

KIA HANGAI TE TITIRO

Reporting on Student Achievement – Refocusing Annual Reports

“The ultimate goal of accountability processes is improvement of students’ learning. What schools need is information that will promote understanding, invite discussion, motivate good decisions, and direct change.”

CORNELIA STERN: *“Quality Development of Schools based on International Quality Comparisons” Annual Conference Report, Gütersloh, 2002*

IN ITS ANNUAL REPORT ON THE 2003 SCHOOL YEAR, each school is required to describe progress towards the goals and targets for student outcomes that are set out in its charter.

The Government is committed to improving overall achievement levels and to reducing systemic under-achievement. Strengthening family and community engagement in education, and an enhanced emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning programmes are the lynchpins of its strategy. The planning and reporting legislation is a key lever in making this strategy work.

The Government’s objectives in changing the focus of planning and reporting are two-fold:

- to contribute to increased involvement of parents and other stakeholders by encouraging better information flows about students’ needs and outcomes; and
- to enhance the quality of teaching and learning programmes by encouraging all schools to adopt a culture of continuous improvement based on an on-going process of evidence-based self-review. Through this process schools will:
 - gather comprehensive information about student achievement;
 - identify specific areas for improvement;
 - design and implement programmes to improve student outcomes in those priority areas;
 - evaluate and report on progress each year; and
 - on the basis of that evaluation make planning decisions that will reflect in the school’s charter for the following year.



Purposes for Annual Reporting

There are three main purposes behind the reporting parts of the schools' planning and reporting legislation:

Self-Evaluation

The cycle of annual self-review is an important part of the process of continuous improvement. The preparation of the annual report provides a key opportunity for the board and management of the school to reflect on the success of their improvement strategies, and to inform their planning for subsequent years.

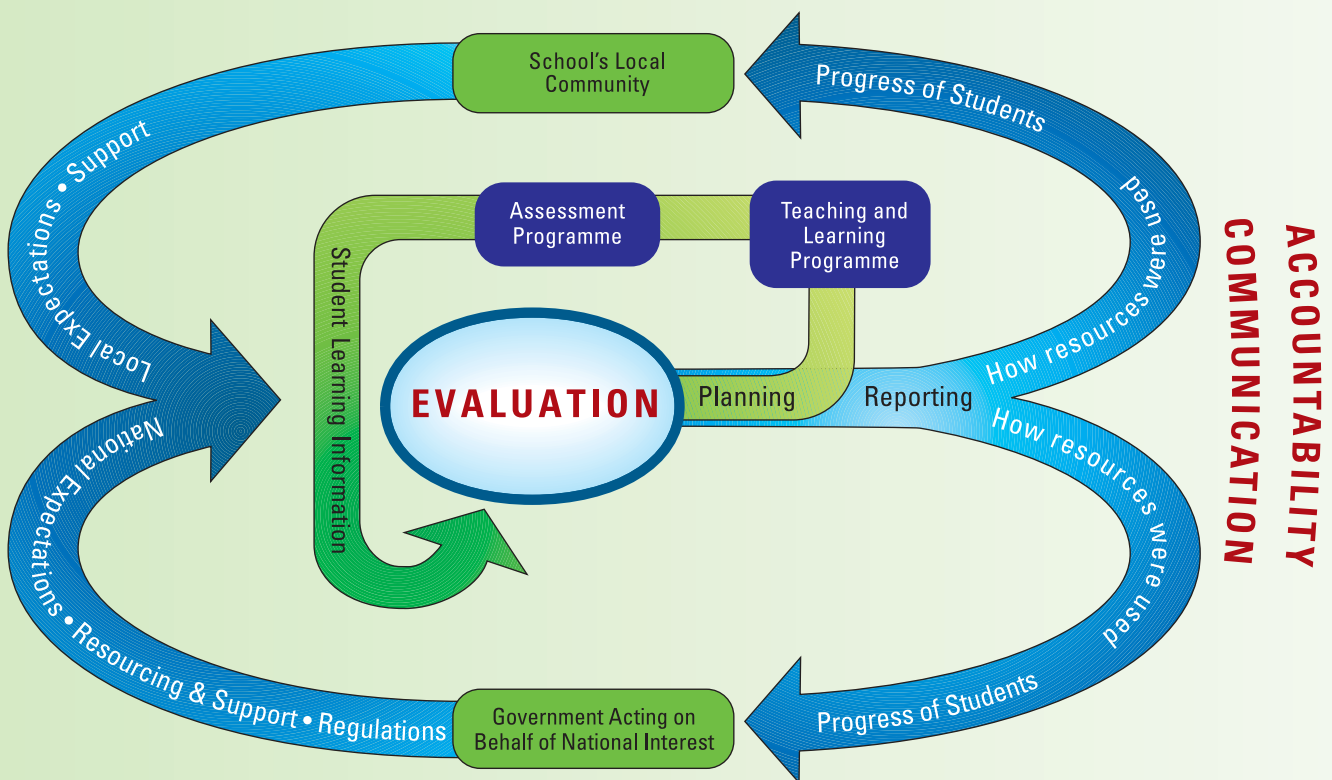
Communication

Together with the publication of the school's charter, the annual report provides an opportunity to inform

and engage parents and other community members in what the school is trying to achieve for students and the progress the students are making.

Accountability

The annual report provides an opportunity for the school to report to the community – parents, students, and Parliament – and account for the ways it has used resources provided for the education of its students. For this reason the annual financial statement continues to form part of reporting requirements.



The annual report provides information about student outcomes, programmes offered, and an account of resources used for parents and community. The analysis of variance within the reporting process is the first step in the evaluation of programmes and resource allocation.

A Focus on Outcomes

A key part of the government's education strategy is to promote a focus on student learning outcomes. Boards and principals need to be clear about how the changes they propose for the learning and professional support programme, or the resource allocations or investments they are making, will help to achieve better student outcomes.

As far as reporting is concerned, the intention of the new legislation is that discussion in a school's annual report will now be focussed by the goals and targets the school has set for improved student outcomes.

The school may also want to report on its outputs: the teaching and learning programmes; provision of professional development; or the maintenance of the library or ICT where they have contributed to the achievement of planned outcomes. The analysis of the effectiveness of those programmes and processes is a key part of the self-review cycle.

Every school is free to continue to cover any aspects of the programme that it has traditionally reported in its annual report. However, the legislation explicitly requires only *"a statement in which schools provide an analysis of any variance between the school's performance and the relevant aims, objectives, directions, priorities, or targets set out in the school charter"*. In other words, the report needs to provide at least a discussion of the ways that the actual outcomes and programme or resource allocation were significantly different from the plans set out in the charter.



'Analysis of Variance' – Another Name for Self-Review

By requiring an 'analysis of variance' in annual reports, the government is encouraging boards and school leadership to investigate and respond to any differences between their planned improvement targets and the actual outcomes achieved by the students.

In the plans and targets set out in its charter, the board describes the school's priority learning issues and its expectations for improved student outcomes. In the annual report the board will describe for the community how the school has gone about addressing those priorities and, in an 'analysis of variance', will show how successful their approach has been.

To be able to analyse progress towards targets

schools will need to have collected good data or evidence about student outcomes.

A close look at this data may suggest that the school could implement some of its programmes differently to make more progress towards their long-term improvement goals.

In other words, the analysis of variance provides a sound starting point for self-review.

In the first example below, the school had looked at its historical data and realised that writing is a weakness for the students. Their medium-term goal is to improve the quality of writing so they've decided this year to concentrate on improving the students' ability to revise their work. Their data suggested only about one student in five was capable of independently revising their written work.

TARGET <i>(This is what)</i>	OUTCOME <i>(What happened)</i>	ANALYSIS	EVALUATION <i>(Now what?)</i>
By the end of Term 4 2003, at least 60% of Year 6 students will independently revise their written work as evidenced by the use of insertion, deletion or reordering of text to improve structure or flow of text.	63% of Year 6 students showed evidence of ability to independently edit in order to improve their writing.	A closer look at the data showed the outcome is uneven. Fewer than a third of the students in one classroom have developed the skill of independent revision. As all of our year 6 classes are of similar mixed-ability composition, this is a surprise.	Our writing programme change is clearly successful but not all teachers implemented it in the way we planned. We will address this through professional development and support early in the new year.

“ The importance of targets is less the report on whether or not they were achieved than the evaluation of the action plan. This may suggest the way to achieve on-going improvement.”

An Opportunity to Evaluate

Good practice in teaching and school management is responsive to evidence about student learning outcomes. The most valuable part of the annual report will be the school's evaluation of the effectiveness of the changes it made.

Evaluating progress will provide boards and school management teams with good pointers to ways in which the strategy needs to be improved for the coming year in order to take the school closer to its overall (or strategic) goal.

Investigating the reasons for the differences between student outcomes achieved and what was planned, provides the board and management team with a basis for deciding whether, and in what areas, professional programmes and resource use need to be different in the next year's plans. It provides a stimulus for the school to seek out best-practice evidence to determine what professional development may make the required difference.

The annual report is therefore an important aspect of the school's ongoing cycle of self-review. It forms a developmental link between the plans for the past year and the plans for the coming year.

Once this process becomes embedded in schools' governance and management thinking, the Government expects that student achievement progress will inform all decision-making and resource allocation decisions within a school.

"...simply collecting data, however systematically and routinely, will not of itself improve schools. There needs to be a commitment to scrutinise such data, to make sense of it, and to plan and act differently as a result."

DAVID HOPKINS: *School Improvement for Real*, Routledge Falmer 2001, p 101

In this example, from a secondary school, the strategic goal for student achievement is to improve the qualifications gained by Māori and Pasifika students. Last year, fewer than 30% of the school's Māori and Pasifika students achieved a Level 1 NCEA, compared to 66% of the school's whole Year 11 cohort. The school's goal is to eliminate this disparity over the next three years.

TARGET (*This is what*)

In next year's NCEA results at least 50% of our Year 11 Māori and Pasifika students will achieve a Level 1 NCEA.

OUTCOME (*What happened*)

42% of our Māori and Pasifika students achieved a Level 1 NCEA.

ANALYSIS

A closer look at the data showed that a further 13% of our target students had achieved 80 or more level 1 credits but had not met the numeracy or literacy standard or both.

EVALUATION (*Now what?*)

We have engaged Teacher Support Services to help us revise our numeracy plan and we have arranged for a specialist 'learning through language' teacher to implement a professional development and support programme, based on the successful programmes offered at Waikomokau College, to improve the literacy outcomes for these students.

Reporting on the Programme

Schools will need to look at their programmes and see what specific areas might need changing to achieve their goals and targets.

An improvement programme doesn't mean doing more, but it does mean doing things differently. These changes need to be planned for and managed.

The improvement programme may require people to take different responsibilities or to learn new things; different teaching activities may mean specific staff development programmes, reprioritisation of funding, or new or different ways of using rooms or equipment.

In its charter, a school reveals its goals and targets and the activities and programmes it will put in place to achieve them.

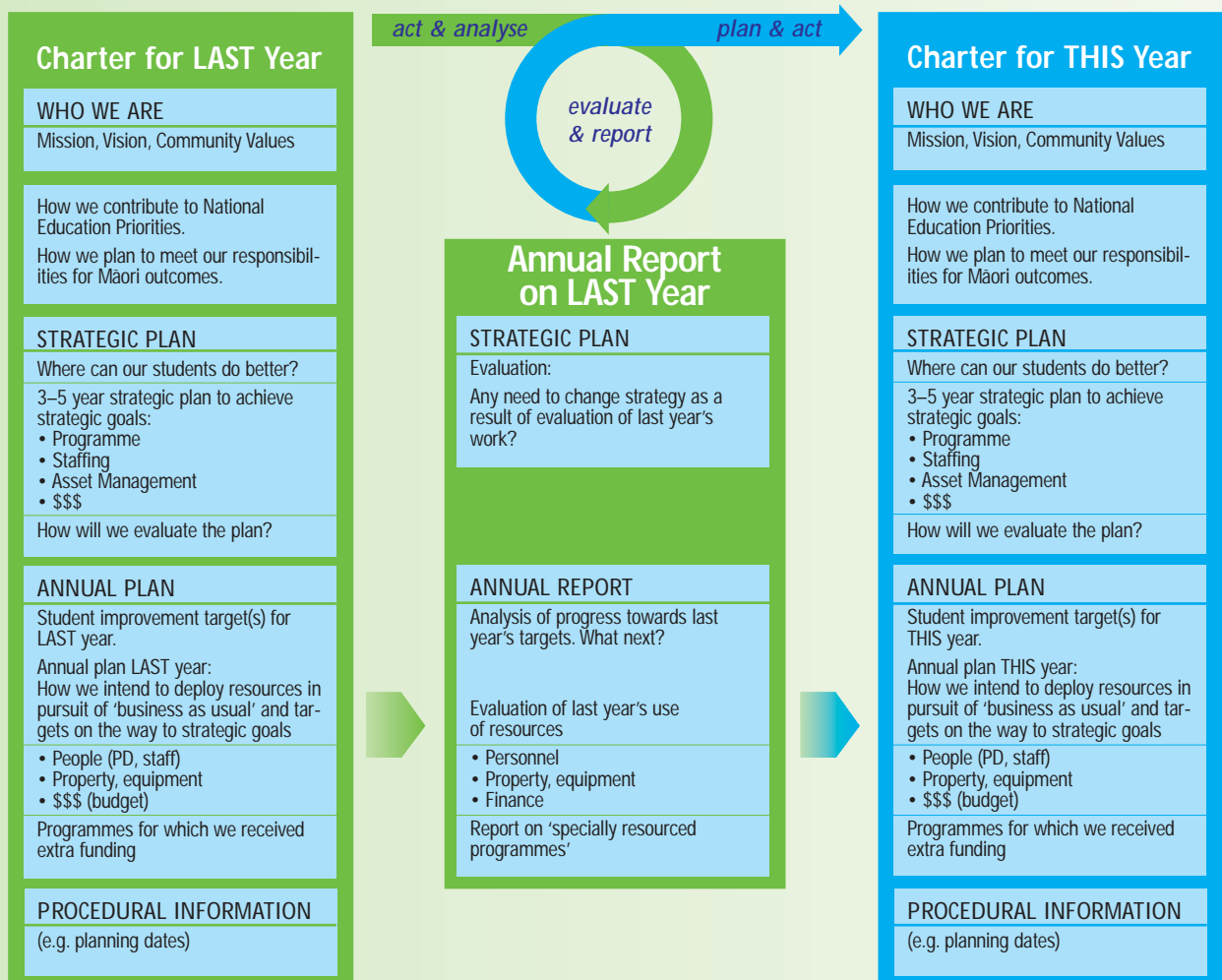
Last year's planning will have covered both:

- *what changes were made*
the special activities and associated professional development that were put in place and/or

capital investment that was made to achieve the improvement that was targeted for the year.

- and *"business as usual"*
the board will also have planned the arrangements for on-going 'delivery' of the parts of the curriculum that it did not propose to change.

The annual report will, therefore, highlight the areas targeted for improvement, while still providing information about how the resources were used in the rest of the programme and what significant outcomes were achieved.



The Shape of Annual Reports

Until now, a school's legal responsibility has been to report its financial performance only. The legislation still requires the board to furnish an annual report on its use of resources. However, from now on financial performance will be reported as one component of a balanced report on the school's outcomes and activities.

The commentary or 'narrative statement' part of the annual report, is where the board and management will describe the significant achievements for the year, focussing on student outcomes. This is where the board will present its 'analysis of variance' and its evaluation of progress. This part of the report will probably make reference to the resourcing decisions that the board had made when planning the improvement programme. It may

also draw attention to the 'notes to the financial statements', particularly if evaluation suggests that a different resource allocation would have made a significant difference to the progress made.

In any case, the notes to the financial statements, which explain in more detail how the school's funding was used, will draw attention to the particular resources that were used to help it achieve its annual targets.

'Traditional' Annual Reports

NARRATIVE STATEMENTS

- Names of trustees
- Chairperson's report
- Principal's report

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

- Statement of responsibility
- Statement of accounting policies
- Statement of financial performance
- Statement of financial position
- Statement of movements in equity
- Statement of cash flows (where required by generally accepted accounting principles)
- Statement of commitments
- Statement of contingent liabilities
- Notes to the financial statements

OPTIONAL

- Performance graphs
- Statement of resources
- Statement of service performance

New Annual Reports

NARRATIVE STATEMENTS

- Names of trustees
- Analysis of Variance: Discussion of outcomes achieved, compared to outcomes planned, in areas of priority.

This part of the report is of key importance. In it the board will present its appraisal of the school's significant achievements and its evaluation of the success of its plans for improving student learning outcomes. It will provide pointers to the board's on-going strategy.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

- Statement of responsibility
- Statement of accounting policies
- Statement of financial performance
- Statement of financial position
- Statement of movements in equity
- Statement of cash flows (where required by generally accepted accounting principles)
- Statement of commitments
- Statement of contingent liabilities
- Notes to the financial statements
- Remuneration paid to principal

OPTIONAL

- Performance graphs
- Statement of resources
- Separate Chairperson's report
- Separate Principal's report

Frequently Asked Questions

What particular information does the Ministry want to see in school annual reports?

The Ministry wants to know that each school has good evidence and processes to respond to learning needs. This is important to improve outcomes of all students, but it is particularly important in the case of students at risk of under-achievement.

The report should contain information that is helpful to the school in its planning and is of interest to parents and other members of the community. School reports, like their charters, should represent the real issues and the real plans and achievements of the school.

What kind of progress report against our targets is expected?

The Ministry of Education is interested in the school's analysis of the progress it has made. It is important that the school has identified areas where, for the sake of the students, it could be doing better and has set targets for the improved outcomes it expects to achieve. The idea of the variance report is that the school will analyse whether the expected progress has been made.

The report should be formatted and presented in the way that is of most use to the school and the people who will be involved in the "next steps" decisions that depend on that analysis.

Do we still use the 'Petone West' model?

Financial reporting is still required. Suggestions for adjustments to the original Petone West model have been circulated from time to time in the past, but it remains a good guide to the presentation of financial reports. The new requirements place the financial accounts into the important wider context of the school's report on its progress in improving students' learning.

When do annual reports need to be done?

Schools will analyse their evidence and evaluate their performance when preparing plans for the following year. Similarly, most schools have completed their first examination of their financial accounts before they prepared budgets for the coming year. Therefore, to be useful, the work of analysing information and evaluation will be done at year end.

However, legislation requires that:

- the school's annual report must be tabled at the board's annual meeting (between 31 March and the 3rd Tuesday of May) and that
- the financial statements are sent to the school's auditor on or before 31 March, and that
- audited annual reports are sent to the Ministry by May 31.

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