teacher establishes and maintains should not just be about sanctions and punishments. It is expected that the framework will include not only "preventative" approaches but also "restorative" approaches.

Beyond having these good practice features (shared understanding, positive behaviour, clear boundaries, response framework, preventative approaches, restorative approaches) in common, there is no intention here of stipulating any single approach, process or format for how a teacher goes about proactively managing the learning setting. The right approach will differ depending on context.

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Further reading:

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- Education Review Office (2011). *Positive Foundations for Learning: Confident and Competent Children in Early Childhood Services*, https://ero.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-05/Positive-Foundations-for-Learning.pdf.

- Education Review Office (2019). *Bullying Prevention and Response in New Zealand Schools*, https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/bullying-prevention-and-response-in-new-zealand-schools-may-2019.

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- Fanselow, Matthew, and Bellett, Donella (2018). *Evaluation of restorative practice - A positive behaviour for learning programme*, https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/pb4l-school-wide/evaluation-of-restorative-practice-a-positive-behaviour-for-learning-programme.

- Swit, Cara (2020). Aggression and bullying in early childhood, *The Education Hub*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/aggression-and-bullying-in-early-childhood/.

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Focus area 5.4
Use equipment and technologies appropriately and effectively to support learning

Have strategies in place for any equipment and technologies utilised, including digital devices and artificial intelligence, to be used safely, responsibly, ethically, and in ways that contribute positively to teaching and learning.

This focus area deals with the use of equipment and technologies in educational settings. It has its origins in two draft focus areas that focused on digital technologies. However, the point was made in consultation that different educational settings may include digital technologies to very different extents (some ECE services have screen-free policies, for instance), and that similar principles apply to the whole range of equipment and technologies that may be utilised.

So, the focus area now applies with regard to "any equipment and technologies utilised, including digital devices and artificial intelligence". To some extent, then, the implications of this focus area for a teacher's practice will depend on the level at which they are teaching and upon the approach and policies of the individual setting. But this focus area is also about the teacher developing some generalisable practice competencies that can apply to range of different types of equipment and technologies.

The specific mention of "digital devices" and "artificial intelligence" reflects the fact that, for some educational settings, these will be an important category of equipment and technologies, and ones in which the expectations of this focus area require particular skill and care.

The reference to "utilised" does not limit the scope of the focus area to utilisation within the educational setting itself; this reflects the fact that in some circumstances the implication of home use (e.g. in doing assignments) will need to be considered.

The object of the focus area is that any forms of equipment and technologies that are used are done so "appropriately and effectively to support learning". This was phrased very deliberately to emphasise that the use of equipment and technologies should be in the service of learning. The descriptor unpacks that as being used:

- safely
- responsibly
- ethically
- in ways that contribute positively to teaching and learning.

"Safely" has a health and safety focus that may be particularly relevant to the use of physical equipment, but which is also intended to include protection from unsafe digital content.

"Responsibly" is intended to cover consideration for fellow learners and others, and avoiding damage or other impairment of the equipment/technologies that might inhibit their future use.

"Ethically" may be particularly relevant to digital technologies, and is intended to refer to abiding by relevant laws and rules of conduct, including respect for intellectual property.

The final consideration, "in ways that contribute positively to teaching and learning", is in some ways the most demanding. Not only should the use of the equipment or technologies not detract from teaching and learning, it should actively make a positive contribution. Some professional knowledge and reflection, often collectively, might be required to assess whether or not this is the case for a particular use; moreover, the best advice on this may change over time.

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Teachers are expected to "have strategies in place" for this purpose. This phrasing is intended to indicate that the primary focus of this focus area is not on the outcomes of equipment or technology use. Factors outside the teacher's control may have been crucial here. Nevertheless, adverse outcomes will of course raise questions about the quality of the strategies in place.

The term "strategies" is not intended to refer to formal policies that have been set throughout the educational setting (possibly without input from the teacher). The individual teacher's strategies for appropriate and effective use will need to adhere to those policies but are unlikely to be fully determined by them.

A 'strategy' will not necessarily need to have been recorded in writing. Moreover, how detailed or fully-developed a 'strategy' needs to be will differ depending on the nature of the equipment or technology and how often they are used. What we mean by a 'strategy' for a simple piece of equipment used on a single occasion may be quite different for a teacher's strategy for, say, the daily use of digital devices.

Nonetheless, the expectation is that the teacher has given some consideration to appropriateness and effectiveness whenever any equipment or technologies are utilised. Moreover, the phrasing the strategies should be "in place" is intended to reflect the need for this consideration to be undertaken in advance, rather than simply reacting adaptively as issues arise (although teachers should do this too if unforeseen events occur).

Further reading:

- Coblenz, David, Dong, Jessie, & Gibbs, Bronwyn. (2025). *Generative artificial intelligence in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools—Teacher and student survey findings*, https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/generative-artificial-intelligence-aotearoa-new-zealand-primary-schools.

- Education Hub (2025). *Research-based guidelines for screen use in educational setting*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/research-based-guidelines-for-screen-use-in-educational-settings/.

- Ministry of Education (website). *Health and safety management of digital device use by staff and students*, https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/schools-year-0-13/health-and-safety/health-and-safety-management-digital-device-use-staff-and-students.

- Ministry of Education (website). Equipment lists, *Suggested equipment for licensed ECE services* https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/early-learning/running-ece-centre/starting-a-centre-based-ece-service/suggested-equipment-for-licensed-ece-services/equipment-lists.

- Paediatric Society of New Zealand (2024). *Recommendations for the use of digital technologies: schools, kura and early childhood education*, https://www.paediatrics.org.nz/knowledge-hub/view-resource?id=59.

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Assess, provide feedback, and report on learning

Use regular and consistent assessment to inform teaching and share information on learner progress.

This standard is about assessment and information about learner progress, covering how it is collected, how it is used and how it is communicated.

The first part of the title is simply a call for teachers to "assess". The descriptor elaborates this as using "regular and consistent" assessment, which connects to Focus area 6.1. It also outlines the purpose of assessment as being "to inform teaching", which connects to Focus area 6.2.

The last part of the descriptor is "share information on learner progress". The title identifies two aspects of this, which connect to different focus areas: "provide feedback" (Focus area 6.3) and "report on learning" (Focus area 6.4).

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Focus area 6.1
Monitor the extent and pace of learning

Make effective and regular use of high-quality assessment and/or aromatawai practices to gather, analyse, and use appropriate information about the pace of learners' progress.

This focus area is about the practice of undertaking assessment.

The title of the focus area presents this solely in terms of its purpose, which is to "monitor" learning. Specifically, this phrasing identifies assessment as being a way of understanding the "extent" of someone's learning, but also the "pace" of learning or (in the descriptor) of "learners' progress". This is intended to refer to how quickly or slowly the learner is acquiring a secure understanding of the appropriate knowledge (including concepts).

While the term "assessment" may evoke particular connotations, the wording of this standard has deliberately avoided characterising this concept in a way that includes or excludes particular activities.

The usage across this standard and its focus areas is consistent with any practice that is effective in monitoring "the extent and pace of learning". This reflects that very different approaches may be used for this purpose across different educational settings and levels of learning.

It is also recognised that assessment practices used in an educational setting will often not be chosen by individual teachers but be determined by curriculum requirements, government policy and/or the decisions of the leadership of that setting. The wording of this focus area and the other focus areas in this standard is not intended to contradict but rather to complement those choices about assessment practices.

This focus area also acknowledges that teachers may in some instances (including but not exclusively in Māori medium settings) use "aromatawai" practices as well as, or instead of, what are described as "assessment" practices. The Ministry of Education's Aromatawai position paper (2023; see further reading) describes aromatawai as:

> literally a way of perceiving mokopuna and their relationship to learning, what they can do, their learning journey and experience, their special talents and strengths, the things that inspire and motivate them, the relationship between kaiako and ākonga, and how that information can support learning, both instantly and over time.

Aromatawai should be understood as a distinct, though related, concept to "assessment", rather than as a translation of it.[6] Where the subsequent focus areas refer to "information", "information on learner progress" or "assessment information" this should be understood as encompassing information from aromatawai practice.

The first part of the descriptor of this focus area elaborates, in broad terms, on the assessment (and/or aromatawai) practices that support the monitoring purpose outlined above.

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6   At the time of writing, the 2026 Standards have only expressed the standards for the teaching profession in English, and work is underway to present the standards for the teaching profession as expressed in te reo Māori. Given this, we have generally avoided using kupu from te reo in the Standards and focus areas to respect that ongoing process. Nevertheless, it was felt to be important to include aromatawai as it was seen to reflect a distinct practice from the English term 'assessment'. (Other exceptions are in Standard 1, although most of the kupu there have been carried across from the 2017 Standards.)

Firstly, the practices need to be "high-quality". This is intended to convey that the teacher should have a sound basis for considering that they can rely on the approach used, and that they should be implementing that approach accurately, using due skill and care, and training as appropriate.

Secondly, teachers should make "effective" use of these practices. As well as complementing and reinforcing the need for quality implementation as described above, this is intended to convey that the teacher should be capturing the insights from these assessments in ways that support them to be usable and used (see below and Focus area 6.2).

Thirdly, teachers should make "regular" use of these practices. This is intended to convey that the monitoring of the extent and pace of learning ("assessment") should not be occasional or haphazard but based on a deliberate and planned approach.

The second part of the descriptor of this focus area elaborates on the scope of what is meant by "assessment and/or aromatawai practices" in relation to the "information about the pace of learners' progress". These practices encompass not only "gather[ing]" information but also "analys[ing]" this information to make sense of it and then making "use" of it (as described in Focus area 6.2).

As the gathering, analysis and use of the information are all part of the "assessment and/or aromatawai practices", they should all be governed by the need for these practices to be "high-quality".

Assessment practices should also ensure that the information gathered, analysed and used is "appropriate". Teachers should make considered assessments of appropriateness. It is intended that this would have regard to ethical considerations and to the information being both relevant and meaningful in relation to the objective of monitoring "the extent and pace of learning".

Further reading:

- Education Review Office (2018). *Evaluation at a Glance: A Decade of Assessment in New Zealand Primary Schools – Practice and trends*, https://www.ero.govt.nz/our-research/evaluation-at-a-glance-a-decade-of-assessment-in-new-zealand-primary-schools-practice-and-trends.

- Gilmore, Alison (2020). Pillars of sound educational assessment, *The Education Hub*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/pillars-of-sound-educational-assessment-2/.

- Hargraves, Vicki (2020). What is assessment in early childhood education?, *The Education Hub*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/what-is-assessment-in-early-childhood-education-2/.

- Ministry of Education (website). Principles of assessment for learning, *Tāhūrangi – New Zealand Curriculum*, https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/5637160331.p.

- Ministry of Education (website). Assessment for learning in practice, *Tāhūrangi – New Zealand Curriculum*, https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/assessment-for-learning-in-practice/5637176083.p.

- Ministry of Education (2019). *Assessment for learning: Using the right tools and resources to notice and respond to progress across the curriculum*, https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/5637167101.p.

- Ministry of Education (2023). *Te Puāwaitanga Harakeke: Aromatawai Ministry of Education Position Paper*, https://kauwhatareo.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/te-mana-o-te-aromatawai/5637247337.p.

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Focus area 6.2
Identify progress and respond to learners' needs

Use information on learner progress, in relation to goals or outcomes that have been identified, to design clear next steps in learning and identify additional support, extension, or adaptations to teaching practice that may be required.

This focus area follows on from Focus area 6.1 by addressing the application of information about learner progress to teaching and learning.

Teachers are called upon to "identify progress" – this is intended to relate the information about "the pace of learners' progress" that has been gathered and analysed as per Focus area 6.1 to the individual learner. This information is therefore framed in the descriptor as "information on learner progress".

It should also be noted that the responses in Focus area 6.2 also apply to "information on learner progress" that has been obtained by means other than the practices referenced in Focus area 6.1. For instance, a learner or their parent/caregiver/whānau might spontaneously share some insights with the teacher about how the learner is doing.

The descriptor outlines a precursor to this focus area, which is that "goals or outcomes" in terms of learning should "have been identified" in advance, ahead of information on learner progress being gathered. This process of being deliberate about identifying goals/outcomes at an early stage is intended to be an important part of the way assessment (broadly conceived) intersects with other aspects of teaching practice. It relates to, and should be consistent with, Focus area 4.1, 'Set high expectations'. It also connects to Focus area 4.2, 'Prepare learning experiences that are coherent and well organised', in particular, its objective "to ensure that the curriculum is enacted in an intentional way for each learner".

The phrasing about "goals or outcomes" is not intended to be prescriptive about the extent to which these goals/outcomes are common across a group of learners or specific to individual learners. Nor about whether they are a comprehensive set of goals/outcomes for all aspects of the learners' progress over a period of time or specific to a particular sequence of teaching and learning.

The phrasing also leaves open whether or not the learners (and/or their parents/caregivers/whānau) have been actively involved in identifying the "goals or outcomes" or even how much visibility they have of them. This may depend on the learning context, including the level of learning.

The teacher is called upon to use the goals/outcomes to interpret the "information on learner progress". This is intended to convey that an assessment of whether or not the learner is meeting (or exceeding) these previously-identified goals/outcomes will have a bearing on the teacher's response to the information.

The second part of this focus area is about the need for teacher to "respond to learners' needs", as identified through the "information on learner progress" (in relation to the goals/outcomes).

The descriptor identifies that one element of this response is for teachers to "design clear next steps in learning". This creates a 'feedback loop' between the use of progress information and 'planning for and implementing effective teaching and learning', as per Standard 4. Progress information can be seen to inform the adaptiveness called for in Focus area 4.4, in service of the goal of 'advanc[ing] the progress and achievement of all learners' in Focus area 4.3. The reference 'next steps in learning' reflects the 'coherent and well organised' learning experiences sought in Focus area 4.2. But the call for these 'next steps' to be designed in response to (regularly-gathered) progress information reinforces that ensuring that "the curriculum is enacted" for each learner involves these "coherent and well organised" experiences to adjust over time as new information about learner progress and needs is taken into account.

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The other aspect of responding to learner needs in the descriptor is for teachers to "identify" what "may be required" for this purpose, based on three broad options. Firstly, for some learners in some instances this may involve "additional support". Secondly, it may also involve "extension". Thirdly, it may involve "adaptations to teaching practice".

Again, this dovetails with Standard 4. In particular, it closely parallels (informs) the provision of "additional support or extension when needed" (Focus area 4.3) and teaching strategies being used "adaptively in response to the needs of individuals and groups of learners" (Focus area 4.4).

The expectation on teachers as part of Focus area 6.2 has deliberately been phrased as being to "identify" the need for additional support, extension, or adaptations. Depending on the nature of "what may be required", meeting that need might be appropriately the responsibility of the wider educational setting. To the extent that the individual teacher can and should respond, doing so comes under Focus areas 4.3 and 4.4, as already outlined.

As noted in Focus area 4.3, the reference to "extension" may be relevant to learners who have been identified as gifted and/or highly proficient. However, neither the need for "additional support" nor the need for "extension" have been presented as being inherent characteristics of a particular learner. This leaves open the possibility that a learner may need "additional support" (or "extension") in some aspects of their learning or at some points in time, but not in others. The same learner may need both "additional support" and "extension" in particular circumstances.

Further reading:

- Brunton, Kaye (2021). Standing the test of time - questions to guide assessment, *EA Blog*, https://www.evaluate.co.nz/blog/standing-the-test-of-time-questions-to-guide-assessment.

- Chamberlain, Mary, Darr, Charles, Hipkins, Rosemary, McKinley, Sheridan, Murphy, Hineihaea, and Sinnema, Claire (2021). *Determining How Learning is Progressing – Options for Calibrating Teacher Judgements*, https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/determining-how-learning-progressing-options-calibrating-teacher-judgements.

- Hargraves, Vicki (2020). Common mistakes in using data for inquiry and improvement, *The Education Hub*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/common-mistakes-in-using-data-for-inquiry-and-improvement/.

Focus area 6.3
Provide constructive and understandable feedback

Ensure learners (and/or their parents/caregivers and whānau, as appropriate) receive and understand ongoing feedback about their progress, and use this information to enhance their engagement with learning.

Focus area 6.3 is about providing feedback to (in most cases) the learner "about their progress" to support ongoing learning.

It is important to note that feedback of progress information is distinct from another use of the term "feedback" that is often used, which is also sometimes termed "correction". While 'feedback about progress' might be across all aspects of learning, or focused on particular aspects, we have interpreted it as being broader than the correction of specific misunderstandings in the course of a learning activity. The latter is a common aspect of teaching practice that is covered under Standard 4 rather than in this focus area.

The framing of the feedback covered by this focus area as being about the learner's "progress" is consistent with phrasing throughout this standard. It is also intended to reinforce an emphasis on learning gains, rather than just a 'point in time' description of what the learner can and can't do.

Feeding back is distinct from reporting to parents/caregivers/whānau (Focus area 6.3) and at most age levels would be carried out between the teacher and the learner. However, for very young children this might not be effective or appropriate. Therefore, primarily for this reason, the phrasing makes provision that "as appropriate" the feedback might also (instead) be communicated to or via the parent or caregivers. In some instance, and again "as appropriate", feedback could be to whānau/family members who are not caregivers.

The title of this focus area calls on teachers to "provide" feedback. The descriptor uses the phrase "ensure" that the learner (and/or appropriate others) "receive" the feedback, recognising that in some instances not all feedback is conveyed by the teacher directly.

Feedback is expected to be "ongoing" rather than presented in a spaced and scheduled way as reporting on progress (Focus area 6.4) may often be.

The title specifies that the feedback should be "understandable". Similarly, the descriptor states that teachers should "ensure" that learners/recipients "understand" the feedback.

The title also specifies that the feedback should be "constructive". In part, this is about being respectful for the learner and their feelings, but it is also intended to relate to the purpose of feedback in supporting the teaching and learning process.

In this regard, an important component of this focus area is that teachers should "use" the feedback information to "enhance" learners' "engagement" with their learning. (Where parents/caregivers/whānau are receiving the feedback, it should also serve to enhance their engagement with the learner's learning.)

This is intended to include the role of feedback about learning progress in guiding learners about what they need to work on, but it is not limited to that. In some instances, and perhaps especially for younger learner, positive reinforcement about recent learning goals met may be presented primarily with the intention of building general confidence and engagement.

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Further reading:

- Ako Aotearoa (2018). *Real Good Teachers Talk About . . . Feedback*, Real Good Teacher Guides, https://ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre/real-good-teacher-guides/real-good-teacher-guide-feedback.

- The Education Hub (Website). *Topic* – Feedback, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/school-resources/feedback/.

- Ministry of Education (website). Principles of assessment for learning, *Tāhūrangi – New Zealand Curriculum*, https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/5637160331.p.

Focus area 6.4
Communicate assessment information

Communicate clear and accurate information to parents/caregivers and whānau that identifies progress, strengths, and areas for development.

This focus area is about sharing the kind of information that has been the subject of Focus areas 6.1 - 6.3 with parents/caregivers and whānau.

This is described in the descriptor of Standard 6 as "report[ing] on learning" and that is an easy and clear way to talk about it. The caveat on this, however, is that, while the expectations on individual teachers with regard to the communication of assessment information (as per this focus area) will overlap with any decisions and obligations of the educational setting with regard to reporting to parents/caregivers/whānau, they are not exactly the same thing. Formal 'reporting' almost inevitably involves substantive work and use of judgment on the part of individual teachers, and they should undertake this in a way consistent with the expectations of this focus area. But some aspects of such reports may be outside the scope of individual teachers to determine. At the same time, there may be other ways that teachers could and should be communicating to parents/caregivers/whānau about learner progress that don't fit within the scope of 'reporting' in the formal sense.

The descriptor sets an expectation that the communication of assessment information should be "clear" and also "accurate".

The descriptor also sets out the kind of information that should be included. As might be expected in the context of the preceding focus areas, it should identify the learner's "progress". It should, however, also identify both the learner's "strengths" and "areas for development".

The wording of this focus area recognises that the family members who have a stake in assessment broadly may encompass "whānau" as well as "parents/caregivers". The wording of this focus area is not prescriptive about the extent to which family/whānau beyond the parent/caregiver ought to be communicated with. This will be informed by an understanding of what is "culturally appropriate" (cf. Focus area 8.1) in the circumstances. It should also be guided by what is needed in order to build relationships with the family environment that support "the learning, engagement, and wellbeing of learners" (also as per Focus area 8.1).

Further reading:

- Ministry of Education (website). Reporting to parents and whānau, *Tāhūrangi – New Zealand Curriculum*, https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/reporting-to-parents-and-whnau/5637158852.p.

- Ministry of Education (website). Assessment, planning and evaluation, T*e Whāriki Online*, https://tewhariki.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/assessment-planning-and-evaluation/5637165598.p.

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Standard 7:

Engage in professional learning

Improve professional capability through evidence-based reflection, professional learning, and engagement with colleagues.

This standard covers the ongoing process of "professional learning".

The descriptor for this standard sets its objective as being to "improve professional capability". It also identifies three ways of doing this which connect to the focus areas for this standard: "evidence-based reflection" (Focus area 7.1), (the more formalised kind of) "professional learning" (Focus area 7.2), and "engagement with colleagues" (Focus area 7.2).

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Focus area 7.1
Participate in a continuous cycle of professional growth

Reflect on the effectiveness of practice in an ongoing way to ensure a cycle of improvement and development, informed by evidence from a range of sources including learner perspectives.

This focus area is about the "continuous" process of identifying and working on areas for development. This process complements and informs more formalised professional learning (Focus area 7.2) and developmental engagement with colleagues (Focus area 7.3).

This is described as a "cycle of professional growth" in the title and as a "cycle of improvement" in the descriptor. It is emphasised that this "cycle" is "continuous".

The descriptor identifies this "cycle" as being underpinned by the teacher "reflect[ing} on the effectiveness of practice" (this is primarily intended to refer to the teacher's own practice but also implied is the prospect that teachers will develop by observing, and reflecting on, the practice of other teachers). Again, it is emphasised that this process of reflection is "ongoing".

The last part of this descriptor is important, however. It is not enough that the teacher simply "reflects" and seeks to "improve" and "develop". This process needs to be "informed" by "evidence from a range of sources".

This evidence may include information on learner progress, as per Standard 6. It may also include evidence that underpins some of the professional knowledge that the teacher has attained and continues to acquire, as per Standards 2 and 3. The use of the term "range" is intended to signal that the process should not rely solely on one source of evidence.

The wording of the focus area descriptor also emphasises that a source of evidence about practice that should be included is "learner perspectives". This is intended to encompass learner feedback, but not be limited to this way of gaining an understanding of learner perspectives of the teaching and learning experience. This reflects in part the fact that for early learning, in particular, relying on learners to articulate these perspectives themselves may not be the most appropriate approach.

The phrasing used in this focus area is similar to the Professional Growth Cycle that the Teaching Council requires for most teachers (apart from some relievers) as part of the re-certification process. This similarity is not because this focus area is intended to reinforce the need to undertake a Professional Growth Cycle, although in many instances participation in their Professional Growth Cycle will structure and record the way that they have met this aspect of Standard 7. Primarily, though, the similar wording is because the ideas about how improvement and development should be supported that have shaped the Professional Growth Cycle process have also informed the wording of this focus area.

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Further reading:

- Cognition Education Trust (2020). Using student voice for assessment and inquiry, *The Education Hub,* https://theeducationhub.org.nz/using-student-voice-for-assessment-and-inquiry/.

- The Education Hub (website). *Topic – Teacher Inquiry,* https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/school-resources/teacher-inquiry/, and *Topic -- Teacher inquiry in early childhood education,* https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/ece-resources/teacher-inquiry-in-ece/.

- Ministry of Education (website). Teachers as learners, *Educational Leaders,* https://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Leading-learning/Professional-learning/Teachers-as-learners.

- Teaching Council (website). *Professional Growth Cycle,* https://teachingcouncil.nz/professional-practice/professional-growth-cycle/.

- Robinson, Viviane (2016) Viviane Robinson on mindsets that are open to learning from evidence and experience, *Youtube – Conexus Education,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AIQHS3a2sO.

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Focus area 7.2

Undertake professional learning to improve practice

Participate in professional learning, targeted to identified professional needs and school/service/system priorities, and adaptively apply this learning in practice.

This focus area is about the kind of "professional learning" that a teacher "participate[s]" in, rather than learning acquired through reflection (Focus area 7.1) or engagement with colleagues (Focus area 7.3).

The purpose of this professional learning is identified as being "to improve practice".

The descriptor makes it clear that there are two types of (not mutually exclusive) professional learning that a teacher can be expected to participate in: that which is "targeted to" "identified professional needs", and that which is targeted to "school/service/system priorities".

It is not stated who the teacher's "professional needs" have been "identified" by, but the intention is that this could relate either to needs identified by a professional leader or needs identified by the teacher themselves as part of their "reflection" on "effectiveness of practice" (Focus area 7.1).

The "priorities" that are used to determine professional learning that a teacher may be expected to "participate" in may have been set by the "school" or early learning "service" where the teacher works, or may have been set at a "system" level (e.g. by the Minister of Education or Ministry of Education).

The focus area does not only set an expectation that the teacher "participate" in this learning, it also sets out that they should "apply this learning in practice".

The application of this learning should be done "adaptively". On the one hand, this is intended to indicate that the teacher is actively engaged in applying what they have learned, rather than in any way taking a 'compliance' approach to doing so. On the other hand, this wording is also intended to recognise that teachers, as part of their professional practice, might (in a considered way) choose to tailor what they have learned to their own educational context.

Further reading:

- Education Review Office (2025). *School leaders' good practice: Professional learning and development* https://www.evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/school-leaders-good-practice-professional-learning-and-development.

- Timperley, Helen (no date). Teacher professional learning and development, *Educational Leaders*, https://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Leading-learning/Professional-learning/Teacher-professional-learning.

- Wenmouth, Derek (2015). What makes for effective PLD?, *Future makers*, https://futuremakers.nz/2015/07/12/what-makes-for-effective-pld-2/.

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Focus area 7.3
Engage with colleagues to improve practice

Invite and respond to feedback from colleagues and other education professionals, collaborate to address challenges, and engage in learning-focused collegial discussions or networks.

This focus area is about the improvement to professional capability that results from engagement with other teachers ("colleagues").

As with the previous focus area, the purpose of this professional learning is identified as being "to improve practice".

The descriptor identifies three forms of engagement that teachers should be undertaking in meeting this aspect of the standard.

The first is "feedback", not only from "colleagues" but also from "other education professionals".

Teachers are called upon to "invite" feedback of this kind. The draft focus area said "seek", but feedback suggested that this had connotations of searching out feedback that were not realistic in many settings; the explicit signal of openness to feedback suggested by "invite" seemed to provide a better balance.

It is not enough to just passively receive feedback, however. Teachers are also expected to do something to "respond" to that feedback. This is intended to connect the feedback process to the process of reflection set out in Focus area 7.1.

The second form of engagement is for teachers to "collaborate" with one another. It is envisaged that the object of such collaboration is "to address challenges". By working together, teachers can solve problems of practice that might be difficult or impossible to manage alone, and in this way develop their own professional capability on an ongoing basis.

The third form of engagement is "collegial discussions or networks", with the caveat that the scope of this focus area relates to those that are "'learning-focused". While there is much to be gained by professional learning experiences organised by a third party, this focus area also signals the importance of the knowledge and understanding that can be gained by teachers having the chance to talk together and share experiences, problems, and solutions. While much of this engagement may occur within the educational setting, the inclusion of the term "collegial . . . networks" is intended to recognise the valuable collegial engagement that draws together teachers from across many settings.

Further reading:

- The Education Hub. *Topic – Professional learning communities*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/school-resources/professional-learning-communities/.

- Hargraves, Vicki (2022). Professional Learning Communities: Teachers collaborating for professional learning and improvement, *Early childhood education resources*, https://theeducationhub.org.nz/professional-learning-communities/.

- Heeps, Susan, and Insley, Silvia (2010). The benefits of collaborative professional learning, *Education Leaders*, https://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Leading-learning/Professional-learning/The-benefits-of-collaborative-professional-learning.

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Engage in productive professional relationships

Work constructively with colleagues, parents/caregivers, and the community to support the learning and wellbeing of each learner.

This standard covers the range of engagements with people other than the learners themselves that are needed to support learning. (Note that engagement with the learners themselves is the focus of Standard 5 while engagement with colleagues to improve the teacher's own professional capability is the subject of Focus area 7.3.)

The title of this standard characterises these engagements as "productive professional relationships". The descriptor uses the phrase "work constructively" and then connects to the focus areas by identifying the partners in these relationships as being colleagues (Focus area 8.2, Focus area 8.3), parents/caregivers (Focus area 8.1), and the community (Focus area 8.2).

The descriptor also sets the object for these collaborations as being "to support the learning and wellbeing of each learner". The reference of "each learner" rather than simply talking about "learners" collectively is intended to reflect a shared duty of care for each one of the learners that the teacher has responsibility for.

The explicit inclusion of "wellbeing" as well as "learning" is intended to reflect that this standard encompasses a pastoral element (and that it is not feasible to try to disentangle the pastoral and learning-focused aspects of these relationships).

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Focus area 8.1
Relate effectively with parents/caregivers and whānau

Build positive, respectful, and culturally appropriate relationships with parents/caregivers and whānau focussed on the learning, engagement, and wellbeing of learners.

This focus area is about relationships with learners' families. This is defined broadly to encompass "whānau" as well as "parents/caregivers".

Teachers are called upon to "relate effectively" with these parents/caregivers/whānau. The descriptor unpacks that as "build[ing] . . . relationships" that are "positive", "respectful", and "culturally appropriate". The specification that they should not only be "positive" but also "respectful" is intended to reflect that there may often be an inherent power imbalance between teachers and parents/caregivers/whānau, and therefore a need for teachers to be mindful to explicitly exhibit respect in their engagement with them.

The specification that the relationship should be "culturally appropriate" will need particular consideration when the teacher comes from a different cultural context from parents/caregivers/whānau that they are engaging with. This may require teachers to call upon (or develop) some knowledge of culturally appropriate behaviours. Note also that Focus area 1.4 obliges teacher to "practise and develop the use of te reo and tikanga Māori, including in support of positive engagement with Māori learners and their whānau and communities."

The wording of this focus area does not envisage relationships with parents/caregivers/whānau to be built for their own sake. They should be "focussed on the learning, engagement, and wellbeing of learners". As noted for the standard as a whole, the explicit inclusion of "wellbeing" is intended to reflect that this standard encompasses a pastoral element (and that it is not feasible to try to disentangle the pastoral and learning-focused aspects of these relationships).

This focus area also explicitly signals the importance of teacher relationships with parents/caregivers/whānau in fostering learner "engagement" (and identifying and addressing barriers to engagement); this is an important prerequisite for learning outcomes.

The wording of this focus area is not prescriptive about the extent to which family/whānau beyond the parent/caregiver ought to be engaged with by the teacher. This will be informed by an understanding of what is "culturally appropriate" in the circumstances. It should also be guided by what is needed in order to support "the learning, engagement, and wellbeing of learners".

Further reading:

- The Education Hub (website). *Parent & whānau relationships in early childhood education,* https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/ece-resources/parent-and-whanau-relationships-in-ece/.

- Education Review Office (2018). *Building genuine learning partnerships with parents,* https://www.ero.govt.nz/our-research/building-genuine-learning-partnerships-with-parents.

- Ministry of Education (website). Educationally powerful partnerships, *Tāhūrangi,* https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/educationally-powerful-partnerships/5637161145.p.

- Ritchie, Jenny and Rau, Cheryl (2008). *Te Puawaitanga: Partnerships with tamariki and whānau in bicultural early childhood care and education: A summary,* https://tlri.org.nz/research/te-puawaitanga-partnerships-with-tamariki-and-whanau-in-bicultural-early-childhood-care-and-education/.

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Focus area 8.2
Cooperate in the interests of learners

Collaborate reciprocally with leaders, teachers, and other colleagues, and engage professionally with external agencies and the wider community, to meet the needs of each learner.

This focus area is about working with others who have paid or voluntary roles supporting the learners.

Teachers are expected to "cooperate" with these people "in the interests of learners". The descriptor elaborates that this cooperation is intended "to meet the needs of each learner". As noted for the standard as a whole, the reference to "each learner" rather than simply talking about "learners" collectively is intended to reflect a shared duty of care for each one of the learners that the teacher has responsibility for.

The descriptor also carefully delineates two distinct types of cooperation, which differ in terms of the level of commitment expected from the teacher.

The first type of collaboration is with "leaders, teachers, and other colleagues". This is intended to refer to collaboration within the teacher's educational setting, or between educational settings (e.g. across a kahui ako, or amongst teachers supporting the transition of learners from an early learning service to a school, or between two schools).

In these circumstances, teachers are asked to "collaborate" with these "leaders, teachers, and other colleagues". Moreover, they are asked to do so "reciprocally", helping support those colleagues and their learners, in the same way that they receive support for themselves and their own learners.

The second type of cooperation is with "external agencies and the wider community". The expectation stated here is to "engage professionally". This is intended to denote a relationship which is less intensive. It isn't as reciprocal – while "engag[ing] professionally" would include assisting these actors to also support the learners that the teacher has responsibility for, it would not necessarily involve assisting them with a different group of learners. It is also intended to be more contingent – the engagement with "external agencies and the wider community" is not a default duty of teachers under this standard (although this does not preclude the teacher's employer from setting duties of this type). Rather, it should occur when and insofar as "the needs of each learner" call for it.

Further reading:

- Bolstad, Rachel (2016). *Schools collaborating with community and professional experts,* https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/schools-collaborating-community-and-professional-experts.

- Education Review Office (2021). *Collaboration in Action: Lessons from a Community of Practice,* https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/collaboration-in-action-lessons-from-a-community-of-practice.

- Ministry of Education (website). Educationally powerful partnerships, *Tāhūrangi,* https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/educationally-powerful-partnerships/5637161145.p.

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Focus area 8.3
Actively contribute to the wider educational setting

Work collegially to support ongoing improvement to organisational culture and practice, showing leadership particularly in areas of responsibility or expertise.

This focus area is about the role of teachers working together, not so much to directly support individual learners (as per Focus area 8.2) but rather to meet the needs of their service, school or other "educational setting".

This is described as the "wider" educational setting. This phrasing is intended to distinguish it from the "learning setting" (the teacher's own class or immediate learning space). The "'wider educational setting" may refer to the organisation as a whole but, especially for larger schools, it might also refer to a part of the organisation such as a department.

Teachers are called on to "contribute" to this wider educational setting and to do so "actively" – this is intended to signal that more is expected than, for example, simple compliance with direct requests.

The descriptor adds that teachers should "work collegially" to make this contribution. It should be a shared endeavour, complementing the collaboration shown to support learners (Focus area 8.2) and develop professional capability (Focus area 7.3).

The objective of teachers' contribution to the wider educational setting should be twofold, to support "improvement to organisational culture" and to support "improvement to organisational practice". These might be combined or separate endeavours. Both types of improvement should be "ongoing", which is intended to signal that the support provided should be ongoing as well.

Individual teachers are all called upon to be "showing leadership" in making their contribution. This may "particularly" (but not necessarily only) be in areas where the teacher has "responsibility" or areas where they have "expertise".

Further reading:

- The Education Hub (website). Topic – Building effective teams, *Early childhood education resources* https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/ece-resources/building-effective-teams/.

- Ministry of Education (website). Te hautūtanga mō te ako: Leadership for learning, *Tāhūrangi - Te Whāriki Online*, https://tewhariki.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/te-haut-tanga-m-te-ako-leadership-for-learning/5637169378.p.

- Ministry of Education (website). *Collaborative cultures – School stories, Tāhūrangi - New Zealand Curriculum*, https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/collaborative-cultures-school-stories/5637169491.p.

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Focus area 8.4
Communicate effectively

Use clear, open, and professional oral and written communication that assists everyone to play their part in supporting learning and wellbeing

This focus area is about the role of communication in supporting professional engagement.

The objective of this focus area is identified as being that communication "assists everyone to play their part in supporting learning and wellbeing". This is intended to connect to all three of the preceding focus areas where teachers are expected to work with others to support learning and wellbeing.

To this end, teachers are called upon to "communicate effectively". The descriptor elaborates what this means for teachers in both in their oral communication and in their written communication.

Their communication should be "clear" – this is intended to mean that it should be able to be readily understood by those it is directed toward, and it should avoid ambiguity.

Their communication should be "open" – this is intended to mean that it should make people feel well-informed and that they are not being kept at arms-length from what is happening with learners.

And their communication should be "professional" – this is intended to mean that it should be appropriate to the behavioural norms expected of teachers, and show respect to those being communicated with.

Further reading:

- Ministry of Education (website). Effective communications, *Educational leaders*, https://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Managing-your-school/Guides-for-managing-your-school/Effective-communications.

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