



Teaching our teachers:

How effective is
professional learning
and development?



NATIONAL REVIEW REPORT



EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE
Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga

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Executive summary

High-quality teaching is essential for ensuring students do well at school. One of the best ways to improve teaching quality is through professional learning and development (PLD) for teachers. Teacher development helps teachers build their expertise, learn proven teaching methods, and improve their classroom practice. This leads to better learning and achievement for students.

The Education Review Office (ERO) looked at how learning and development works for teachers in New Zealand. We looked at how good it is, and what impact it has on teaching and student outcomes. This summary sets out the key findings and recommendations to improve teacher development in New Zealand.

What is professional learning and development (PLD)?

All registered teachers in New Zealand hold a teaching qualification, which gives them the skills and knowledge to begin teaching. However, this is just the starting point. Ongoing teacher development helps teachers develop their expertise, knowledge, stay up-to-date with new evidence, and keep improving their practice.

Teacher development can take a variety of forms. For example, teachers participate in in-house sessions led by school leaders or expert teachers (**internal PLD**), or programmes and courses delivered by specialist providers from outside the school (**external PLD**).

Some PLD is decided and funded centrally by the Ministry of Education, for example the recent nationwide PLD to support **structured maths**, and PLD to support the **structured literacy approaches**. Other PLD is funded by the school.

For this report, in February and March 2025, ERO looked at all PLD for teachers in **primary** and **secondary** schools. This coincided with the nationwide rollout of English curriculum changes for teachers of Years 0-6. Just over four in ten (44 percent) primary school teachers told us about external PLD that was focussed on English.

Why does teacher development matter?

Finding 1: Quality teaching is critical for student outcomes. Developing our teachers is one of the biggest levers for raising student achievement.

- Quality teaching is the biggest driver of student success. It is more impactful than other things, including prior student achievement and class size, on students' outcomes.
- PLD has a strong impact on improving the quality of teaching practice and enhancing student achievement.

How much do we invest in developing our teachers?

Finding 2: We invest substantially in teacher development, both centrally and in schools. In New Zealand, formal PLD is not a requirement for teachers, unlike similar professions and some other countries.

- The Ministry of Education funded \$138 million for PLD in the last financial year (2024–2025).^a
- This funding includes \$40.7 million for literacy/ Te Reo Matatini, and \$1.3 million for maths/ Pāngarau.
- Schools are also making a significant contribution – just over two-thirds of schools funded half or more of their PLD from their operational funds.
- On average, teachers complete about two days of internal PLD a year. In most cases, this adds up throughout the year during smaller topic-focussed activities.
- Teachers most commonly (55 percent) complete one to two external development programmes (which can range from a stand-alone session, to a comprehensive multi-month course) per year. Another quarter (28 percent) attend three to four external development programmes per year.
- Teachers also participate in informal and ad hoc professional learning activities, such as classroom observations and mentoring, or self-paced online modules.
- Teachers' participation in development also has a time cost, and teachers report they need to see a benefit from their participation to feel it is worth it.
- Unlike similar professions in New Zealand, or teachers in some other countries, there is no mandatory requirement for teachers to complete a set number of development hours to maintain their registration. For example, teachers in Australia are required to engage in teacher development, with the number of hours varying by state.

What is good teacher development?

Finding 3: The international evidence shows why quality PLD has the biggest impact – teachers' development needs to be well-designed (so it is based on the best evidence) and well-selected (so it meets teachers' needs) and well-embedded (so it sticks).

- Well-designed PLD focusses on building teachers' knowledge, developing teaching techniques, providing practical tools, and motivating teachers.
- Well-selected PLD meets a school's identified needs. Leaders make data-driven, evidence-backed decisions about where to focus PLD, ensuring that it is focussed on teacher needs and improving student outcomes.
- Well-embedded PLD is actively supported by school leaders. They use plans, processes, and professional supports, as well as revisiting and recapping new learning with teachers. Good support is in place for monitoring the impact of changes on teacher practice and student outcomes.

^a Numbers referring to funding in this report describe the amount the Ministry of Education allocated for the 2024 to 2025 financial year, the actual spend may not match this.

Finding 4: In New Zealand, we found external PLD that provides stepped-out teaching techniques and tools (like maths and English PLD), makes the biggest difference.

- Teachers are more than five times more likely to report an improvement in their practice when external PLD motivates them to use what they have learnt.
- Teachers are four times more likely to report an improvement when external PLD develops teaching techniques.
- Teachers are over four times more likely to report an improvement when external PLD gives teachers practical tools they can use.

Finding 5: Internal PLD provided by schools can also improve practice if it builds on what teachers know and they are motivated to use it.

- Internal PLD that supports external PLD and embeds it can be some of the most effective.
- Teachers are over four times more likely to report improved practice when internal PLD helps them build from what they know.
- Teachers are nearly five times more likely to report improved practice when they are motivated to use the internal PLD.

Finding 6: The recent English PLD in primary schools has been very impactful. Most teachers are using what they have learnt, using it often, and seeing improvement in student outcomes.

- Teachers whose most recent external PLD was on English report that they:
 - use it often in the classroom. Nearly three-quarters (71 percent) use it every day
 - use what they have learnt widely in the classroom. Two-thirds (65 percent) use it with all students
 - see improvement in student outcomes. Six in ten (61 percent) report improvements in student outcomes.
- In all these areas, the recent English PLD in primary schools has had more impact than other PLD.
- Teachers report they value the evidence base of structured literacy approaches and feel confident in their ability to have an impact. This, combined with ready-to-use resources and built-in mechanisms to monitor student progress, enables teachers to make immediate changes to their classroom practice and see their impacts – with a motivating effect. The nationwide rollout of the refreshed English curriculum this year added urgency and timeliness, supporting the uptake, embedding, and therefore the impact, of PLD in English.

Finding 7: In New Zealand, school leaders and PLD providers are good at ensuring a strong focus on building teachers' knowledge, motivating teachers to use PLD, and making sure it is relevant.

- More than nine out of 10 PLD providers (96 percent) focus on designing development programmes that build teachers' knowledge and motivate teachers to use what they have learnt (93 percent).
- When school leaders select external PLD or design their own teacher development, they focus most on making sure it's relevant to their schools' needs. Nearly all leaders (97 percent) focus *a lot* on how the programme features align with their school priorities.
- We heard from school leaders that making sure teachers' development is relevant is a key factor in their planning. Ensuring teacher development aligns with school-wide goals and strategic priorities allows it to be responsive to their school context. This makes it easier for teachers to apply what they've learnt and use new tools to build their expertise.

How can we strengthen development for New Zealand's teachers?

Despite the substantial investment and the value teachers and leaders place in PLD, ERO found that not all PLD is as impactful as the recent English PLD. There are key improvements that can be made.

Finding 8: We need teacher development to have more impact for teachers and a stronger return on investment. Too much PLD does not shift teacher practice.

- Many teachers report little or no improvement in their teaching practice following their engagement in PLD. Just over a quarter of teachers (26 percent) report that their most recent *external* PLD did not improve their practice 'very much' or 'at all'. This was even more for *internal* PLD, with just over a third (34 percent) of teachers reporting little or no improvement in their practice.
- We heard from teachers that external PLD does not always improve practice as much as intended. Often, this is because the techniques being taught are not always clearly transferrable into their classrooms.

Finding 9: We need teacher development that shifts student outcomes. Around a quarter of teachers report PLD does not improve student outcomes much or at all.

- Nearly a quarter (22 percent) of teachers report *external* PLD did not improve student outcomes either 'very much' or 'at all'. For *internal* PLD, three in 10 teachers (29 percent) report student outcomes did not improve 'very much' or 'at all'.
- In secondary school, internal PLD is particularly weak. Thirty-five percent of secondary teachers report it does not improve student outcomes.

Finding 10: We need to improve the design and selection of PLD, as currently it is focussed least on what matters the most.

- Although developing teaching techniques is one of the most impactful things to improve teaching practice, PLD providers and leaders do not focus on this a lot. Just under two-thirds of providers (65 percent) report they do this, and even fewer leaders, with under half (48 percent) *always* focussing on this when selecting development opportunities.

Finding 11: We need development for teachers to be better embedded, particularly in secondary schools.

- Teachers are too often not clear on how to use what they learn from teacher development in their classroom. Half of teachers are not completely clear about how to use what they have learnt from their development in their classroom (53 percent internal PLD, 48 percent external PLD).
- We heard from teachers that teacher development often lacks practical guidance and focusses too much on theory. This leaves teachers unsure about how to apply their learning in their classroom.
- Many teachers, especially in secondary schools, are not supported to embed what they have learnt (from both external and internal PLD). In primary schools, one in five leaders (20 percent) infrequently follow up with teachers about what they have learnt, and just over a half of secondary school leaders infrequently follow up (51 percent).

Finding 12: We need teacher development to be planned and developed over years to sustain change. Currently, it does not always build on previous learning, but instead, shifts with changing school leaders and changing priorities.

- We found that schools' development priorities change when key personnel change. Approximately a third of schools have new principals each year, so this can have a significant impact. School leaders often select teacher development based on immediate priorities, rather than plan a coherent programme of teacher development that builds over time to develop teachers' skills.

Finding 13: We need to remove the burden on leaders who find that selecting or applying for teacher development is often time-consuming and inefficient.

- Leaders report finding it difficult and time-consuming to sort through the high volume of development offerings to identify and select quality teacher development. They report juggling multiple factors when selecting programmes, often without clear guidance. For small schools, this can be a particular challenge.
- Nearly a third of leaders (31 percent) think that the PLD available isn't a good fit for their needs, and they are concerned about committing to PLD that is not helpful. We heard from leaders that the quality of PLD varies significantly. Leaders told us there is a lack of reliable information about PLD offerings and it is difficult to assess their quality before actually engaging in it themselves.

Finding 14: We need to do more to ensure PLD supports schools with the greatest challenges. Schools in low socioeconomic communities do not have more teacher development, despite having greater challenges. Teachers in rural or isolated schools also struggle to access development opportunities.

- Teachers in schools from both high and low socioeconomic communities receive the same amount of both internal and external PLD, despite schools in low socioeconomic communities having greater challenges.
- Teachers in small schools receive a similar amount of external PLD to teachers in large schools. For internal PLD, teachers in small schools are covering fewer topics than teachers in large schools, and there is an indication they may be receiving fewer hours.
- Although rural teachers attend external PLD as frequently as their peers, the nature of the PLD may differ, as there are higher costs for them attending and it is more likely to be online.
- We heard that teachers in rural and isolated schools often face long travel times for teacher development, increasing pressure on classroom practice and over-reliance on online delivery. However, much of this online teacher development lacks interactivity and engagement that impacts how effective it is.

Finding 15: There is an opportunity for PLD to have the most impact in schools with more challenges.

- For schools in low socioeconomic communities, teachers report that internal PLD improves practice more (78 percent), compared to teachers from schools in high socioeconomic communities (64 percent).
- Small schools often have big challenges and PLD is more impactful in small school settings. Seven in ten teachers (69 percent) from small schools use the *external* PLD they learnt once a week, or more, compared to 57 percent of teachers from large schools.



Recommendations

We need to build on the success of effective PLD, such as English and maths, by improving how it is designed and selected, ensuring all PLD is high quality, and making sure that it reaches the schools and teachers that need it most.

Based on these key findings, ERO has identified three priority areas for action to improve the design, selection, and embedding of quality development for teachers. Our recommendations are set out below.

Area 1: Improve the selection of teachers' PLD

To improve the selection of teachers' PLD, ERO recommends:

Recommendation 1: Continue investing in centralised PLD, like English and maths, that supports deliberate and sustained improvement in critical areas for improvement.

Recommendation 2: For locally developed PLD, school leaders use ERO's clear guidance on how to select quality external PLD and design quality internal PLD.

Area 2: Ensure all PLD is high-quality

To ensure all PLD is quality, ERO recommends:

Recommendation 3: The Ministry of Education continues to track and record the impact of all nationally-funded PLD, and where PLD is not having sufficient impact, stops funding.

Recommendation 4: ERO is resourced to review any PLD provider where there are consistent concerns about the quality of PLD provided.

Recommendation 5: The Ministry of Education or ERO explore options that make it easier for leaders to select quality PLD, including considering introducing a 'quality marking' scheme.

Area 3: Ensure PLD reaches the schools and teachers that most need support

To better ensure all schools, teachers, and students are able to benefit from teacher practice improvements, ERO recommends:

Recommendation 6: The Ministry of Education streamlines processes for applying for centrally-funded PLD to make it less burdensome.

Recommendation 7: The Ministry of Education strengthens approaches to enable small schools and rural schools to more easily access PLD.

Recommendation 8: The Ministry of Education prioritises access to Ministry-funded PLD for schools with highest need, including schools identified by ERO as needing support.

Recommendation 9: The Ministry of Education examines options to make PLD in key areas a requirement for teachers.





About this report

Teachers are key to student success. Like other professions, ongoing professional learning and development (PLD) is essential to develop their expertise. Evidence shows that high-quality PLD can significantly enhance teaching practice and lift student achievement.

This report examines the current PLD landscape in New Zealand – how teachers engage with PLD, and how it is chosen, designed, and delivered. We set out to understand what is working, where the gaps are, and how we can strengthen PLD.

The Education Review Office (ERO) is responsible for reviewing and reporting on the performance of early learning services, schools, and kura. As part of this role, ERO looks at how the education system supports teachers and schools to provide quality education for students. In 2025, we looked at PLD including what is working well and the challenges. ERO last reviewed PLD in 2019.¹

What we looked at

For this report in February and March 2025, ERO looked at all PLD for teachers in **primary** and **secondary** schools (in English medium). We looked at:

- 1) What is PLD and why is it important?
- 2) How much PLD do teachers receive?
- 3) What is good quality PLD?
- 4) What will strengthen the quality of PLD?

Where we looked

This report focusses on the PLD that teachers receive both externally from experts, and internally within their school from leaders, colleagues, or others. We looked at PLD both funded centrally from the Ministry of Education and locally. We did not look at PLD in specialist schools, early childhood education, or kura kaupapa.

Teachers are not the only ones who receive PLD, but their PLD is the focus of this report

Teachers are key recipients of PLD, but school leaders and principals, teacher aides, and support staff also attend PLD either individually or as part of whole-school PLD. For example, most new principals engage in development and support opportunities when they are in their role.² Leaders reported that nearly half of teacher aides delivering structured interventions received PLD in the last year.

Because this report focusses particularly on PLD's impact on teaching practice and student outcomes, ERO focussed attention on the PLD received by teachers.

We used a wide range of evidence to deliver breadth and depth in this review.

We built our understanding of how PLD is selected, designed, and embedded through:

- reviewing international and local literature about quality PLD
- administrative data from the Ministry of Education
- survey responses from:
 - 667 school leaders (556 unique schools)
 - 818 teachers (354 unique schools)
 - 1005 board members (669 unique schools)
 - 79 PLD providers
- visits to 20 schools, covering a variety of regions and school characteristics
- interviews with:
 - 42 leaders
 - 87 teachers
 - four board members
- interviews with PLD providers covering more than 10 organisations
- observations of both internal and external PLD session in practice.

As our research emphasises the need for quality PLD, we also drew heavily on international literature to understand whether current practices are informed by robust evidence that improves teaching practice, resulting in visible improvements to student outcomes.

We drew on rich insights from interviews, observations, and discussions across a diverse range of primary, intermediate, and secondary schools to understand how school leaders, teachers, and PLD providers approach the selection, design, and embedding of professional learning. These conversations offered valuable perspectives on the decision-making processes involved – and whether current practices are achieving the intended impact.

English PLD

It is useful to note that the timing of this national review coincided with the nationwide rollout of English curriculum changes for teachers of Years 0-6. Our surveys asked teachers to reflect on their *most recent* PLD, so just over four in ten (44 percent) primary school teachers reported on external PLD that was focussed on English. (For a discussion of findings specifically about this, see Chapter 4.)

Report structure

This report is divided into five chapters.

- **Chapter 1** sets out the **context** of what PLD is and its importance in creating positive outcomes. We also investigate how PLD works in New Zealand, and how this compares to other professions and countries.
- **Chapter 2** examines **how much we invest in developing our teachers**, with a focus on where funding comes from, how much teachers get, and how teachers engage in internal and external PLD.
- **Chapter 3** outlines **what good quality PLD looks like** by drawing on literature about selection, design, and embedding. It reports what the evidence shows matters the most in New Zealand and highlights what is good about current PLD in New Zealand
- **Chapter 4** explores what the evidence shows would **strengthen PLD in New Zealand**.
- **Chapter 5** sets out our **key recommendations for action** that will help improve PLD.



Chapter 1: What is PLD and why is it important?

PLD provides structured opportunities to improve teaching practice, deepen subject knowledge, and enhance student outcomes. Through PLD, teachers stay up to date with evidence-based practices that make a difference in the classroom. This chapter sets out what PLD is, why it matters, how teacher development works in New Zealand, and how this compares to other professions and countries.

This section sets out:

- 1) what PLD is
- 2) why PLD is it important
- 3) what the system is for teacher education in New Zealand
- 4) how the expectations for teachers in New Zealand compares to other professions, and to other countries' expectations for teachers.

What we found: an overview

PLD for teachers is defined as structured and facilitated learning aimed at shifting teaching practice.

This report focusses on PLD for teachers. We also refer to this as teacher development. To align with the international evidence base, we have defined PLD as *a structured and facilitated learning activity, intended to increase teaching ability and strengthen teaching practice*. Teachers can participate in PLD activities facilitated and run by others in their school, or by professional PLD providers who are external to the school. Some PLD is decided and funded centrally by the Ministry of Education, for example the recent nationwide PLD to support structured maths, and PLD to support the structured literacy approaches. Other PLD is funded by the school.

Quality teaching is critical for student outcomes. Developing our teachers is one of the biggest levers for raising student achievement

Quality teaching is the biggest driver of student success. It is more impactful than other things, including prior student achievement and class size, on students' outcomes. PLD has a strong impact on improving the quality of teaching practice and enhancing student achievement.

These findings are set out in more detail below.

Findings

1) What is PLD?

In this report, we define PLD as *a structured and facilitated activity for teachers intended to increase their teaching ability*. PLD has a clear structure and aim for training. A team meeting focussing on admin or staff updates is not counted as PLD.

On-the-job learning, such as being mentored by a more experienced colleague, or receiving quick feedback on teaching, is another highly effective way to improve teaching, but is not defined as PLD for this review.

Table 1 sets out examples of the sorts of PLD that this report does and does not focus on.

Table 1: *Examples of how our review has defined what PLD is and is not.*³

Professional learning and development is...	Professional learning and development is not...
School-wide, monthly after-school sessions on how to improve assessment processes in the classroom, including the use of specific assessment tools.	A document that tells teachers how to use assessment software.
A training day provided by a school leader on how to teach using structured literacy approaches.	An information session on the new English learning area.
A series of online webinars delivered by an external provider on how to teach maths.	An email from the principal on how compliance with the one hour a day reading, writing, and maths will be monitored.

PLD can be **internal**, meaning it is designed and delivered by members of a school to either individuals, groups, or as a whole-school activity. Internal PLD can be run:

- within a school, where colleagues learn from each other
- between schools, where teachers learn from teachers in other schools.

PLD can also be **external**, where it is run by outside facilitators, like an expert coming into the school to share a new teaching technique, or teachers attending a course. External PLD typically involves a school engaging an expert PLD provider, who facilitates a PLD programme for a whole-school or group of teachers from a school. This might take place at the school itself, or in an off-site location. It can include teachers from just one school, or from a range of schools. External PLD programmes **are often focussed on a particular topic**, such as Maths, or Restorative Practice. External PLD can be anything from a short, standalone seminar to multiple days spread over several months.

English PLD

Since Term 3, 2024, the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) has provided PLD to support primary school teachers in adopting structured literacy approaches. This PLD was widely promoted by the Ministry as part of mandatory curriculum changes and supported by allocated teacher-only day time, guidance, and resources. This PLD helps teachers understand well-defined teaching principles, evidence-based techniques, and use aligned assessment tools. Schools can apply to join and choose from approved providers. The PLD spans three school terms and includes at least three full-day workshops, four peer-learning sessions (called ‘communities of practice’), and ongoing support for these sessions over two additional terms.

2) Why is PLD important?

Quality teaching practice is critical for improving student outcomes. Developing our teachers is one of the biggest levers for raising student achievement.

Student achievement in New Zealand is a concern. Fewer than one in four Year 8 students (22 percent) achieve at the expected level in maths^{b, 4} and student achievement is declining.⁵

To improve student achievement, we need good teachers. High-quality teaching is the biggest driver of student success. It is more impactful than other areas including prior student achievement and reducing class size, on students’ outcomes.⁶

Once teachers have completed their initial teaching qualification, ongoing PLD is one of the most effective ways to enhance quality teaching practice.

PLD enables teachers to keep up to date with important changes and developments in the profession, such as curriculum changes, and to have greater impact on student achievement. Research shows that good quality PLD has a strong impact on improving the quality of teaching practice and enhancing student achievement.⁷

Effective PLD supports teachers to use evidence-based teaching methods, strengthens their subject knowledge, and improves the effectiveness of their teaching, leading to significant improvements in student outcomes. It is especially important for beginning teachers, as they start using what they have learnt in classrooms.

Effective PLD can also be useful for motivating teachers and supporting their career progression, which helps retain teachers in the workforce.⁸

b Following changes to the maths curriculum in 2023.

3) What is the system for developing teachers in New Zealand?

There are several steps to becoming a teacher in New Zealand.

There are four steps to becoming a teacher in New Zealand. To become a fully certified teacher, aspiring teachers must:

- complete an Initial Teacher Education qualification from an approved provider
- register as a teacher, and attain provisional practising certification
- complete two years of induction and mentoring
- attain full practising certification.

The Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (the Teaching Council) is the professional body for teachers. It is responsible for registering teachers and issuing provisional or full practising certificates.

The Teaching Council strongly encourages teacher to participate in ongoing learning.

While provisionally certified, beginning teachers are required to participate in induction and mentoring programmes. Once they are fully certified, there is flexibility in what teachers' ongoing learning might look like.

Requirements for teachers are governed by the need to renew their practising certificate every three years. To do this, the Teaching Council considers evidence that teachers have: engaged in professional learning (see discussion below) within the last three years and apply that learning in practice along with other factors.^c

The Teaching Council does not specify what 'satisfactory' professional learning must look like, how structured the learning should be, or how much PLD teachers need to participate in to be considered satisfactory. Teachers must show how they are engaging in learning as part of a 'Professional Growth Cycle', which is a tool from the Teaching Council where teachers are expected to reflect on their practice, set clear goals, and take action to improve.⁹ Teachers meet this condition by providing an endorsement from their professional leader that they have engaged in professional learning designed to upskill their practice. This action can, but does not have to, include participating in formal PLD.

Teachers identify their learning needs and school leaders play a key role in identifying development needs across the school.

While school boards are the employer for teachers in their school, school leaders are responsible for supporting teachers' development. This includes ensuring all teachers, including provisionally-certified and overseas-trained teachers have the skills and resources they need to succeed.

Teachers, along with school leaders, are responsible for managing their own professional development, including outlining their professional goals and identifying areas for development. They are also responsible for maintaining their teaching certification, including meeting the requirement to have completed satisfactory professional development in the last three years.

^c For example, engaged in a programme of learning designed to upskill their practice.

PLD is funded in a variety of ways.

Centrally-funded PLD

The Ministry funds teachers' participation in PLD with specialist providers, focussed on specific priorities.^d The way this funding works has recently undergone changes. Before Term 1 2024, schools applied for PLD through a regionally-allocated PLD fund. Providers that were accredited to deliver regionally-allocated PLD often covered a range of priorities, and were responsible for the quality of facilitation themselves.

Currently, there is a shift to centrally-funded PLD. To access funding for either topic, school leaders now go through the following process:

- Apply for funding.
- If approved, enrol with an approved provider.
- Wait for the provider to confirm their enrolment with the Ministry.
- Support their staff to attend the PLD.

To become an approved provider and receive Ministry funding, PLD providers are required to demonstrate they have the experience, capacity and capability to meet the Ministry's needs. An evaluation panel reviews submissions from providers to ensure they meet all requirements. Depending on demand, the Ministry may limit the number of providers who are approved.

Other external PLD

Schools also use their operational funding to access PLD opportunities for their staff. Operational funding is calculated based on a variety of factors, including the number of students a school has enrolled and the level of need in the school community. School boards are responsible for deciding how operational funds are spent.

Some iwi and charity groups also offer PLD for teachers, for example on local history and landmarks, or environmental initiatives.

There is currently no system for quality assurance for who is able to offer or charge for PLD. This means there is no way to know how many PLD providers there are, what they offer, or the quality of their programmes. School boards and leaders are responsible for deciding for themselves whether the offering is suitable.

Professional Learning Association New Zealand

The Professional Learning Association New Zealand (PLANZ) is the voluntary representative body for PLD providers in schools. PLANZ was established in 2016 and has a membership of around 20 PLD providers, including most, if not all, the large PLD providers in New Zealand as well as a number of the medium-sized and sole provider organisations working in both Māori – and English-medium settings. Within these organisations PLANZ represents around 300 facilitators.

^d Until the end of Term 1, 2024, schools could apply for PLD through a Regionally-Allocated PLD fund, which was distributed based on national priorities. A key difference in this model was that providers were accredited to deliver PLD across multiple priorities and were responsible for approving their own facilitators. This approach did not guarantee the quality or consistency of practice needed for effective PLD programmes.

Internal or peer-to-peer PLD

Many schools have significant expertise amongst their staff. School leaders often use these in-house experts to facilitate PLD within their school, at low or no cost. Schools often share this expertise with others in their community. This kind of PLD has the added advantage of the opportunity to contextualise learning to the school or specific students.

There is no targeted support or training to develop expert teachers' ability to teach their peers. There is also no minimum standard or requirement for these teachers.

4) How does New Zealand's PLD for teachers compare to other countries?

Other, similar professions in New Zealand set minimum time requirements for PLD and require providers to meet standards.

Teaching is a complex, varied, and continually evolving profession, overseen by a professional body that requires a minimum qualification, registration, and ongoing certification. This is similar to social work, psychology, and nursing.

Unlike social work and nursing, there is no specified time requirement for professional learning for teachers.

- The Social Workers' Registration Board requires a minimum of 20 hours of continuous professional development per year, to maintain registration.¹⁰
- The Nursing Council of New Zealand requires nurses to complete 60 hours of professional development every three years, to renew their certification.¹¹

The requirements for teachers are more similar to those for psychologists, who are expected to identify their learning objectives, develop and embed a plan for meeting these learning objectives, and review their progress against those objectives. The New Zealand Psychologists' Board does not direct what the learning plan should include.¹²

Whilst PLD for teachers does not have to meet specific conditions, PLD providers for some other professions do. For example, all PLD for nurses must be approved or accredited by the Nursing Council of New Zealand. This approval confirms that the programme meets national standards for assessing continuing competence and supports nurses' professional growth. Providers must design their PLD programmes in line with the Nursing Council's education standards to ensure quality and relevance.¹³

Similarly, social work education programmes in New Zealand must meet the Social Workers' Registration Board's programme recognition standards to keep their accreditation. This includes ongoing programme reviews and monitoring, with all new programmes undergoing a formal review in their first year of delivery.

Teachers in other jurisdictions are expected and supported to complete ongoing PLD.

Because of differences in each education system, there is no PLD landscape that is exactly like ours. However, the system to train and support teachers in New Zealand is comparable to the systems in the United Kingdom (UK), Australia and Singapore. These include:

- Setting entry requirements for Initial Teacher Education.
- Certifying and hiring teachers.
- Retaining teachers.

There are some differences in the expectations for ongoing teacher education, and support for teachers to do this. The key things that are different between our system and others are:

- New Zealand emphasises the ‘professional growth cycle’ but does not mandate specific PLD hours or activities. Other OECD countries *require* teachers to engage in ongoing PLD to remain certified.
- PLD funding is often applied for on a case-by-case basis by schools, while other countries offer more consistent funding, centralised support, and incentives.
- Many countries have formal accreditation requirements for PLD providers, whereas New Zealand only requires accreditation for Ministry-funded providers.

Table 2 compares the New Zealand system, at a high level, with similar systems from Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), and Singapore.

Table 2: *System for ongoing teacher education in New Zealand, compared to other countries.*

Process	New Zealand	Examples from other OECD countries
Participation requirements	<p>The Teaching Council of New Zealand sets requirements for teachers to attain and renew certification as teachers.</p> <p>Teachers are required to show evidence of their engagement in professional learning and development to renew their certification every three years.</p>	<p>Most OECD countries have policies for compulsory participation in continuous professional development (CPD) to maintain employment and/or for salary increases in lower secondary teachers.</p> <p>Singapore provides teachers with an entitlement to 100 hours per year of professional development. Participation is not mandatory.¹⁴</p> <p>Australian teachers are required to engage in PLD, with the number of hours varying by state. Teachers in New South Wales must complete at least 100 hours of PLD over a five-year period while teachers in ACT must record and reflect on 20 hours of professional learning each teaching year.</p> <p>In the UK, there is no legal requirement that all teachers must engage in PLD, but it is similar to New Zealand as it is strongly expected as part of professional standards, performance management, and often to maintain employment.</p>
Support to participate	<p>The Ministry of Education provides access to PLD focussed on national priorities. Schools must apply for this on a case-by-case basis.</p>	<p>Singapore provides in-service training courses and programmes as well as specialised, subject specific courses. Teachers also have the opportunity to participate in experiential learning in research laboratories and in the business and community sectors. There is a structured roadmap in Singapore that has clear guidelines for PLD opportunities to be tailored to different career stages.</p> <p>In Australia, state-level support is available with funded PLD programmes. Schools may also apply for PLD opportunities independently.</p>

Process	New Zealand	Examples from other OECD countries
Quality assurance	<p>There is no minimum standard or quality assurance for PLD providers in New Zealand.</p> <p>To be eligible for Ministry funding, PLD providers must be an 'approved provider'.</p> <p>To become an approved provider, organisations need to demonstrate they have the organisational experience, capacity and capability to meet the Ministry's requirements for service delivery.</p>	<p>PLD providers in the UK are accredited through the UK Register of Learning Providers. While this registration doesn't guarantee quality, it is often a pre-requisite to accessing public funding. Though not nationally consistent, there are internal and external quality assurance. Professional bodies or local authorities may also endorse specific PLD programmes.</p> <p>Singapore has a well-established national system for managing professional learning facilitators. It combines official certification through the Workforce Skills Qualification (WSQ) system with registration by the Ministry of Education. Clear quality standards guide how professional learning is designed to ensure relevance and impact. These systems help ensure facilitators are skilled and that training is consistent and effective.</p> <p>Australian states like New South Wales require PLD providers to meet formal accreditation criteria if their PLD counts towards mandatory hours, including presenter qualifications and programme quality.</p>

Conclusion

Like other professions, teaching is complex and evolving. Good quality teaching is a key driver of student achievement, and PLD is a powerful tool for maintaining and raising the quality of teaching once teachers are in the workforce.

PLD for teachers can take a variety of forms, and there is no specific expectation for how teachers engage in ongoing professional learning. Compared to other countries like Australia and Singapore, New Zealand does not have a clear unified quality framework for PLD. As a result, school boards and leaders must choose PLD themselves, with little assurance the PLD they are investing time and resource in is good quality.

The next chapter looks at how much we invest in developing, including how it is funded, how often teachers participate, and how much they engage in internal and external PLD.



Chapter 2: How much do we invest in developing our teachers?

Teachers in New Zealand receive professional learning and development (PLD) through a mix of centrally funded and school-funded opportunities. While there is no set requirement for how much PLD teachers must complete, most receive a mix of external PLD (funded by either their school or the Ministry), and internal PLD.

This chapter explores how much PLD teachers receive, how it is funded, and how teachers participate in internal and external PLD. It also looks at differences across primary and secondary schools, and how PLD is delivered.

What we did

PLD is an essential resource for improving teacher effectiveness and student achievement. To understand how much PLD teachers in New Zealand receive, we used data from the Ministry alongside surveys and interviews with teachers, leaders, and boards.

This section sets out:

- 1) How much PLD is funded
 - a) Centrally
 - b) By schools
- 2) How much PLD do teachers receive?

What we found: an overview

We invest substantially in PLD.

The Ministry funded \$138 million for PLD in the last financial year (2024 to 2025), the majority of which (\$112 million) was for curriculum-related PLD. This funding includes \$40.7 million for literacy/ Te Reo Matatini, and \$1.3 million for maths/ Pāngarau. In addition, just over two-thirds of schools funded half or more of their PLD from their operational funds.

Nearly all teachers participate in both internal and externally delivered PLD.

Eight in ten teachers received both internal and external PLD in the last year and the volume of PLD that teachers receive is similar across primary and secondary schools.

The majority of teachers attend one to two externally facilitated PLD programmes a year.

On average, primary school teachers attend slightly more external PLD programmes than secondary school teachers. PLD providers offer programmes to individual schools or groups of schools, and most deliver programmes either online or in-person.

On average, teachers participate in about two days per year of internal PLD, mostly delivered through whole school sessions.

Teachers receive about two days a year of internal PLD, typically through regular, short sessions that cover multiple topics and are most often delivered to the whole-school staff.

These findings and the supporting evidence are set out in more detail below.

Findings

1) How much PLD is funded?

Centrally funded

The Ministry of Education funded \$138 million for PLD in the last financial year (2024 to 2025), most of which related to curriculum.

The Ministry funds a range of PLD and works with approximately 180 PLD providers. This covers a range of topics and areas, either by large national contracts or smaller targeted supports. Over the past five years, the Government has increased annual funding for PLD to support changes to the curriculum by more than \$30 million.

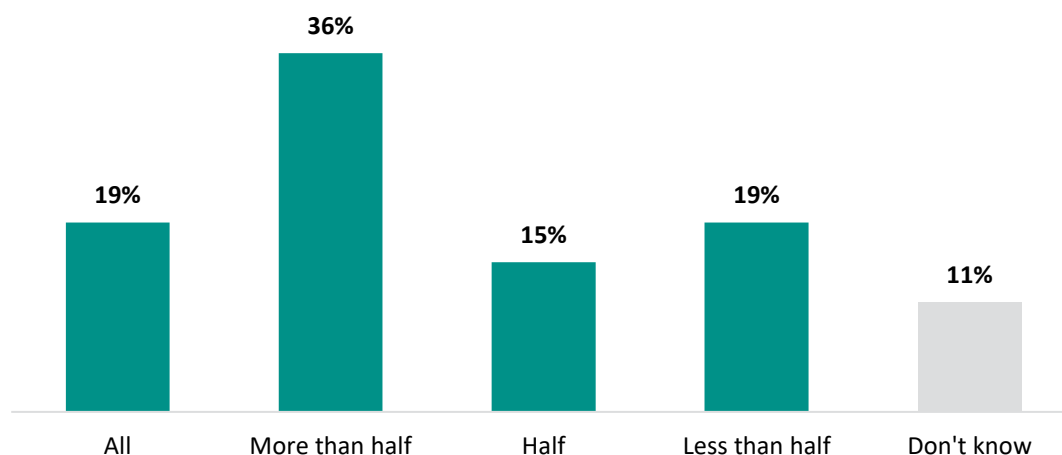
Overall, the Ministry funded approximately \$138 million for PLD in the last financial year (2024 to 2025; including PLD for teachers as well as other school roles like leaders, boards, and teacher aides). The largest proportion of the Ministry's PLD budget is for curriculum PLD. The Ministry committed approximately \$112 million towards curriculum PLD last year. This funding includes \$40.7 million for literacy/ Te Reo Matatini, \$1.3 million for maths/ Pāngarau, and \$26 million for a range of other, non-curriculum related PLD in the last year, for example for: board support, teacher education refresh, teacher retention, and learning support.

By schools

Schools make a significant contribution to their PLD.

Over two-thirds of schools (70 percent) fund at least half of their PLD from their operational budgets.

Figure 1: *How much PLD schools leaders report they fund through their operational budget.*



Secondary schools are more likely to fund all their PLD themselves (29 percent) compared to just 13 percent of primary schools.

Some schools also pool their funding through local clusters and networks to access face-to-face PLD. Because providers often require minimum numbers for a session, the Ministry encourages small, rural, and remote schools who seek face-to-face PLD to link up with other schools in their wider regions so that they can meet these thresholds.

School leaders shared that they select PLD in areas not supported by Ministry funding to meet the needs they identify for their staff and students.

Schools also contribute to teachers' participation in PLD by finding ways to release teachers from their usual classroom responsibilities, covering the cost of relief teachers, and paying for travel and accommodation. They identify experts in their school and support them to provide in-house development, as well as make connections with teachers in other schools.

Teachers' participation in PLD has an opportunity cost for them and their students. Teachers consistently told us they view PLD as an investment, and they need to see a benefit from their participation. They are often concerned about the negative impact to their students from having a relief teacher, and the cost of rearranging their schedule and time out of the classroom.

“Making sure the funding is available to do the PLD. For me as a head of faculty, the biggest barrier for me attending the PLD is having the funding for release time, and the costs associated [with travel].”

SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADER

2) How much PLD do teachers receive?

In this section we look at how much PLD teachers receive, how recently they have received it and its delivery.

How much PLD

Nearly all teachers received PLD in the last year.

Overall, eight in ten teachers (80 percent) received PLD in the last year. Primary and secondary schools receive similar amounts of PLD; 79 percent of teachers from primary schools, and 76 percent of teachers from secondary schools, have received both external and internal PLD in the last year.

Leaders told us they tend to use a combination of external and internal PLD. External PLD is useful for introducing new ideas and evidence-based practices, while internal PLD helps embed and sustain key practices over time.

In particular, they often adopt the ‘champions model’, where it is more affordable to send a small number of staff to external PLD sessions to build their skills and capability. These staff then bring their knowledge and skills back to facilitate internal PLD, coach and mentor their colleagues. They also share their expertise to support the embedding and sustainability of new practices or initiatives at a wider school level. School leaders tend to prefer a whole-school approach, so everybody is on the same page.

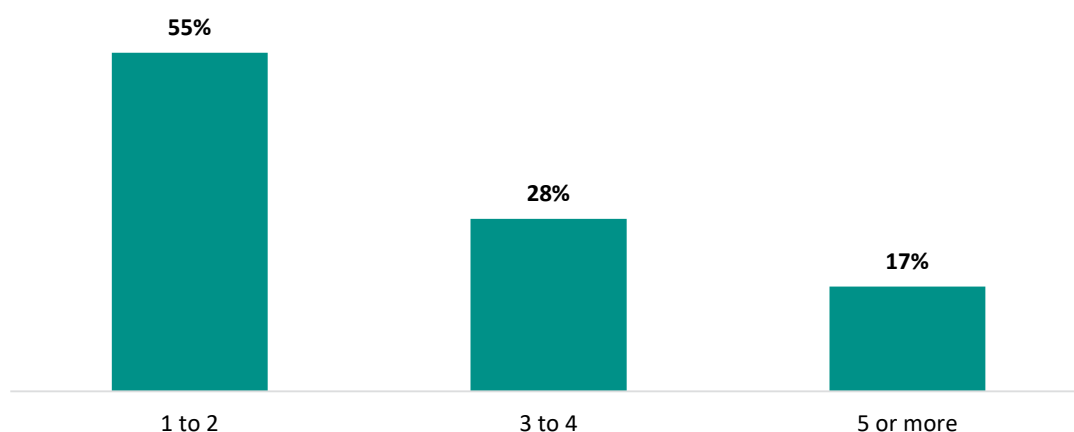
“....It is a whole-school approach and that’s what I like. Everyone is on the same waka and working towards the same thing.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

The majority of teachers attended one to two external PLD programmes in the past year.

Most teachers (83 percent) report they attended one to four external PLD programmes in the last year. Teachers in primary and secondary schools receive similar amounts of external PLD. Just over half of teachers (55 percent) report attending 1-2 PLD programmes per year and a further 28 percent (just under 3 in 10) attend 3-4 PLD programmes per year. One in six (17 percent) teachers report attending five or more PLD programmes annually.

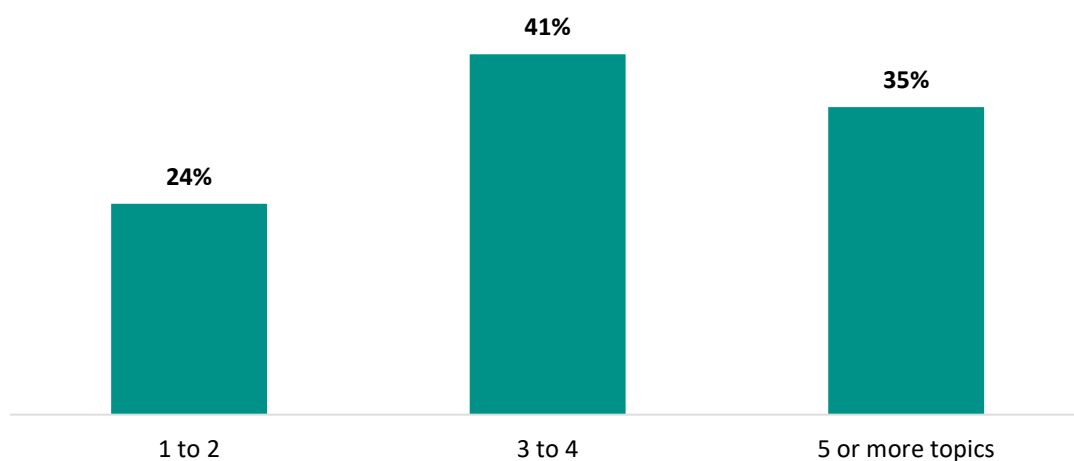
Figure 2: *Number of external PLD programmes teachers report they attended in the past year.*



Teachers complete about two days of internal PLD a year.

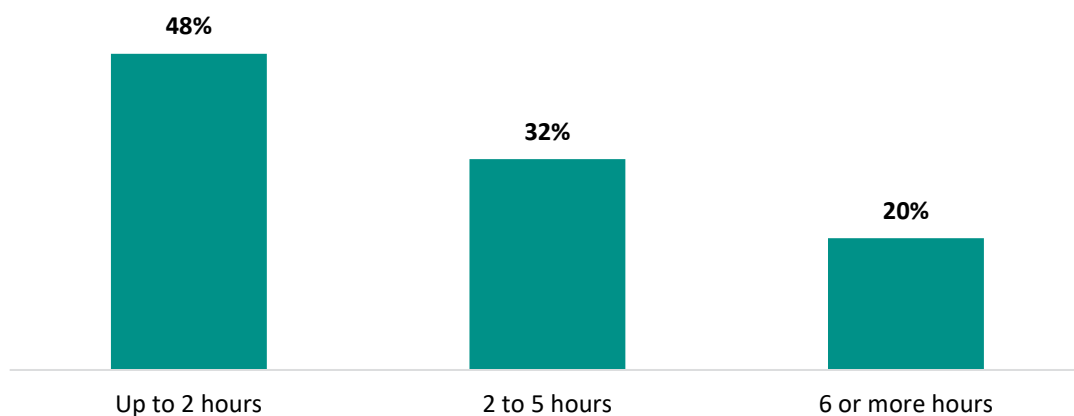
Teachers have typically covered three to four topics in internal PLD in the last year.

Figure 3: *Number of topics teachers report they have covered in internal PLD in the last year.*



The amount of time spent on topics varies with half of teachers (48 percent) spending less than two hours per topic, and half spending more than two hours.

Figure 4: Time teachers report they usually spend on one topic during internal PLD sessions.



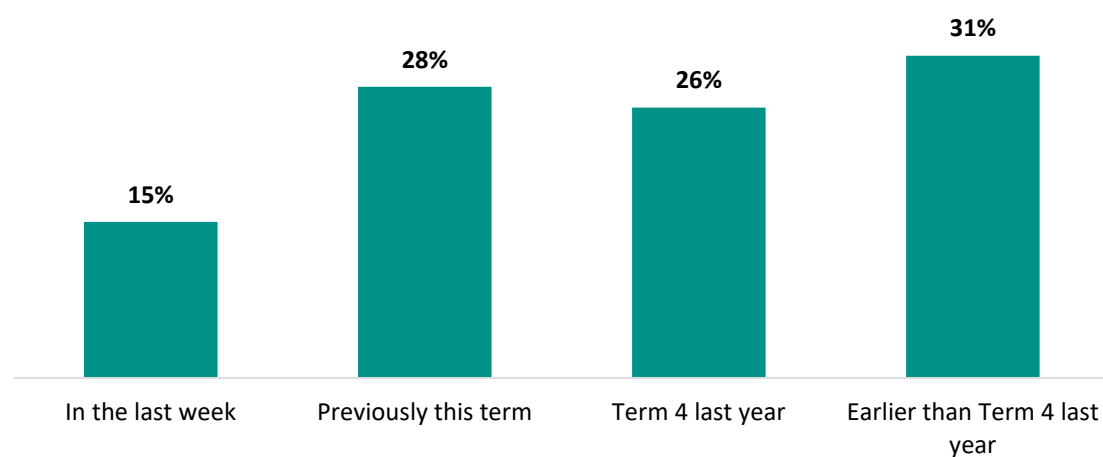
On average, this means teachers receive about **2 days of internal PLD in a year**.

How recently teachers received PLD

More teachers have received internal PLD recently than external PLD.

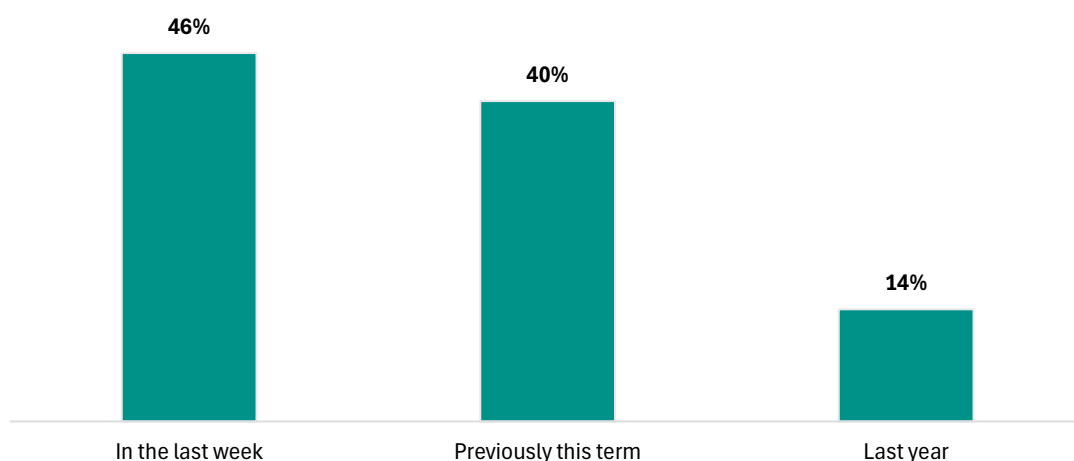
Four in ten (43 percent) teachers attended external PLD recently (in the last week or previously in the term).

Figure 5: When teachers report they last attended external PLD.



Nearly half of teachers (46 percent) attended internal PLD in the last week.

Figure 6: *When teachers report they last attended internal PLD.*



Concerningly one in five primary school teachers report receiving no internal PLD this year.

On average, both primary and secondary school teachers receive about 2 days of PLD per year. However, one in five primary school teachers (20 percent) did not receive any internal PLD this year. For secondary school teachers this was one in ten (10 percent). This is a concern given the scale of curriculum changes in primary schools that teachers need support to implement.

Figure 7: *Proportion of primary and secondary school teachers who report they haven't received any internal PLD this year.*



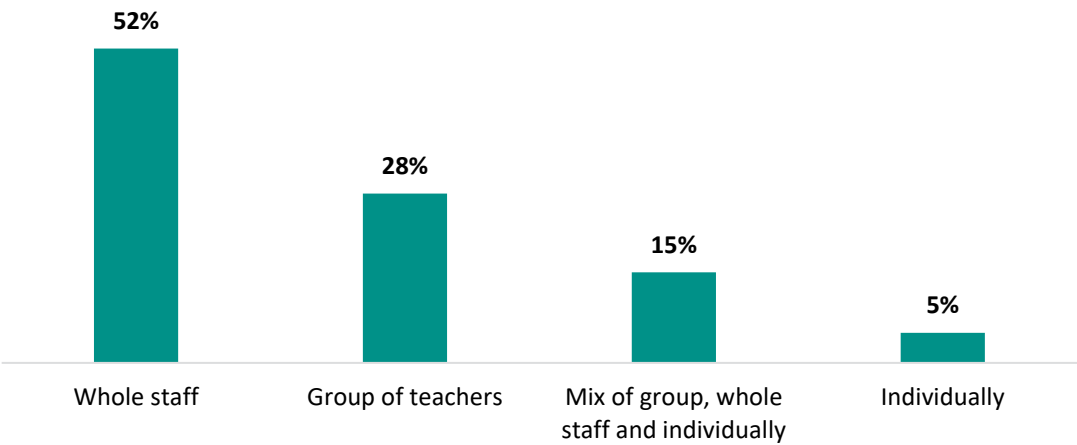
How PLD is delivered

Teachers usually receive external PLD as a whole school. Just over half of teachers (52 percent) receive external PLD with the whole school. Less than one in three teachers (28 percent) receive external PLD with a group of colleagues from their school, and about one in six (15 percent) receive external PLD in a mix of small group, whole-staff and individual PLD. One in 20 (5 percent) receive PLD on their own.

“Small group, face-to-face really works, rather than full staff, half a day... working this way is a bit more meaningful and purposeful. It really helps the teachers to be... part of the programme... it also gives teachers who may not be team leaders leadership opportunities.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

Figure 8: Who teachers report they attended external PLD with.



A quarter of PLD providers (25 percent) deliver programmes in-person only. Three quarters of PLD providers (75 percent) offer programmes both online and in-person. Of these providers, half deliver hybrid programmes, where the programme includes both online and in-person elements. These might range from seminars running for up to a couple of hours, to workshops spanning several days, to courses running for sustained periods.

Teachers explained that hybrid programmes might start with an intensive workshop, with semi-regular follow up sessions held online. For example, one programme held a three-day workshop away from the school (with teachers from many schools present), with a series of follow up online meetings for each teaching team spread out across the remaining year.

We heard from teachers that in-person programmes commonly require them to travel to a particular host site, though some programme facilitators travel to the school to run PLD there.

There is a clear distinction in how external PLD is provided in primary and secondary schools.

Teachers in primary schools say they receive more external PLD as a whole-school (40 percent) than teachers in secondary schools (17 percent).

Secondary schools told us they often leverage support for external PLD opportunities through subject associations and highly value the opportunities for collaboration and sharing ideas that come from their involvement with them.

“One principal said to me, ‘I just need someone walking alongside me at the moment to help me keep balls in the air and know that I’ve got the right balls in the air, and asking me the questions that are going to guide me to the things I should be thinking about that could be on my horizon.’”

PLD PROVIDER



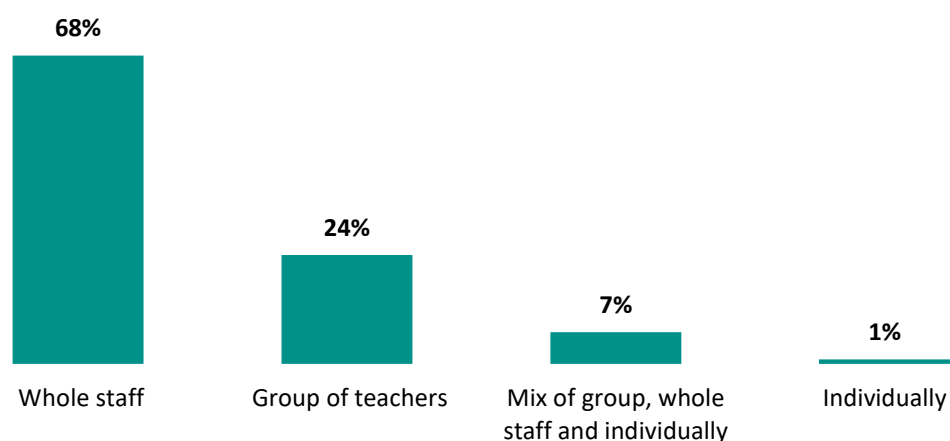
Internal PLD is normally received by the whole school.

Two in three teachers (68 percent) receive internal PLD alongside the whole-school staff. Schools most often offer whole-school internal PLD to ensure consistent practice across all staff, and to support the embedding of major initiatives requiring collective understanding and engagement. One in four teachers (24 percent) receive internal PLD in a smaller group of teachers. This is usually when professional learning is focussed on specific learning areas or year levels, such as within faculties in secondary schools or teams in primary settings.

“We wanted a programme that would complement what we’re already doing, and not take over.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL



Figure 9: *Who teachers report they attended internal PLD with.*

“It’s about balance, it’s not just about teacher capacity... I’ve had to look at what are our internal support mechanisms for teachers and what can we resource...”

PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

When planning internal PLD, school leaders consider the time needed to ensure that teachers have opportunity to learn new practices, embed what they have learnt, and reflect and learn from each other to be more effective. Internal PLD is typically scheduled weekly, fortnightly, or once a term. It is often set up to cover a variety of areas, for example, by having alternate weeks focussing on literacy and numeracy. Teachers value this regular schedule because it means they get frequent, bite-sized portions of PLD. This helps make sure learning is relevant, front of mind, and embedded consistently. Teachers also value having a mix of whole-staff, and more focussed team-based PLD with teachers from their subject area or the same year group.

Schools tend to rely on in-house experts or school leaders to facilitate internal PLD. Some leaders found that by delivering PLD like this, they can ensure PLD reflects the school’s particular needs and context, especially when it’s shaped by the school’s own goals, data, and range of expertise.

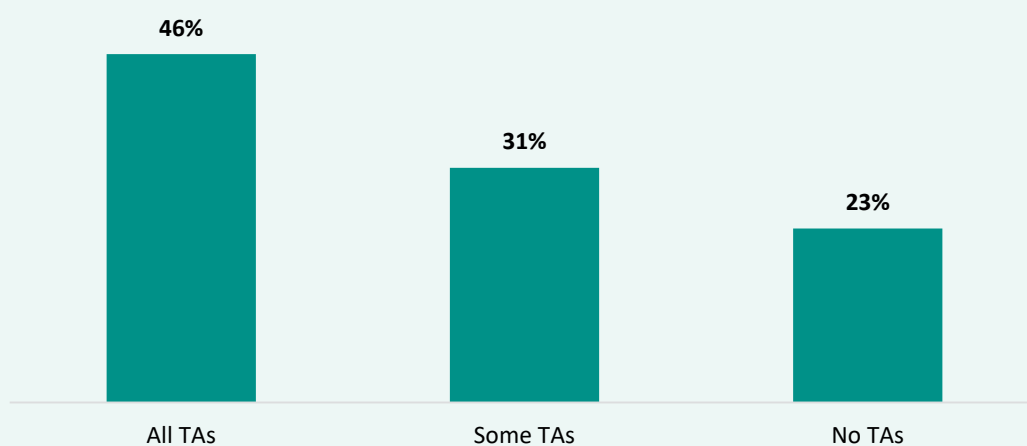
“We have used our staff [for PLD] and that’s been really valuable as well. Like, drawing on the skills [here] rather than getting someone externally. [A teacher here] has got a wealth of knowledge in maths, and she’s run some workshops around that as well to uplift us, which is quite handy, and it’s a little bit more familiar.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL LEADER

Many teacher aides (TAs) deliver structured interventions, but not enough get PLD to support them to do this well.

A consistent approach to teaching is important, as is delivering structured interventions correctly. Unfortunately, leaders report less than half (46 percent) of teacher aides (TAs) who deliver structured interventions receive PLD and 31 percent of leaders say PLD is offered to *some* TAs. Just under a quarter (23 percent) of TAs who are responsible for delivering structured interventions are not offered any formalised PLD to support effective embedding.

Figure 10: *Proportion of leaders who report teacher aides receive PLD.*



For those TAs who do get PLD, leaders told us that they are deliberate about including all staff in PLD wherever possible, including external opportunities. They felt that this leads to new practices being consistent and strongly embedded across the school. We often heard that schools that have dedicated time for PLD, such as a regular day or session built into the timetable allowed teachers and support staff (including teacher aides) to collaborate and learn at the same pace. Adopting a whole-school approach with TAs on board helps ensure that there is consistent practice across the school, in different classrooms.

“Part of PLD is training teacher aides, they are very much valued, and their skills are enhanced.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL.



Conclusion

We invest substantially in teacher development, both centrally and in schools. Schools also make a significant contribution to PLD for teachers, and teachers value seeing benefits from their participation. Teachers across schools engage in PLD to varying degrees, often through a mix of internal and external opportunities. Schools play a key role in both funding and delivering this learning, and teachers receive a mix of centrally-funded and school-funded PLD. Teachers value PLD that is relevant and impactful, and most engage in PLD alongside colleagues.

Given the investment in time and money, it is essential that PLD is impactful. The next chapter outlines what quality PLD looks like, drawing on international evidence and local insights. It sets out the key components of effective PLD and explores what makes the biggest difference to teaching practice and student outcomes.





Chapter 3: What is good PLD?

The international evidence shows how PLD has the biggest impact. To be effective at improving student outcomes, PLD needs to be well-designed and based on the best evidence; well-selected, so it meets teachers' needs; and well-embedded, so teachers act on what they have learnt.

Effective PLD builds knowledge, motivates teachers to use what they learn, develops teaching techniques, and provides structures and strategies to embed good practice. In New Zealand, external PLD (like English PLD) is most effective when it provides teachers with stepped out teaching techniques and practical tools. Internal PLD is most effective when it builds on what teachers know.

This chapter looks at the key elements that make PLD effective, which elements of PLD have the greatest impact on teaching practice and student outcomes in New Zealand, including the recent English PLD in primary schools, and the strengths of PLD in New Zealand.

What we did

To understand what makes PLD effective at improving student outcomes, we:

- Drew off international evidence¹⁵
- Reviewed the New Zealand evidence¹⁶
- Tested with an Expert Advisory Group, consisting of people who are experts in PLD, and at translating this into practice
- Interviewed experts in the field of translating learning into practice
- Surveyed school leaders and teachers
- Used statistical modelling to identify what makes the biggest difference in New Zealand.

To accompany this report, ERO developed a framework tool to support leaders' decision-making around teachers' PLD, and a practical good practice report. These can be downloaded for free from our evidence website, www.evidence.ero.govt.nz.

What we found: an overview

The international evidence shows what PLD has the biggest impact

Teachers' development needs to be well-designed (so it is based on the best evidence) and well-selected (so it meets teachers' needs) and well-embedded (so it sticks).

In New Zealand, we found that external PLD that provides stepped-out teaching techniques and tools (like English and maths PLD) makes the biggest difference.

Teachers are four times more likely to report an improvement in their practice when external PLD develops teaching techniques.

Internal PLD provided by schools can also improve practice if it builds off what teachers know and motivates them to use what they have learnt.

Teachers are more than four times more likely to report an improvement in their practice when internal PLD helps them build from what they know

The recent English PLD in primary schools has been very impactful. Most teachers are using what they have learnt, using it often, and seeing improvement in student outcomes.

Nearly three-quarters of teachers (71 percent) use it every day.

In New Zealand, school leaders and PLD providers are good at ensuring a strong focus on building teachers' knowledge and motivating teachers to use PLD.

More than nine out of ten PLD providers focus on designing PLD programmes that build teachers' knowledge. When selecting PLD, school leaders focus most on ensuring that it is relevant to their school needs.

These findings and the supporting evidence are set out in more detail below.

Findings

1) What does the international evidence show are the most important components of PLD?

The international evidence shows what PLD has the biggest impact – teachers' development needs to be well-designed, well-selected, and well-embedded. These components are set out in more detail below.

Well-designed

How PLD is designed, and its content, makes a big difference to its potential impact on student outcomes. Well-designed PLD has four key mechanisms:

- a) builds teachers' knowledge
- b) helps teachers develop teaching techniques
- c) gives teachers the tools to take what they have learnt and use it
- d) motivates teachers to use what they have learnt.

These four mechanisms are all about equipping teachers to turn their learning into action – otherwise the PLD won't make a lasting difference. Ensuring that PLD is from a credible source and has a strong evidence base is a foundational aspect of good PLD design, to ensure that PLD is worthwhile.

a) Building teacher knowledge

Effective PLD is carefully planned and paced to build teachers' knowledge and skills over time.

Successful PLD requires careful pacing and ongoing support to keep up momentum and improvement. School leaders carefully consider useful and realistic ways of setting out PLD sessions, as well as the practical supports (like observations and meetings) that will help embed that learning in the classroom. Key considerations are:

- being responsive to different levels of expertise and experience
- ensuring that content is focussed and relevant, and delivered at the right time for them to use it
- building a sense of 'ownership' among staff
- how PLD will fit into other PLD that is already planned or underway at the school
- how and when leaders will support teachers to revisit, recap, and monitor their learning and practice shifts.

Building knowledge well over *time* might include leaders designing a term-by-term rollout plan for PLD so that teachers can learn new things in manageable chunks, with time to revisit and reinforce key ideas over time, supporting retention, and understanding.¹⁷ This means that teachers are exposed to new information, and can process and retain it in ways that support effective practice, without being overwhelmed.

“PLD should be individualised and relevant to what's going to take you to the next step in your learning directly... scaffolded rather than just once off and left alone.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

b) Develops teaching techniques

Teachers develop a range of useful teaching techniques from PLD, so they can select what works best for their students.

Teachers need a variety of techniques, so they can adapt their instruction to meet the needs of their students. Effective PLD makes sure teachers know *how* to teach, as well as *what* to teach. Key mechanisms do this by:

- instructing teachers on how to perform a technique – providing clear, step-by-step guidance
- arranging practical support – creating opportunities for collaboration, coaching, or peer learning

- modelling the technique – showing what good practice looks like in action
- providing feedback – offering constructive, targeted feedback to help teachers improve
- rehearsing the technique – giving teachers time and space to practise in a safe environment.

We heard PLD providers do this well when sessions include group activities, discussions, and opportunities to collaborate and learn from peers.

c) Gives teachers the tools they need

Teachers benefit from practical, classroom-ready tools to take what they have learnt and use it.

Well-designed PLD supports teachers with tools to take what they have learnt and apply it immediately in the classroom – for example, prompts, props, scripts, assessment frameworks, exemplars, or learning activity examples. Providing classroom-ready tools gives teachers a clear action for following up on their learning, so that their new learning isn't just forgotten after their PLD session.

Teachers that we spoke with affirmed the value of balancing the 'theory' behind PLD, which is important, with the 'practical' – what actually happens in the classroom. They also emphasised that the most useful tools are ready to use straight away – not just left for them to 'consider' – otherwise they are tempted to leave it for later when they have more time.

“I need PLD that I can immediately use with the students... to increase their achievement.”

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER

d) Motivates teachers

Teachers' motivation and 'buy-in' are important.

Teachers are more likely to engage with and apply new learning when they understand its purpose, see its relevance, and feel supported to succeed. Teachers can more easily see the value of PLD, and are more motivated to engage, when there is clear evidence that it has led to improved outcomes for students in the past. It helps when this evidence is supported with a strong explanation of how the learning can be applied to a teacher's specific context. Credibility of the school staff or external provider who will deliver the learning, as well as the credibility of the programme or practice to be learnt, are key to teachers trusting that PLD is worth their efforts.

“All the theory, not the practical. I can go read that in my own time – I want to know practically how that works in my classroom.”

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHING LEADER

Three key components that help motivate teachers to turn learning into action are:

- setting and agreeing on goals – helping teachers understand what the PLD is aiming to achieve
- presenting information from a credible source – using trusted experts or evidence-based content
- providing affirmation and reinforcement – recognising progress and identifying success.¹⁸

In practice, this means designing PLD that has a clear purpose and is aligned with both school priorities and teachers' needs. Leaders focus on ensuring that PLD content is relevant to the school's context, responds to the needs identified in school and student data, and that teachers will be able to use and benefit from the development they will receive.

Teachers told us they are more motivated to use what they have learnt in their classrooms when they see PLD as a way to grow their practice and develop them in the profession. Leaders play a key role in shaping this culture, ensuring that staff feel supported and valued rather than needing to be "fixed."

"It's terrible and objectionable to feel that we need fixing. I don't need PLD because I'm broken."

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER

"Education is constantly growing and you have to constantly grow with it... it depends on peoples' perceptions of PLD – I love it and will jump at any chance... it really is an opportunity, and sharing our expertise within a school is really valuable. You always take away something little that you can add to your practice, and that is really important."

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER

"I'd say grow... in-school PLDs and out-of-school PLDs have shaped me into who I am today... all the relevant PLDs attended in the last 15, 16 years gave me a good network of my teaching area, and equipped me with the new skills and knowledge of teaching my area. And the school PLD is... how to become a better teacher. I grew a lot from this PLD."

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Well-selected

Leaders might choose to arrange PLD provision from external providers, or offer internal PLD that draws off the expertise of their staff. Either way, well-selected PLD needs to be:

- a) relevant to school, student, and teacher needs
- b) focussed on student outcomes
- c) evidence-based and effective.

a) Relevant

Good selection uses data and evidence to be relevant, and is strongly focussed on what matters most.

To construct a teacher PLD plan that will make a real difference, school leaders focus on ensuring that content is relevant to the school's context and needs, and that students will benefit.¹⁹ This means stopping to think and take stock, identifying where PLD should be prioritised, and *then* shaping up a plan.

Data and evidence are the cornerstones of good PLD decisions.²⁰ Rather than just making decisions based on teacher requests or individual interests, school leaders should look to achievement data, evidence of progress, and other student outcome data. It is important not to be drawn into less-relevant PLD just because it is accessible, available, affordable, or of personal interest.

This involves making use of schoolwide data patterns across student achievement, progress trajectories, or wellbeing and behaviour data. Schools may identify evidence of longitudinal achievement decline in particular learning areas, or cohort-specific learning gaps.

Sometimes these data patterns are identified at a national level and signalled to schools by the Ministry, such as the current national decline in literacy and numeracy achievement. When this happens, leaders might closely examine their own schools' data to identify what this national trend looks like in their specific context. Nationwide shifts in practice or expectations, like curriculum changes or new mandates, are also considered when planning and prioritising.

As part of their decision-making, school leaders also consider evidence from their ongoing monitoring of the impact of any previous PLD and use this information to inform choices around timing, provider selection, delivery methods, and other selection and design elements.

b) Focused

PLD must have a clear link to student outcomes.

PLD can be focussed on a wide variety of topics or techniques, but not all of these are focussed on improving student outcomes. Selecting PLD well means targeting the things that matter most.

In New Zealand, centrally-funded PLD is focussed on specific national priorities, like structured literacy approaches and ways to teach maths. School leaders and boards can also choose to use their operational funds for PLD. This might be focussed on things like boosting teachers' knowledge in other subjects, or building on past PLD learning.

c) Evidence-based

Quality PLD uses credible, evidence-based interventions and providers

Good selection requires school leaders to carefully assess the strength of different options. They consider whether they have the expertise within their school to design and deliver the learning, or whether they will need to source expertise externally. It is crucially important that their choices consider the evidence base of the PLD learning (the topic or programme) as well as the PLD delivery method itself.²¹

“Having that evidence base is important and understanding why we are doing what we are doing.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL BEGINNING TEACHER

“How would a leader know whether PLD is good? How would a leader of a school know if it's having impact, and what that looks like? Without that engagement [between the leader and PLD provider], they get further and further distanced from effective practice.”

PLD FACILITATOR

In New Zealand, there is no set standard for PLD providers to be assessed against as evidence-based and effective. Instead, school leaders might gauge credibility by looking at whether a PLD provider works with the Ministry, or is recommended by other school leaders.

Well-embedded

It is not enough to *know* what good practice looks like – teachers need to *use* what they have learnt to improve student outcomes. This is about real-life changes in the classroom, and maintaining these changes over time. When PLD is well-embedded:

- a) teachers are expected and supported to use what they have learnt
- b) teachers are clear about where adaptations can be made, or not
- c) effectiveness of any changes is monitored.

a) Supported

Leaders should actively support teachers to embed what they have learnt. This helps turn theory into practice and leads to better outcomes for students.

School leaders have a crucial role in embedding learning into practice and preventing teachers returning to ‘business as usual’ after engaging in new learning. To ensure PLD learning actually impacts on practice, school leaders need to prioritise embedding PLD throughout school plans, processes, and professional supports (like strategic plans and goals, meetings and discussions, observations, feedback, policies, and inductions for new staff).

Leaders can show staff how much they value their learning by participating in the learning themselves and modelling use of what they have learnt.

b) Clear

To be effective, PLD providers need to be clear about what teachers can adapt, and what must be followed exactly to achieve the intended outcomes.

Well-designed and well-selected PLD provides teachers with new knowledge and teaching techniques that are proven to be effective – but only if they are implemented correctly. However, teachers are also expected to adapt the way they work with students, so that all students learn and progress.

To ensure teachers can embed their learning meaningfully, and be responsive, PLD providers need to be explicit about how teachers can take what they have learnt and adapt it, and what parts have to be followed exactly. For example, when introducing teachers to structured literacy approaches, PLD providers explain its research foundation. They emphasise that core components like explicit phonemic awareness, systematic phonics, and cumulative review must be followed as designed, and adapting these could impact the effectiveness of this approach.

c) Monitored

Effective PLD reminds teachers to take what they have learnt and use it in the classroom.

- Giving teachers the right knowledge for *what* to teach, and *how* to teach it, does not necessarily transfer to changes in their classroom practice. Effective PLD sets teachers up for success by giving them practical tools and strategies to help them use what they have learnt. These include:
- prompts and cues – using reminders to keep new strategies top of mind
- action planning – supporting teachers to plan when and how they'll use a new technique
- self-monitoring – helping teachers reflect on what's working and what could be improved
- context-specific repetition – reinforcing learning through repeated use in real classroom settings.

We heard from teachers that some of their most impactful and practical PLD included a gradual release of responsibility, where the PLD facilitator demonstrates, then uses the tool or strategy *with* teachers, then observes teachers using the tool or strategy and provides feedback.

“When they sprinkle in bits that generate an immediate change... they're not telling you to change your entire teaching practice, just giving you bits and pieces that make a huge impact – practical, approachable, and doable.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL BEGINNING TEACHER



Monitoring is needed to ensure that PLD learning and practice changes are having the intended impacts.

Embedding change well requires leaders and teachers to monitor the effectiveness of their changes. This needs to be realistic about what impacts should be expected and when.

Leaders and teachers need to monitor whether they are embedding the intended changes (to content, or to teaching techniques), and what differences that is making for teachers and students. This means gathering feedback, examining data, checking in regularly, and being willing to adapt when things aren't working.²²

Leaders and teachers can monitor how well the embedding is going by doing things like observing how students are responding to new practices, using digital tools to track embedding, and monitoring impact over time.

When all these elements are in place, PLD can lead to lasting change in teaching practice. It becomes a driver of real, lasting improvement and positive outcomes for teachers and students. We share more detail about what these mechanisms look like in practice in our companion report, *School leaders' good practice: Professional learning and development*.

2) What components of PLD are most important for shifting teaching practice in New Zealand?

Research shows that careful design, selection, and embedding are important for PLD to be effective. However, some elements make a bigger difference than others in New Zealand in ensuring PLD is:

- a) used
- b) improves teacher practice
- c) improves student outcomes.

We have analysed all the evidence we collected to identify what makes the biggest difference in New Zealand.

External PLD

Teachers are more likely to use what they learn from external PLD when it gives them stepped-out teaching techniques and practical tools.

Our research found that teachers in New Zealand are more than twice as likely to frequently use what they learn from external PLD when it helps them develop teaching techniques.^e Teachers are nearly four times more likely to use PLD often when it provides practical tools.^f

e We used a logistic regression, OR 2.30, $p < 0.01$.

f We used a logistic regression, OR 3.79, $p < 0.01$.

When external PLD:	Increase likelihood teachers use what they have learnt	Increase likelihood improves teachers practice	Increase likelihood improves student outcomes
Links to what teachers already know ^g	-	-	-
Develops teaching techniques	More than 2 times	4 times	Nearly 3 times
Gives teachers practical tools they can use	Nearly 4 times	Over 4 times	More than 2 times
Motivates teachers to use what they have learnt	More than 2 times	Over 5 times ^h	More than 8 times

Teachers told us about the value of hands-on, practical PLD that involves them working together by modelling and practicing classroom techniques during PLD sessions. This is important because it gives teachers clear, precise things they can take and embed immediately. This allows teachers to experience ‘quick wins’, and build confidence from seeing the impact of what they have learnt.

“Just getting your hands dirty – something that feels like I can do this exact activity in class, as opposed to this is probably going to influence how I might start planning for something else.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Teachers’ report that their practice is more likely to improve when external PLD develops teaching techniques and gives teachers practical tools, alongside motivating teachers to use what they have learnt.

Teachers’ practice is four times more likely to improve when external PLD develops teaching techniquesⁱ and more than four times more likely to improve when it gives them practical tools^j they can use in their classroom.

^g Results were not statistically significant.

^h We used a logistic regression, OR 5.54, $p < 0.01$.

ⁱ We used a logistic regression, OR 4.99, $p < 0.01$.

^j We used a logistic regression, OR 3.51, $p < 0.01$.

Teachers explained that when PLD gives them practical teaching techniques they can use immediately, it builds their confidence. They are more likely to use it and improve their ways of teaching. We heard from many teachers about the importance of having PLD provide practical tools (often alongside resources), as it makes the learning feel tangible and useful. They highly value PLD that gives them things they can embed in the classroom as soon as the next day. Teachers told us that this makes them more motivated to both participate in PLD and embed what they've learnt, since they can start right away. Conversely, some teachers told us that when it became clear that the PLD was unlikely to be immediately relevant to their classroom teaching, they were likely to start feeling disengaged.

“I think for me, if I'm thinking about curriculum-based stuff, it's giving us practical things that I can then apply into my teaching and make them better.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Teachers benefit from the outside expertise that comes from external PLD. For example, we heard how external PLD helps teachers affirm and increase their understanding of new teaching approaches, 'fine-tune' their understanding of curriculum changes, and expand their specialist subject knowledge.

Teachers are more likely to report improvements in student outcomes when external PLD develops teaching techniques and gives them practical tools, alongside motivating them to use what they learn.

The overarching purpose of PLD is to improve student outcomes. Teachers are nearly three times more likely to report improvements in student outcomes when external PLD develops their teaching techniques.^k Teachers are more than two times as likely to report student outcomes improve when external PLD gives them practical tools they can use.^l They are also more than eight times as likely to report improved student outcomes when external PLD motivates them to use what they have learnt.^m

Internal PLD

It is important for internal PLD to build off what teachers know, develop teaching techniques and motivate teachers to use what they have learnt.

Teachers in New Zealand are about three times more likely to often use what they learn from internal PLD when it motivates them,ⁿ and about two times more likely to often use it when PLD builds on what they already know.^o

^k We used a logistic regression, OR 2.73, $p < 0.05$.

^l We used a logistic regression, OR 2.55, $p < 0.1$.

^m We used a logistic regression, OR 8.53, $p < 0.01$.

ⁿ We used a logistic regression, OR 3.17, $p < 0.01$.

^o We used a logistic regression, OR 2.11, $p < 0.05$.

When internal PLD:	Increase likelihood teachers use what they have learnt	Increase likelihood improves teachers practice	Increase likelihood improves student outcomes
Links to what teachers already know	About 2 times	More than 4 times	5 times
Develops teaching techniques	About 2 times	More than 3 times	Nearly 3 times
Gives teachers practical tools they can use	-	Nearly 3 times	-
Motivates teachers to use what they have learnt	About 3 times	Nearly 5 times	5 times

Internal PLD that links to what teachers already know, develops teaching techniques, and motivates teachers, can help embed and sustain key practices over time. We heard that internal PLD can be more responsive and contextualised. Some teachers told us their internal PLD included regular meetings and informal check-ins. Teachers responded positively to this approach, as it meant they could quickly seek internal support or guidance when they faced challenges or were ready to refine their practice.

“Reaffirmed a lot of principles from previous PLD and linked this more specifically to our setting... Links to what we have in place in our kura already and a chance to troubleshoot, brainstorm with colleagues.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Internal PLD is most likely to improve teachers' practice when it motivates them to use what they have learnt and links to what they already know.

Teachers are nearly five times more likely to report improvement in their practice when internal PLD motivates them to use what they have learnt.^p They're over four times more likely to report improved practice when it builds off what they already know.^q

Teachers are more than three times more likely to report improvement when internal PLD gives them teaching techniques,^r and nearly three times more likely when it includes practical tools they can use in the classroom.^s

p We used a logistic regression, OR 4.74, $p < 0.01$.

q We used a logistic regression, OR 4.59, $p < 0.01$.

r We used a logistic regression, OR 3.51, $p < 0.01$.

s We used a logistic regression, OR 2.78, $p < 0.01$.

Internal PLD is often designed and led by in-house experts and school leaders, or sometimes co-designed with external partners. Schools can tailor content to ensure that teachers continue to build on what they know and develop their teaching techniques. It helps keep them engaged and motivated to use what they have learnt.

Teachers also consistently told us that internal PLD is most effective at improving their practice when it is relevant to their school's context. They value PLD that is goal-directed, aligned with school priorities, and designed in consultation with staff. This contextualisation helps ensure that learning is practical and more transferable to the classroom. Teachers emphasised the importance of having time to reflect, adapt, and apply new strategies.

“[PLD] made what to teach clearer, set goals and targets, ensured staff were on the same page and understood the content...”

TEACHER IN COMPOSITE SCHOOL

Teachers are more likely to report student outcomes have improved when internal PLD links to what teachers already know, develops teaching techniques, and motivates them to use what they have learnt.

Teachers are five times as likely to report student outcomes have improved when internal PLD links to what teachers already know,^t and nearly three times as likely to report student outcomes have improved when internal PLD helps teachers build teaching techniques.^u Teachers are five times more likely to report student outcomes improve when internal PLD motivates teachers to use what they have learnt.^v

This closely matches what makes teachers more likely to use what they have learnt from internal PLD. Internal PLD can play a key role in taking teachers' learning from other places, building on what teachers already know, and making it work in the context of the specific school, class, or teachers using it. Making the learning 'fit' drives improved student outcomes.

Leaders' perspective

Leaders and teachers have identified different components of PLD as being important. Leaders are more likely to report building on what teachers already know and providing them practical tools as important.

Across both internal and external PLD, school leaders are just over three times more likely to report improvements in teaching practice when PLD links to what teachers already know.^w Leaders are also nearly three times more likely to report that practical tools in the classroom improves teacher practice.^x

^t We used a logistic regression, OR 5.14, $p < 0.01$.

^u We used a logistic regression, OR 2.68, $p < 0.01$.

^v We used a logistic regression, OR 5.02, $p < 0.01$.

^w We used a logistic regression, OR 3.36, $p < 0.1$.

^x We used a logistic regression, OR 2.91, $p < 0.1$.

Leaders also reported their support is key to PLD changing practice. It includes identifying a need, ensuring teachers understood the purpose or value, and maintaining clear communication about school expectations. Leaders discussed the importance of holding teachers accountable.

“We’re constantly told as teachers what we have to do, [when] and how we have to do it. So now to choose something for yourself that you’re passionate about and you want to grow that. You see, this is an area that I’m really interested, or it’s an area that I see as a weakness that I need to grow, so you can do that.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL DEPUTY PRINCIPAL



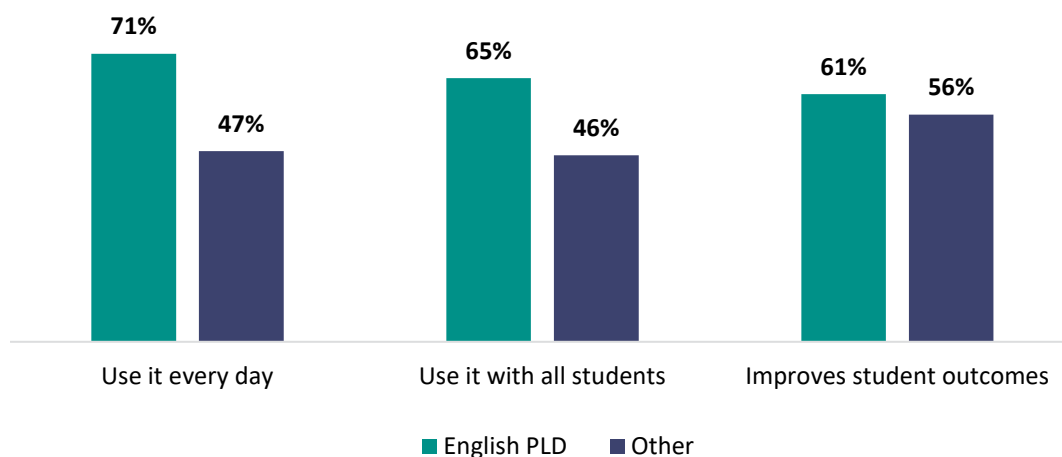
3) The most recent English PLD is a good example of effective and impactful PLD

The recent English PLD in primary schools has been very impactful. Most teachers are using what they have learnt, using it often, and see improvement in student outcomes.

Because the timing of this review coincided with the rollout of new English curriculum guidance and expectations, nearly one in three (31 percent) of primary school teachers’ most recent external PLD was on English.

- Teachers whose most recent external PLD was on English report they:
 - use it often in the classroom. Nearly three-quarters (71 percent) use it every day
 - use what they have learnt widely in the classroom. Two-thirds (65 percent) use it with all students
 - see improvement in student outcomes. Six in ten (61 percent) report improvements in student outcomes.
- In all these areas the recent English PLD in primary schools has had more impact than other PLD.

Figure 11: *Primary school teachers who report their most recent external PLD was on English compared to other PLD.*



The most recent external English PLD incorporated many of the components of effective PLD.

Well-designed

This PLD package included the key components of *building teachers' knowledge, developing teaching techniques, and motivating teachers to use PLD.*

The recent PLD is strongly focused on building teachers' knowledge and developing clearly defined techniques and approaches. We heard from teachers that they are able to make immediate changes to their practice. The close monitoring of progress is highly motivating for teachers. Seeing student outcomes improve after a short time reinforces the impact of the changes teachers make.

“Structured literacy programme explicitly taught us how to use the resources, how to go through the entire book and the speed word, fun ways of teaching. Understanding why it works, how it goes through all the letters, and being able to read independently and confidently...”

PRIMARY SCHOOL BEGINNING TEACHER

Well-selected

This PLD package included the key components of being *evidence-based, relevant and clearly linked to student outcomes.*

- PLD on structured literacy is directly relevant to the changes in curriculum, meaning that teachers are immediately using what they learn in the classroom – the changes to their practice are required and relevant.

Structured literacy approaches have an extensive evidence base demonstrating their efficacy. We heard that teachers are happier to invest in embedding learning from PLD when they feel confident it will have an impact. The strong evidence base for structured literacy approaches gives teachers that confidence, and means they are more invested in making it work. It is also likely that the widespread uptake of this PLD means that teachers have been more likely to hear success stories from their colleagues and networks, with a motivating effect.

Teachers report they value the evidence base of structured literacy approaches and feel confident in their ability to have an impact. This, combined with ready-to-use resources and built-in mechanisms to monitor student progress, enables teachers to make immediate changes to their classroom practice and see their impacts – with a motivating effect.

“I know the scope and sequence for teaching structured literacy. My students are learning more effectively and efficiently, and my priority learners are beginning to move faster than ever before.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Well-embedded

This PLD package included the key components of *support to implement, clarity about what can adapt and clear monitoring*.

Alongside the strong evidence base and motivation to make change, the broader system conditions have had a strong role in supporting the uptake, embedding, and therefore impact, of PLD in English. The key factors are:

- A system shift in practice, where professional peer networks, inter-school collaboration, modelling, and general impetus all combine to create a web of support.
- Ongoing communication, resourcing and support from the Ministry, to encourage and enable teachers to change their practice.

In addition, a core component of structured literacy approaches is monitoring student progress and responding to students' needs. This means teachers are highly engaged in understanding what aspects of their embedding of PLD are working or not and adjusting their approach.

The nationwide rollout of the refreshed English curriculum this year added urgency and timeliness, supporting the uptake, embedding, and therefore impact, of PLD in English.

4) What are the overall strengths of New Zealand's PLD?

New Zealand's PLD has three strengths: building teacher's knowledge, being relevant and motivating teachers to use what they learn.

a) Building teachers' knowledge

School leaders and PLD providers in New Zealand have a strong focus on building teachers' knowledge.

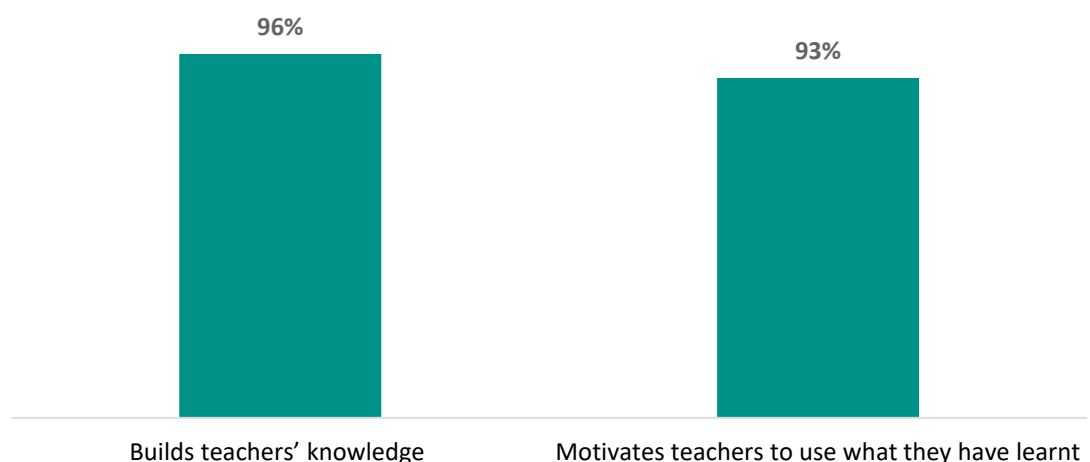
More than nine in ten PLD providers (96 percent) focus on designing development programmes that build teachers' knowledge and motivate teachers to use what they have learnt (93 percent). School leaders prioritise selecting PLD that builds teachers' knowledge, above all other components of quality PLD. Nearly all leaders (97 percent) always or usually consider how PLD builds teachers' knowledge.

PLD providers told us they aim to build teachers' knowledge about the research that informs the programme, while trying to scaffold teachers' learning in ways that helps connect theory to classroom application.

“So our people are expected to be experts and know where those resources are and [to] be able to direct people to those resources, to be able to use them in the appropriate ways”

PLD PROVIDER

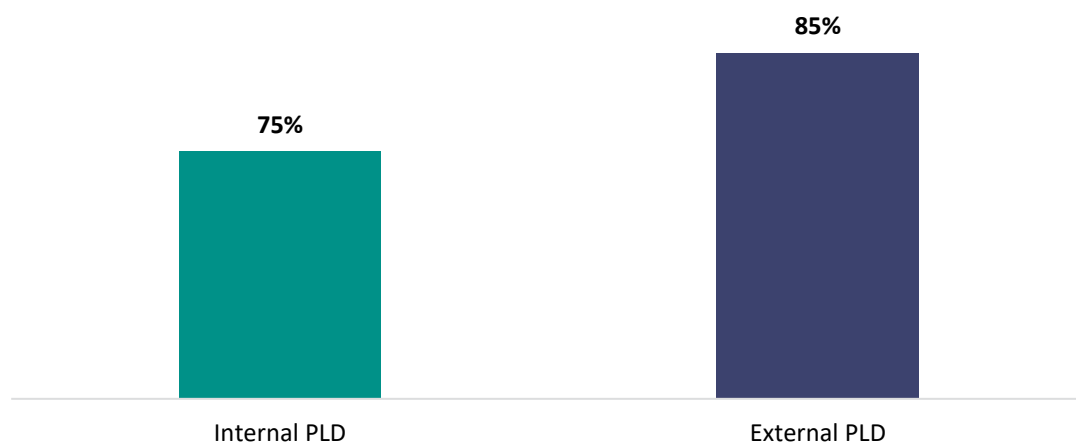
Figure 12: *Factors PLD providers report they consider when designing programmes for teachers.*



Teachers agree that PLD builds their knowledge. Three out of four teachers (75 percent) report their most recent internal PLD built their knowledge. Nearly nine out of ten teachers (85 percent) report their most recent external PLD helped them build knowledge.

Teachers told us they particularly value aspects of external PLD that may not be available through internal PLD. They appreciate the specialist content knowledge and resources that external providers bring, which helps deepen knowledge and learning through the provision of a wide range of tools and frameworks. External PLD also offers a ‘fresh perspective’, exposing teachers to new ideas and practices outside their usual networks. These new perspectives might be more informed by the latest research and approaches to teaching, which are strongly emphasised by external providers. Teachers also value the opportunity to step away from their regular routines and environments, allowing them to focus more deeply on new learning, and create space to explore new ideas and practices.

Figure 13: *Proportion of teachers who report internal and external PLD has helped them build knowledge.*



Teachers told us internal PLD helps to keep consistency in what they are working on in the school; regularly topping up or affirming knowledge and techniques through discussions with colleagues, weekly hui or staff meetings.

b) Relevance

School leaders in New Zealand have a strong focus on selecting PLD that is relevant.

When school leaders select external PLD or design their own teacher development, they focus most on making sure it's relevant to their schools' needs and builds teachers knowledge. Nearly all leaders (97 percent) focus *a lot* on how the programme features align with their school priorities.

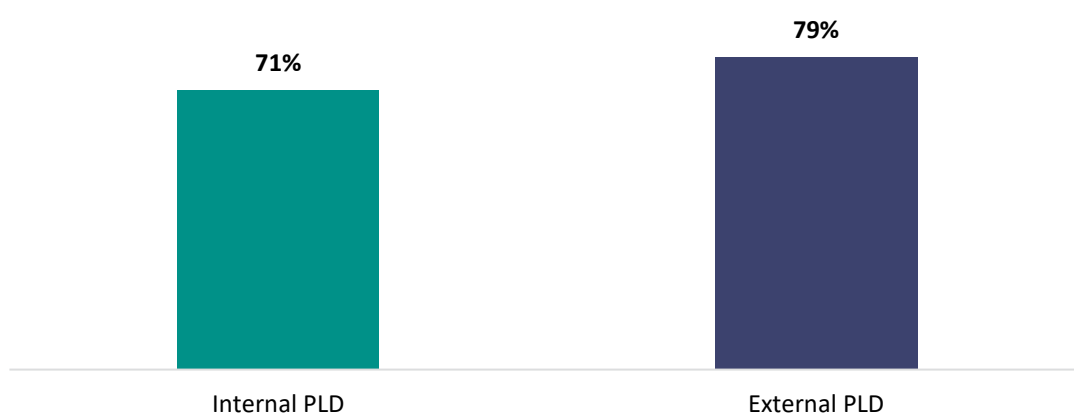
We heard from school leaders that a key factor in their planning is making sure teachers' development is relevant. Ensuring teacher development aligns with school-wide goals and strategic priorities allows it to be responsive to their school context. This makes it easier for teachers to apply what they've learnt and use new tools to build their expertise.

c) Motivates to use

Teachers report PLD motivates them to use what they have learnt.

More than nine out of 10 PLD providers focus heavily on motivating teachers to use what they learn (93 percent do this *a lot*). Teachers agree that their PLD is motivating. Eight out of 10 teachers (79 percent) report that their most recent external PLD motivated them to use what they learnt. Seven out of 10 teachers (71 percent) report their most recent internal PLD motivated them to use what they learnt.

Figure 14: *Proportion of teachers who report that internal and external PLD motivated them to use what they learnt.*



Good internal PLD provides teachers with ongoing support, which helps maintain motivation to embed changes.

“It’s more about awareness and reminders. It’s always on my mind and when I prepare for my class, I’m doing so with this PLD in mind.”

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Conclusion

The international evidence is very clear about what makes PLD impactful.

ERO’s review found that the same things matter in New Zealand and that some components matter most in the New Zealand context for PLD to be used, build teachers’ practice, and improve student outcomes.

The review also found real strengths in New Zealand’s PLD. Recent PLD in English shows that when PLD is well-designed, well-selected, and well-embedded it can have a quick impact.

But not all PLD is quality; the next chapter looks at how we need to strengthen PLD in New Zealand.



Chapter 4: How can PLD be strengthened in New Zealand?

Despite the substantial investment and the value teachers and leaders place on PLD, ERO found that not all PLD is as impactful as the recent PLD for English has been. There are key improvements that can be made. This chapter looks at what was not working so well and how PLD in New Zealand could be strengthened. This includes how access, impact, and quality may differ across school characteristics.

What we did

To understand how to strengthen PLD, we compared the current practice against the components of effective PLD, along with what makes the biggest difference to teachers' practice and student outcomes. We drew on:

- interviews with PLD providers and experts
- in-depth discussions with school leaders and teachers
- surveys of school leaders and teachers
- surveys of school board members
- surveys of PLD providers.

To understand how efficient it is for leaders to access and apply for PLD, and build teachers' knowledge over time, and how equitable access to high-quality PLD is, we looked at:

- our surveys of school leaders and teachers
- our interviews with school leaders and teachers, PLD providers, and experts.

What we found: an overview

We need teacher development to have more impact for teachers and a stronger return on investment. Too much PLD does not shift teacher practice.

Many teachers report little or no improvement in their teaching practice following their engagement in PLD.

We need teacher development that shifts student outcomes. Around a quarter of teachers report PLD does not improve student outcomes much or at all.

Nearly a quarter (22 percent) of teachers report *external* PLD did not improve student outcomes either 'very much' or 'at all'. For *internal* PLD, three in 10 teachers (29 percent) report student outcomes did not improve 'very much' or 'at all'.

We need to improve the design and selection of PLD, as currently it is focussed least on what matters the most.

Although developing teaching techniques is one of the most impactful things to improve teaching practice, PLD providers and leaders do not focus on this *a lot*. Just under two-thirds of providers (65 percent) report they do this, and even fewer leaders, with under half (48 percent) *always* focussing on this when selecting development opportunities.

We need development for teachers to be better embedded, particularly in secondary schools.

Too often teachers are not clear on how to use what they learn from teacher development in their classroom. Half of teachers (53 percent for internal PLD, 48 percent for external) are not completely clear about how to use what they have learnt from their development in their classroom.

We need teacher development to be planned and developed over years to sustain change.

It currently does not always build on previous learning, but instead, shifts with changing school leaders and changing priorities.

We need to remove the burden on leaders who find that selecting or applying for teacher development is often time-consuming and inefficient.

Leaders report finding it difficult and time-consuming to sort through the high volume of development offerings to identify and select quality teacher development.

We need to do more to ensure PLD supports schools with the greatest challenges.

Schools in low socioeconomic communities report they do not have more teacher development, despite having greater challenges, and teachers in rural or isolated schools struggle to access development opportunities.

There is an opportunity for PLD to have the most impact in schools with more challenges.

For schools in low socioeconomic communities, teachers report internal PLD improves practice more (78 percent), compared to teachers from schools in high socioeconomic communities (64 percent).

These findings and the supporting evidence are set out in more detail below.

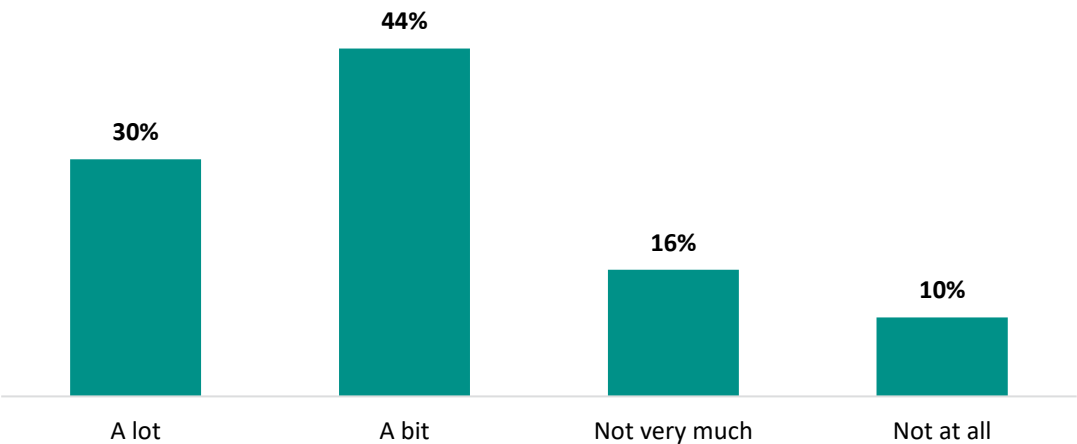
Findings: Areas for Strengthening

1) Impact on teachers’ practice

We need teacher development to have more impact for teachers and a stronger return on investment. Too often PLD does not shift teacher practice.

Few teachers report their teaching practice has improved *a lot* following external PLD. External PLD is not always providing a good return on investment. Only three in 10 teachers (30 percent) report their teaching practice improved *a lot* following their most recent external PLD. Less than half of teachers (44 percent) report their practice improved *a bit*, and a further quarter of teachers (26 percent) report *little* or *no improvement* following their most recent external PLD.

Figure 15: *Proportion of teachers who say their teaching practice has improved after external PLD.*



Teachers explained that external PLD is not helpful when it presents ‘generic’ information that isn’t contextualised to them or their school. Teachers often rely on facilitators to be responsive to their specific school or class needs, to help them understand how the content or practices might be included in their day-to-day teaching. When they encounter programmes that don’t consider their students’ needs, teacher expectations, or existing school practice, they find it is very difficult to embed the learning – or even to see *how* they would do so.

“[External PLD] was rehashing what we’ve been looking at for years and was nothing new. It was poorly delivered by the external providers who treated us like we’re idiots. When questioning how I could use it in my own classroom context, they couldn’t give me any answers. Given they’d both been out of a classroom for over 10 years, I don’t think they were the best to deliver it.”

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER



We also heard from teachers, and from providers themselves, that it's more useful when external PLD facilitators are experienced teachers. This supports their credibility as well as their ability to adapt practice to different teachers and settings.

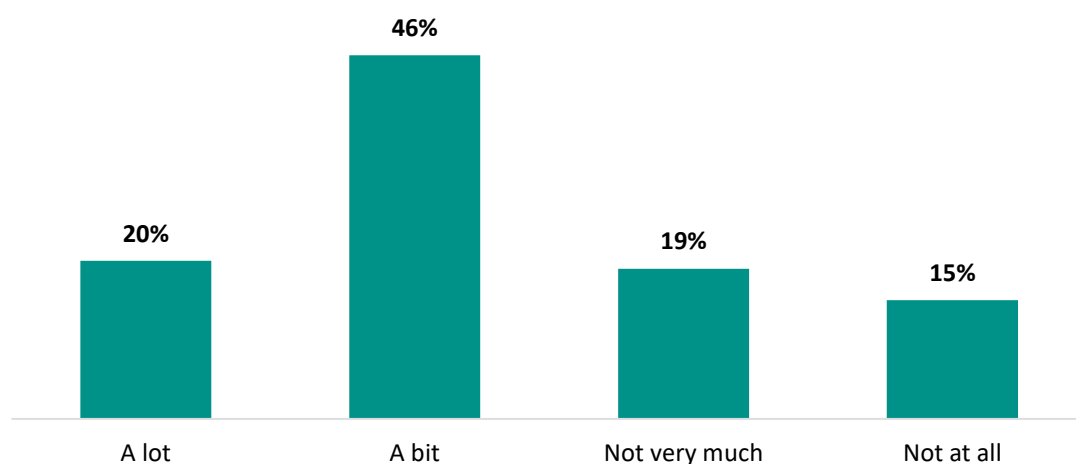
“If it's something we're expected [to do] in the classroom, they need to be someone who's actually worked in the classroom, because some of the ideas they come up with, you think, 'what planet are you on?'... So sometimes it's about the presenters being relevant as well.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Even fewer teachers report their teaching practice has improved *a lot* following internal PLD.

Only two in 10 teachers (20 percent) report their most recent internal PLD improved their teaching practice *a lot*. Almost half (46 percent) report some improvement, and one third (34 percent) say it has not improved their practice *very much* or *at all*.

Figure 16: *Proportion of teachers who say their teaching practice has improved after internal PLD.*



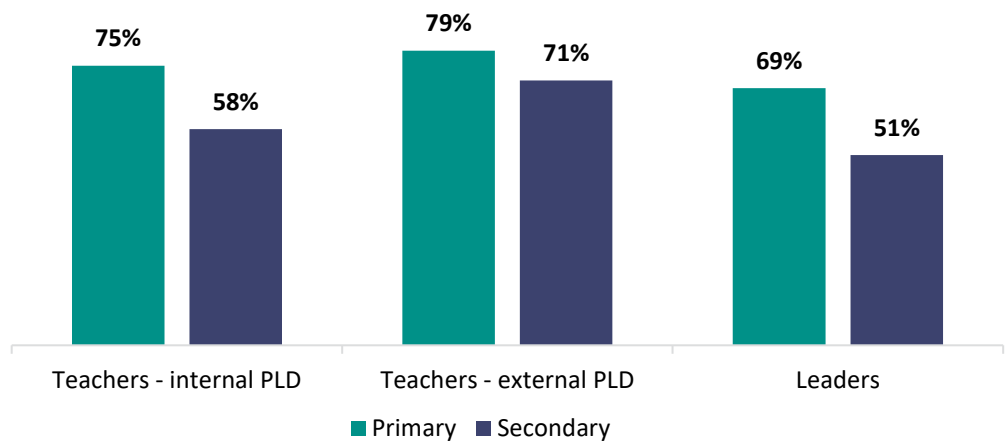
Teachers' recent experiences of internal PLD have been focussed on a wide range of topics, depending on each school's priorities. Sometimes internal PLD is used to address school-specific needs, such as behaviour or cultural competency.

Recently, many primary schools have been using internal PLD to respond to the ongoing curriculum changes, by developing an understanding of what it means for them and supplementing the quality external PLD on offer. However, we heard that this can be challenging because the curriculum is still new to all teachers. It is common for the staff member who is leading the internal PLD to be learning alongside the others, or only slightly ahead. This limits their ability to meaningfully support their peers.

Leaders and teachers in secondary schools are least likely to report improved teaching practice following PLD.

Only half (58 percent) of secondary school teachers report their teaching practice improved following their most recent *internal* PLD. Only seven in 10 (71 percent) teachers report their teaching practice improved significantly following their most recent *external* PLD, and only half (51 percent) of leaders from secondary schools say PLD has improved teacher practice by *a lot*.

Figure 17: *Proportion of teachers and leaders who say internal and external PLD has improved teaching practice.*



We heard that secondary school teachers often find whole school PLD less relevant as it struggles to cater to their needs, which vary significantly due to classroom specialisations. These teachers explained that even more general practices (such as managing behaviour) could become disengaging and unhelpful, as teachers across the school can be more or less experienced in them already, and they may not face the same challenges during their subject lessons.

“The health ones [PLD sessions] are really good because we’re all really passionate. Being in your subject area is really helpful.”

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER



2) Student outcomes

We need teacher development that shifts student outcomes. Around a quarter of teachers report PLD does not improve student outcomes much or at all.

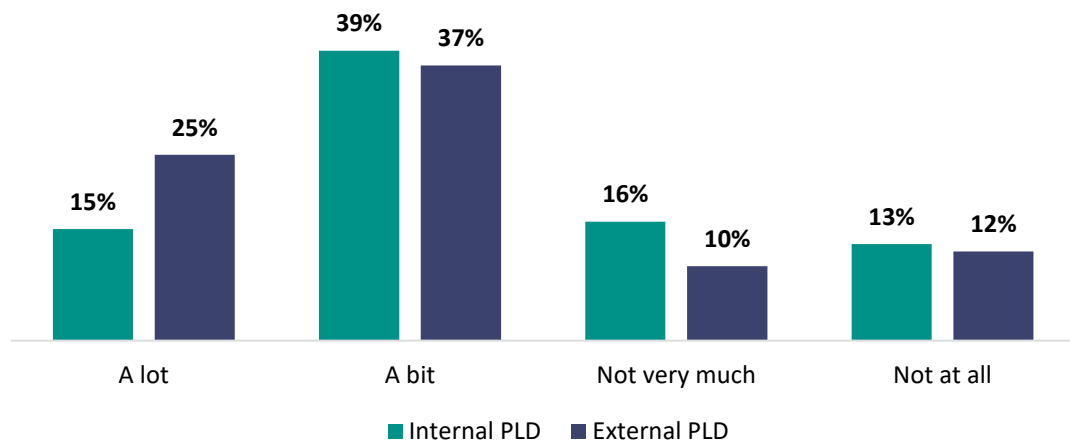
Too many teachers report student outcomes did not improve much or at all following their most recent [external](#) PLD.

Nearly a quarter of teachers report *little or no improvement* in student outcomes as a result of external PLD (22 percent). This is concerning, as teachers we spoke to share a strong commitment to student outcomes. In our interviews, this was overwhelmingly reported to be the main thing they want PLD to achieve, and the main motivator for participating in any PLD.

Even fewer teachers report improved student outcomes following their most recent [internal](#) PLD.

Teacher reporting indicates that they are less positive about the impact of internal PLD on student outcomes than their leaders – three in 10 teachers (29 percent) said it did not improve student outcomes *very much or at all*.

Figure 18: *Proportion of teachers who report improvements in student outcomes following their most recent PLD.*



Teachers revealed that their internal PLD may be less impactful than external opportunities, because in-house staff do not always have the expertise and breadth of experience in a topic to effectively lead learning.

To support internal PLD, schools commonly adopt a ‘champions model’, where a small number of staff attend external PLD to build expertise and then share their learning with colleagues. This is a popular approach as it is less costly and disruptive to everyday school operations. We heard some examples of the champions model being used successfully – when champions are experts in the PLD topic, skilled and experienced at PLD delivery, and have plentiful opportunities to model their learning and mentor other teachers. We also heard that it is important for leaders to stay very closely connected to what is happening, and not just in selecting who attends.

“You can’t have everybody out of the school for everything. So, we will strategically send one or two who will lead that mahi, and then they’ll bring it back and help grow that through the school.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL LEADER

However, we heard that this model does not always work well. External PLD is usually designed to equip attendees for specific classroom teaching practices, not to equip them to teach other teachers, so there is varying success in how well knowledge is passed on. We also heard that teachers are selective about the aspects that they pass on to their colleagues. For example, they focus on parts they most enjoyed or found interesting, or the conclusions that they reach personally.

“[How useful champions are] is dependent on a whole heap of things – the experience of the person going, the stage they’re at, their classroom currently, and their own personal beliefs about how the world works, all influence what they bring back.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

“It’s obviously cheaper than sending all of us and we can’t really go. But it does have its limitations in terms of the depth of understanding of the big picture for the people who didn’t go.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

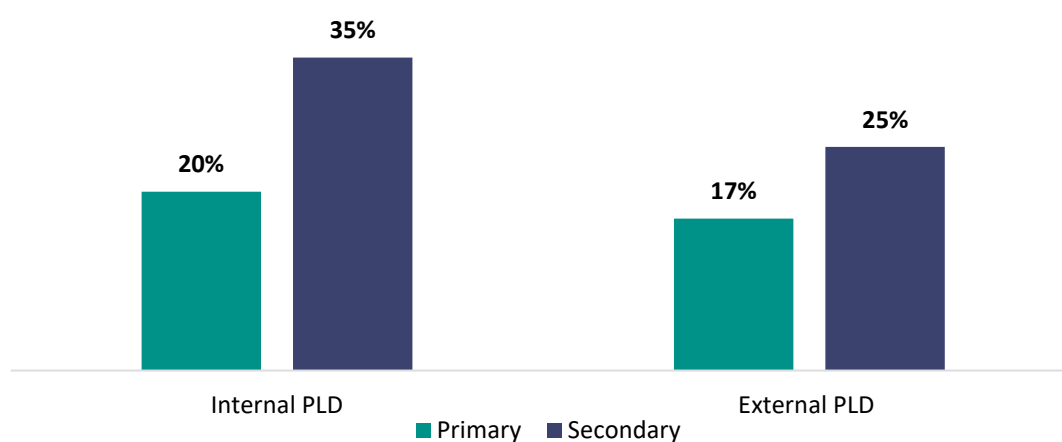
In schools where teachers told us that internal PLD *has* been effective for them, we heard that the key to success is ‘cutting out the fluff’, and keeping internal PLD focussed on what the school wants to achieve. Teachers find it valuable to be able to hear and see exactly how to embed change in their context.

We discuss how schools can share the knowledge in more depth in our companion good practice report: evidence.ero.govt.nz.

Secondary teachers are least likely to say that internal or external PLD improved student outcomes.

Secondary school teachers are more likely to say their most recent internal PLD (35 percent) and external PLD (25 percent) did not improve student outcomes *much* or *at all*. than primary school teachers (20 percent internal PLD, 17 percent external PLD).

Figure 19: *Proportion of primary and secondary teachers who report little to no improvement in student outcomes from internal and external PLD.*



Secondary teachers are less positive about whole-school internal PLD than their primary peers. This may be due to the wide range of different experience and expertise among secondary teachers. Secondary teachers often told us that they are most interested in PLD that is relevant to their specialist topic areas. The whole school approach means that even when they do receive more specific whole-school internal PLD, it caters poorly to all groups. For example, an internal PLD topic covering Maths might be lacking sufficient depth for Maths and Science teachers, while also lacking context and easy applicability for Art teachers.

Leaders are more positive about the impact of the PLD their teachers receive.

Leaders are more positive about the impact of PLD on improving teacher practice than teachers are themselves. Just over half say it improves student outcomes *a little* (51 percent), and over four in 10 say it improves student outcomes a lot (43 percent).

We heard from leaders that an important focus for PLD is shifting teacher practice, which could explain why they are more attentive to monitoring changes in teacher practice. Leaders are also likely to be more motivated to establish a link between PLD and its impact, to justify their decisions and investment of their schools' time and resources. They also use impact evidence to inform future PLD decisions – so are more comfortable using broader evidence. Research supports this kind of approach, noting that it is important to look for evidence rather than proof when reviewing the impact of PLD.²³

Leaders told us that, because they regularly engage with school achievement data and trends (often alongside their boards), they are strongly aware of how students are progressing and associate this with improvements from PLD in teachers' practice. In contrast, teachers emphasised that it takes time to see changes in student outcomes, and found gaps in their own teaching practice more visible – seeing where they needed to learn more, or to revisit PLD learning.

3) Design and selection

We need to improve the design and selection of PLD, as currently it is focussed least on what matters the most.

We also need to remove the burden on leaders who find that selecting or applying for teacher development is often time-consuming and inefficient.

Developing teaching techniques is the least common element of PLD design, across both internal and external PLD, despite being the factor most likely to improve teaching practice.

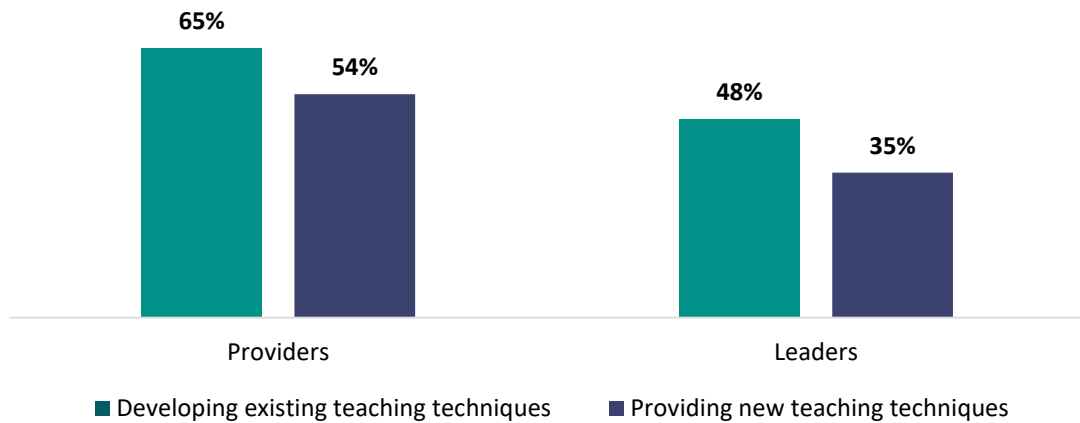
PLD providers

Although the most likely to improve teaching practice, not all PLD providers focus on PLD that develops teaching techniques when designing their PLD programmes. Less than two-thirds of providers (65 percent) report they *always* focus on developing existing teaching techniques, and only half (54 percent) say they *always* focus on providing new teaching techniques when designing PLD.

Leaders

Developing teaching techniques is the component school leaders focus on least. When planning internal PLD or selecting external PLD, less than half of school leaders (48 percent) *always* focus on developing existing teaching techniques, and less than four in 10 (35 percent) *always* focus on providing new teaching techniques.

Figure 20: *Proportion of PLD providers and school leaders who report they focus on developing existing and providing new teaching techniques.*

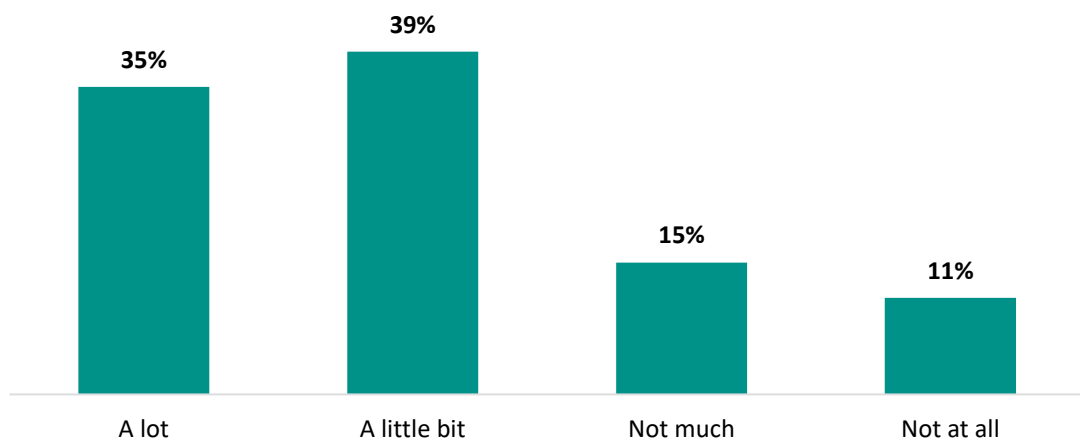


Some of this lack of focus on teaching techniques may be due to focus on new content that teachers need to get across. In our interviews with leaders, we heard that recent PLD has been mostly focussed on larger-scale changes. For example, NCEA requirements or the curriculum refresh. This is having an impact on how much attention schools are giving to the ‘finer detail’ of teaching techniques.

Teachers don’t always find the teaching techniques they receive usable.

More than one in four teachers (26 percent) report their most recent external PLD did not help them develop teaching techniques *much*, or *at all*.

Figure 21: *Proportion of teachers who report their most recent external PLD developed teaching techniques.*



We heard from teachers that external PLD may not impact practice as much as intended, because the techniques being taught are not always clearly transferrable into their classrooms. Some teachers told us that the techniques taught in PLD weren't suited to their school context or students, and they were not sure where to make adaptations. This makes it difficult for them to incorporate the techniques into their practice in classrooms quickly, and requires an additional investment by the teacher. When strategies are overly complex, or not clearly linked to everyday teaching, teachers may struggle to embed them effectively.

“I like PLD where you can come away with something solid and tangible that you can apply the next day.”

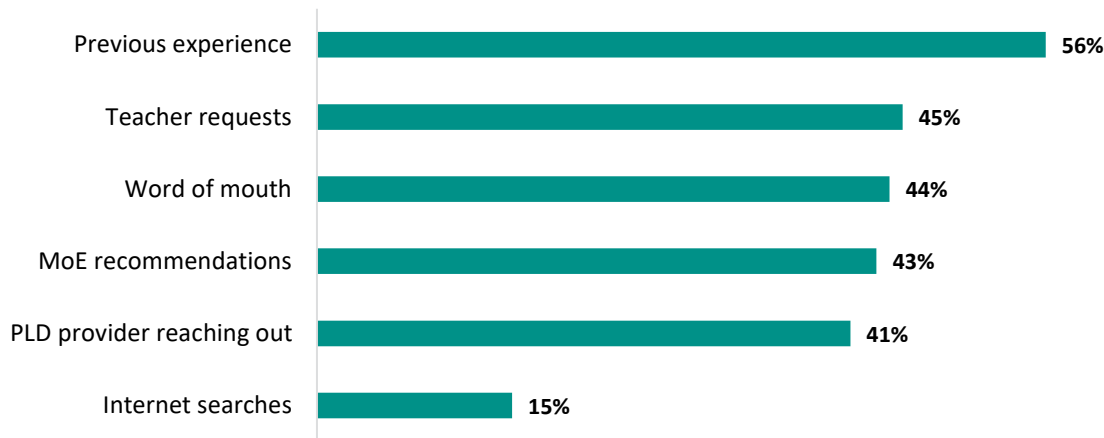
SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Not all school leaders have a strong focus on student outcomes when selecting PLD. One in five leaders (19 percent) do not always focus on improving student outcomes when selecting PLD. Only one in three leaders (31 percent) report their students need, as one of their top considerations when selecting PLD for their school.

Selecting PLD is difficult because there is a range of providers, but no easy way to assess quality, meaning leaders often default to selecting PLD based off previous experiences or word of mouth, rather than evidence of effectiveness.

Leaders find out about PLD from a wide range of sources, which can be confusing and time consuming. More than half of school leaders (56 percent) find out about PLD opportunities through previous experience, and nearly half (44 percent) find out through word of mouth.

Figure 22: *Proportion of school leaders who report they find out about PLD providers in different ways.*



School leaders frequently find it challenging to assess the quality of PLD offered, and to know whether it is evidence-based or not. They do not have the information they need to know if PLD options are credible or likely to be effective.

This is a key factor in school leaders' frustration with trying to choose PLD that is well-suited to their needs. Nearly a third of leaders (31 percent) think the PLD available isn't a good fit to their needs. They are concerned about committing to PLD that is not helpful, but there is no clear way to judge this before committing to the PLD.

Figure 23: *Proportion of leaders who say the PLD available is well suited to their needs.*



School leaders told us there is a lack of reliable information about PLD offerings and it is difficult to assess their quality before actually engaging in it themselves. There is no centralised source that pulls all available PLD together. This makes it difficult for leaders to compare options, assess quality, and determine the relevance of different PLD options to their schools' needs. Instead, leaders told us they often rely on one another to share experiences with different programmes and inform each other about quality and relevance.

“What would be quite nice [is] if the Ministry actually consolidated the offering a little bit, as providers are doing the same thing and then there is a gravy train of consultants doing only bits and pieces.”

SECONDARY SCHOOL DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

“If you don’t read every single bulletin, you miss stuff... you have to be reading every little line because it [was] hidden a little bit in the content what opportunities there are.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Some leaders also told us that the content of PLD programmes is not always clearly communicated by the provider, leading to mismatched expectations. The actual focus of the sessions on offer can differ from what school leaders hoped and planned for. This becomes challenging for their teachers to draw any relevance or value from the PLD, while still taking time and resources.

“Things that are advertised as one thing and don’t quite hit the mark. Mainly thinking of subject-specific stuff... We were kind of misled as to what [PLD providers’] priorities were.”

SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Leaders told us they are often overwhelmed by the volume of PLD options available. They struggle to identify PLD options that are truly fit for purpose and aligned with their school’s needs – rather than engaging with every new initiative, which may lack long-term impact.

Leaders from rural and small schools told us they receive a very high volume of emails, including from PLD providers. Due to other work demands, they can only engage with these communications briefly, which limits their ability to fully understand what is being offered and what the demands from the PLD might be for their school.

“We don’t have the time to find out what’s out there.”

RURAL SCHOOL LEADER

Leaders find applying for funding difficult.

Navigating the Ministry funding application process often depends on the experience of the principal, and how well they can find the right opportunities to apply for. In some cases, leaders will not be aware that an opportunity exists. As a result, not all schools will have the same access to PLD.

“I think that’s all credit to [the principal], because I know that there are schools that didn’t have access to that PLD. It’s up to your principal to be onto it, and to be accessing those hours and putting in those applications for those hours. And [the principal here] does a really good job of that.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL LEADER

Leaders explained that the process for submitting PLD funding applications can be quite complicated. It’s often difficult to identify the correct form and complete it accurately. We heard that even small mistakes, or not using the right language to make a strong case, can result in an unsuccessful application. As a result, some leaders have come to rely on PLD providers to complete the forms on the school’s behalf.

“[PLD applications] are not easy to do. Horrific amount of time. They’re cumbersome and people don’t even bother because of the effort it takes.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

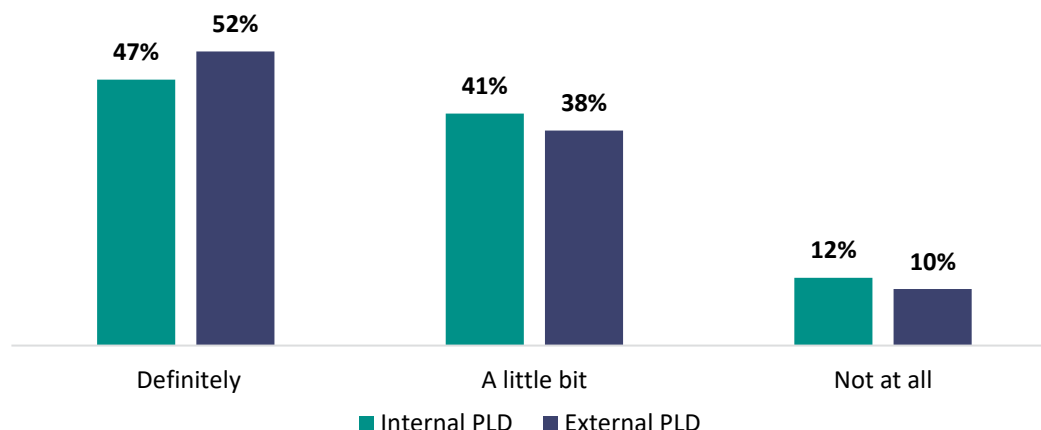
4) Better embedding

We need development for teachers to be better embedded, particularly in secondary schools.

Teachers are often not clear on how to use what they learn from PLD in their classroom, particularly in secondary schools.

Over half of teachers (53 percent) are not completely clear about how to use what they learnt from internal PLD in their classroom (41 percent *a little bit* and 12 percent *not at all*). This is almost half (48 percent) for external PLD (38 percent *a little bit* and 10 percent *not at all*).

Figure 24: *Proportion of teachers who report being clear on how to use and adapt their learning from internal and external PLD.*



Secondary school teachers are less likely to know how to use and adapt what they learnt from *internal* PLD.

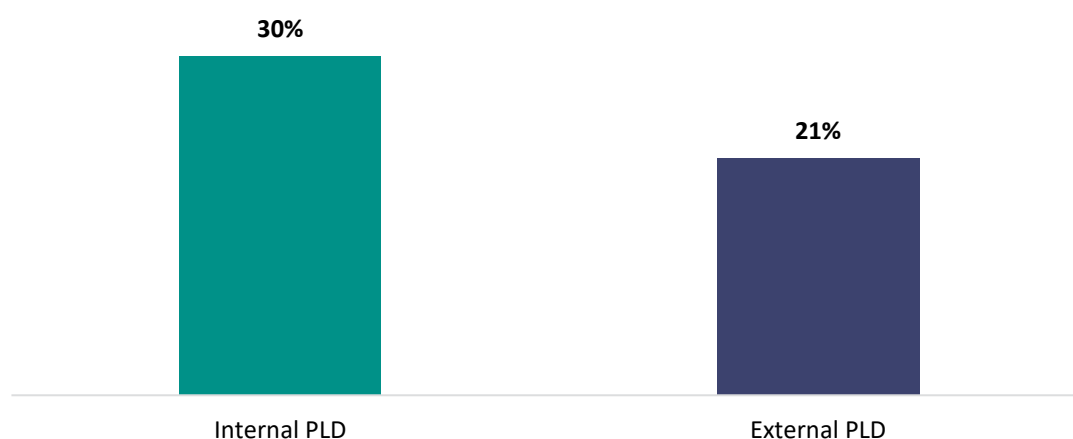
Four in 10 secondary school teachers (41 percent) say they definitely know how to use what they learnt from their most recent internal PLD and adapt it to their classroom, compared to 54 percent of primary school teachers. Just under six in 10 secondary teachers (59 percent) are not clear how to use and adapt what they learnt from internal PLD (44 percent *a little bit* and 16 percent *not at all*), compared to 46 percent of primary school teachers.

PLD doesn't always provide the scaffolding and clarity that teachers need to bring teaching practices to life. Teachers told us that PLD too often focusses on theoretical ideas, or ideal scenarios, and leaves them unsure about what to do as a next step in the reality of their own classroom. This is particularly problematic when the PLD content is too generic and does not fit the particular context that teachers work within. For example, small schools with mixed-age classrooms are less able to embed tightly year-group-bound teaching guidance, so they need to know what aspects of that guidance matters most, and how to adapt the rest.

Too many teachers are not provided with the tools they need to embed PLD.

Three in 10 teachers (30 percent) say their most recent *internal* PLD, and just over one in five teachers (21 percent) their most recent *external* PLD did not give them the tools to take what they learnt and use it *much* or *at all*.

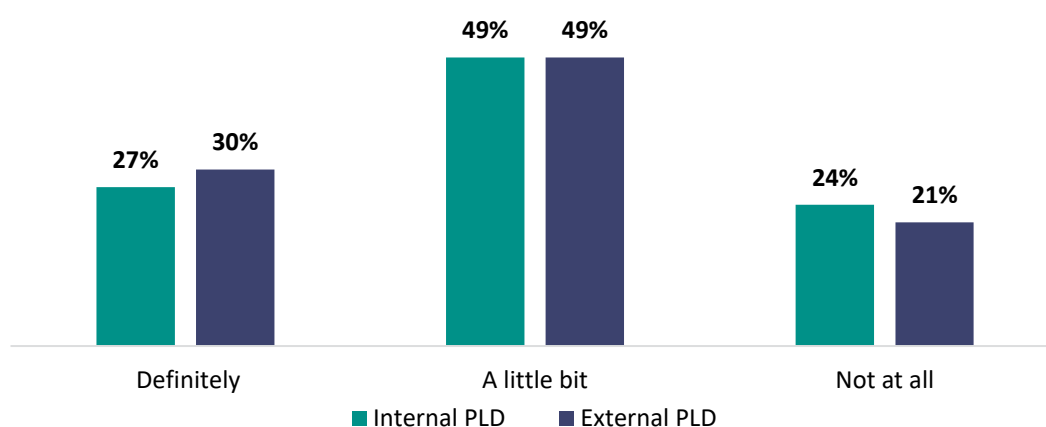
Figure 25: Teachers who report that their most recent PLD did not give them tools to take what they learnt and use it ‘much’ or ‘at all’.



Many teachers report not having the the time and resources they need to use what they have learnt.

Only three in 10 teachers report that they *definitely* have the time and resources to use what they learnt from both internal (27 percent) and external PLD (30 percent).

Figure 26: Proportion of teachers who report they have the time and resources to use what they learn from internal and external PLD.



Teachers described ‘information overload’ – lots of PLD and very limited time to process learning or plan out necessary practice changes. More primary school teachers (29 percent) report they have the time and resources to apply what they have learnt from internal PLD, compared to secondary school teachers (only 24 percent).

The embedding of PLD, where teachers put new learning into practice, is not always well-supported by leaders.

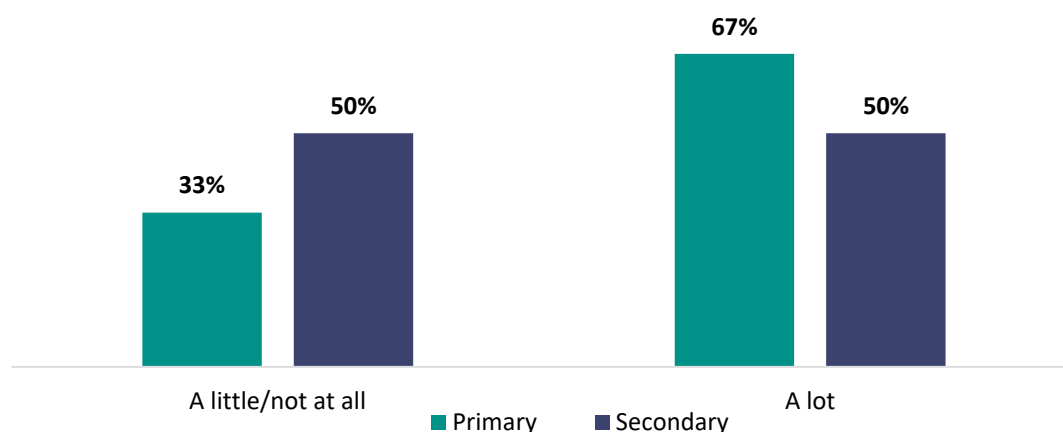
Teachers spoke about ad hoc or incoherent approaches to embedding, and occasions where support was minimal or absent. Teachers need support as they face broader challenges that limit their capacity to embed new learning. Across all our school interviews, cognitive load emerged as a major concern. Teachers struggle to adapt to changing curriculum requirements, balance other priorities, and tailor content to cater for different teacher and learner skills.

Too little attention is paid to monitoring the effectiveness of changes.

A key part of ensuring that PLD is successful is having a plan to track how well the embedding is going – looking at shifts in teacher practice, and shifts in student outcomes. But ERO found that many teachers aren't expected to monitor how their PLD is impacting what they do in the classroom.

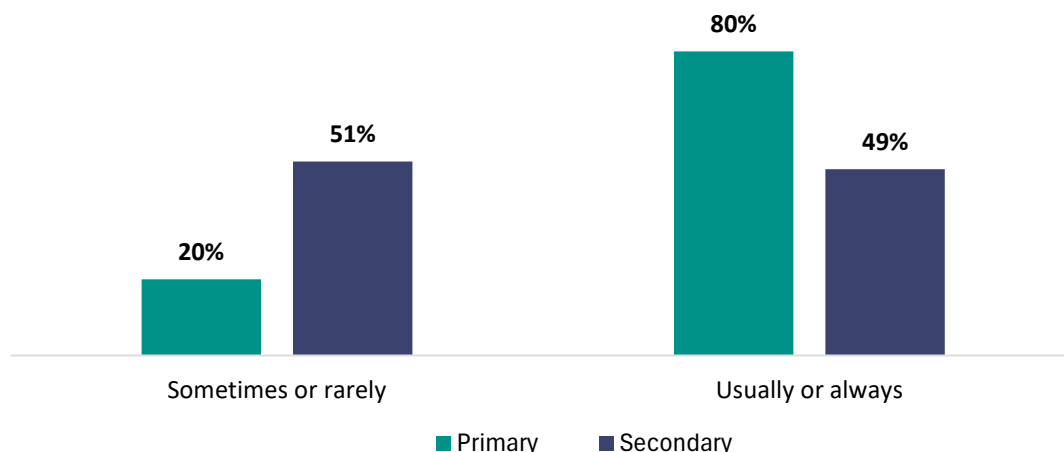
Just under two in five school leaders (38 percent) have little or no expectation that teachers will monitor the effectiveness of changes they make after PLD. This lack of expectation may be more common in secondary schools, where half (50 percent) of leaders say this, compared to a third (33 percent) of leaders in primary schools.

Figure 27: *Proportion of primary and secondary school leaders who say they expect teachers to monitor the effectiveness of changes they make after PLD 'a little/not at all', or 'a lot'.*



Three in 10 (30 percent) of all leaders only *sometimes*, *rarely*, or *never* follow up with teachers about what they learnt in PLD, which is an important part of ensuring and sustaining practice changes. In primary schools, 20 percent of leaders *sometimes*, *rarely*, or *never* follow up with teachers, compared to just over half of secondary school leaders (51 percent).

Figure 28: *Proportion of primary and secondary school leaders who follow up with teachers about what they learnt in PLD.*



Teachers told us it is difficult to know what specific change to their practice has led to changes in student outcomes. We observed that teachers often look for something more concrete and immediate to feel confident to comment on how PLD has improved their practice.

Together, these issues with embedding PLD lead to many teachers rarely using what they have learnt. Nearly half of teachers only use what they have learnt from PLD only once a month or less (46 percent for internal PLD, 36 percent for external PLD).

5) Sustained Change

We need teacher development to be planned and developed over years to sustain change. It currently does not always build on previous learning, but instead, shifts with changing school leaders and changing priorities.

Schools' priorities change with change in leaders and government priorities.

We found that schools' development priorities change when key personnel change. Some leaders and teachers expressed frustration that a lack of consistency has negatively affected their long-term PLD plans. They told us changing Government priorities tend to overshadow other PLD opportunities, and as a result, school leaders often cannot plan PLD that builds over time to develop teachers' skills.

In some cases, new school leaders inherit PLD plans from their predecessors. Approximately a third of schools have new principals each year so this can have a significant impact.²⁴ While some new principals continue with the existing direction, others feel the need to quickly pivot and respond to more immediate priorities.

“[I’m] feeling a need to shift the way people are thinking about PLD, in this school specifically – there has previously been [the] attitude of, ‘Ooh something new and shiny, I want to do that,’ where things are done sporadically and not seen all the way through.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL LEADER

“Lots of changes happening all the time. I feel like when it’s a new government, they’re trying to change things all the time. I’d like it if they’d just stick with it for a bit. I know that they’re trying to improve it, but it feels like we don’t get a chance...”

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Leaders prioritise alignment with immediate school priorities, rather than longer term. Nearly all leaders (97 percent) place a lot of emphasis on PLD’s alignment with their school priorities. This is good, but we found school leaders often select teacher development based on immediate priorities, rather than plan a coherent programme of teacher development that builds over time to develop teachers’ skills.

6) Targeting

We need to do more to ensure PLD supports schools with the greatest challenges.

Teachers from schools in low socioeconomic communities do not receive more PLD, despite their students often having greater challenges.^y

Students in schools in lower socioeconomic communities often face greater barriers to education, and achieve poorer outcomes, than students attending schools in higher socioeconomic communities.

Teachers from schools in low and high socioeconomic communities attend the same number of external PLD programmes, with 80 percent from both groups attending between one and four external PLD programmes in the past year. Teachers in both settings participate in an average of about two days of internal PLD per year.

Teachers from schools with a high number of Māori students do not receive more PLD despite the education attainment challenges for Māori students.

Encouragingly we found a similar proportion of teachers in schools with both a high and low proportion of Māori students report that PLD improved student outcomes, which suggests that PLD works equally well in these schools. However, schools with a high number of Māori students do not receive *more* PLD, even though these schools can face greater education challenges.

^y The SES differences in ‘teacher improvement’ and ‘use what they learnt’ are not impacted by school size – the relationship remains significant after controlling for school size, and the odds ratio does not change much or at all. This suggests that the higher PLD usage in schools in low socioeconomic communities may be explained by their smaller school size, rather than their socioeconomic context alone.

Rural schools are receiving less *internal* PLD and small schools are likely receiving less as well.

Teacher reporting indicates that small schools may receive less internal PLD. A reason for this difference is that small schools have fewer staff and limited flexibility to release teachers from their classrooms in support of internal PLD.

Teachers in rural schools also report receiving less internal PLD than teachers in urban schools (average of 1.5 days per year for teachers in rural schools, compared to 2 days per year for those in urban schools). This likely relates to the much lower numbers of staff in small schools who can provide learning to colleagues.

Teachers in small and rural schools also cover fewer topics than large schools. Only one in six teachers (15 percent) from small schools cover five or more topics for internal PLD, compared to two in five (40 percent) from large schools. Teachers in rural schools cover fewer topics per year through internal PLD (typically three topics per year compared to five topics per year in urban schools). This is because small schools typically have fewer teachers and leaders, so there is a smaller pool of people to draw on for internal expertise.

Rural school teachers consistently raised concerns about access. Because in-person options are limited, much of their PLD is delivered online, which can be less engaging or effective.

Teachers in both small, and rural schools receive the same amount of PLD as their peers. However, rural school teachers explained that attending PLD often requires significant travel time, sometimes taking them out of the classroom for several days, which compounds costs and pressure on relief teachers. This becomes more pronounced in more isolated schools, leading to programmes being offered online instead of in person.

Rural and isolated schools in particular struggle with a very high proportion of their external PLD being delivered online. We heard that PLD that is delivered online is not as interactive or dynamic as meeting in person. Teachers in rural schools told us that it is difficult to find ‘new ideas’, especially if they are part of a smaller staff. They rely on networking with other schools (which is more challenging in rural settings) and on external PLD offerings to access different ideas for their teaching practice.

However, our research indicates that teachers in rural schools are more likely to report improvements to their practice and student outcomes from external PLD, so further work is needed to understand the effectiveness of PLD.

“Zoom is inferior to face-to-face PLD. This means it’s inequitable, in terms of the mode of delivery that rural schools get. Access might be equitable with digital, but the *mode of delivery* isn’t.”

RURAL SCHOOL PRINCIPAL.



7) Increasing impact

There is an opportunity for PLD to have the most impact in schools with more challenges.

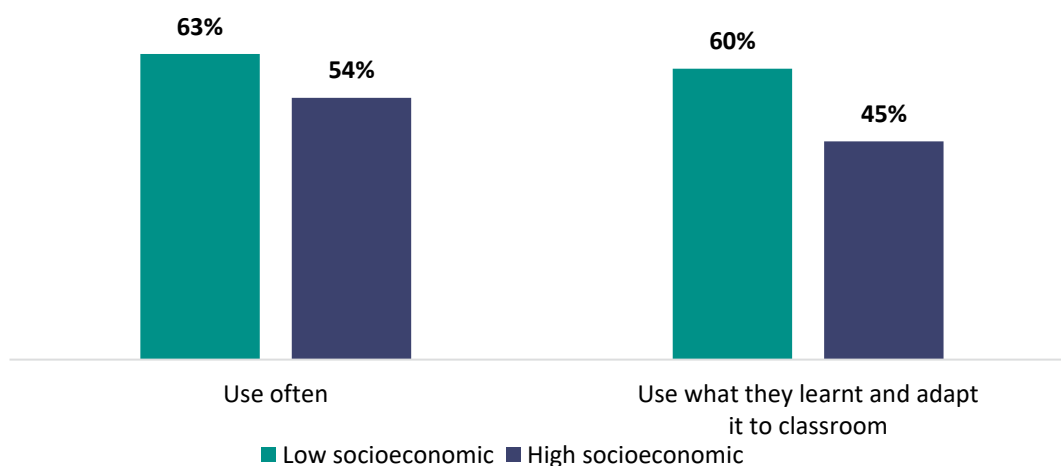
Teachers from low socioeconomic communities are more likely to use and apply what they have learnt from internal PLD.

Teachers from schools in low socioeconomic communities are more likely to say after their most recent internal PLD, they:

- frequently use (once a week or more) what they learnt in their classroom (63 percent compared to 54 percent of teachers from high socioeconomic communities)
- definitely know how to use what they learnt and adapt it (60 percent compared to 45 percent of teachers from schools in high socioeconomic communities).

In this review we also found indications teachers may also use and adapt external PLD for the classroom more often in low socioeconomic communities than in high socioeconomic communities.

Figure 29: *Proportion of teachers from schools in low and high socioeconomic communities who say their most recent internal PLD has had an impact.*



School leaders and teachers told us when providers share relatable experiences, especially from similar socioeconomic school settings, it fosters a stronger sense of connection and makes learning more meaningful. In contrast, PLD delivered by facilitators without experience in similar contexts can feel disconnected and less applicable, reducing its overall impact.

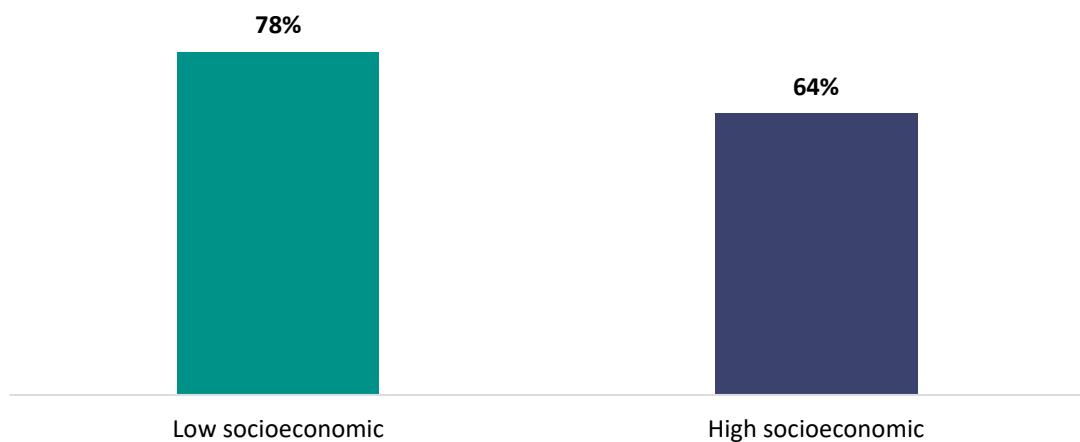
“Going somewhere and seeing in the space that, hey, those are the kids that are very similar to the kids that I teach, or [they’re a] person that’s come from that space. It’s making a link that [we can] understand. Because it’s one thing for someone to stand up there who’s taught in a high socioeconomic space and say, do this and this and this. Well, you don’t know these kids, right? It’s having those experiences that you can kind of relate and connect with. That’s what I find quite engaging for my PLD to take back into the classroom pretty quickly.”

PRIMARY TEACHER FROM SCHOOL IN LOW SOCIOECONOMIC COMMUNITY

Teachers in low socioeconomic schools are more likely to improve their practice following internal PLD and there is an indication their external PLD may improve student outcomes more.

Teachers from schools in low socioeconomic communities are more likely to say their most recent internal PLD improved their practice *a bit* or *a lot* (78 percent) compared to teachers in schools from high socioeconomic communities (64 percent).

Figure 30: *Proportion of teachers who say internal PLD improved their teaching practice according to their socioeconomic communities.*



For external PLD, 65 percent of teachers in schools in low socioeconomic communities report student outcomes have improved a bit or a lot following external PLD compared to only 56 percent of teachers in high socioeconomic schools.

We need to do further work to understand why PLD is more impactful in schools in low socioeconomic communities. These schools often face greater challenges and it may be that they have high motivation to use the PLD, but we need to understand this more.

Teachers from small schools are making greater use of what they learn from PLD

Similar to teachers in low socioeconomic communities, teachers in small schools are more likely to use their external PLD once or week or more – seven in ten (69 percent) compared to 57 percent of teachers from large schools.

It's particularly important for teachers in small schools to get fresh ideas from external PLD, as they have fewer staff to learn from within their school. Teachers in smaller schools told us that, while being smaller has challenges relating to accessing PLD, having a smaller staff means it is easier to have everyone on the same page so they can more quickly adopt new practices and share strategies with one another.

“Because we're little you can go and ask... I can go to [a school leader] and go, 'I'm not sure about this bit of structured literacy, can you just pop in and have a look?' or, 'What do I do? Where do I go?' And again, that's safe. It's safe.”

TEACHER FROM SMALL PRIMARY SCHOOL.



Are boards engaging with the design, selection, and embedding of PLD in schools?

School boards (boards) have an important role in governing schools.

A board's main responsibility is to ensure that all students at their school achieve. This includes making sure that the principal and staff are supported and resourced to achieve high-quality teaching and learning. Given the board's important role and the impact PLD can have, we wanted to know how involved boards are in the design, selection, and embedding of PLD in their schools.

Most boards are aware of PLD in their school, and think PLD is a worthwhile investment.

Almost all board members (95 percent) have a positive view of PLD, and think it is a worthwhile investment. Around seven in ten (69 percent) board members say their school reports to them on the effectiveness of teachers' PLD. It is unclear how leaders measure this effectiveness, as only three in five school leaders expect teachers to monitor the effectiveness of changes they make following PLD.

Just under two thirds (63 percent) of board members report their school has a plan for all teachers' PLD for the year. A similar number (62 percent) report PLD always aligns with their schools' strategic intentions.

Most board members don't have a role in the design and selection of PLD at their school.

Two thirds (66 percent) of board members do not have a role in selecting PLD for their school. About half (49 percent) of board members discuss what teacher PLD is needed, and less than half (44 percent) discuss options for teacher PLD at board meetings.

While board members don't take an active role in designing and selecting their school's PLD, we heard how they are still interested in understanding how PLD supports their school's broader objectives. They appreciate when PLD initiatives align with the school's strategic and annual plans. Board members also value knowing that PLD is tailored to the specific needs of the school, staff and students, as it reassures them that resources are being used effectively and learning will have a meaningful impact.

Leaders keep boards informed of PLD investment and outcomes.

Leaders we spoke with acknowledged the large financial and time investment of PLD and described the importance of, and their commitment to, reporting findings from teachers' PLD to their school boards. Board members told us they are confident principals have a good knowledge about what teachers need and what PLD will be good. They are mainly interested to know whether programs are aligned with school priorities and usually hold the principal to account to ensure that PLD selection is carefully considered on this premise. We heard that board members also like to be 'kept in the loop' to see how PLD is landing or progressing within their school.

“...I don't know how you can have an understanding of what's going on in the school if you're not part of the conversation, and what the difficulties are so that you can try and help that, fix that, make it better.”

PRIMARY SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER.



New teachers

Beginning teachers in New Zealand—those with less than two years of experience—take part in a structured induction and mentoring programme as part of their registration. This supports them to transition into the profession and is complemented by both internal and external PLD.

While this review didn't include induction or general mentoring activities, which are a significant part of beginning teachers' development, the findings still offer useful insights into how PLD is accessed and used across experience levels.

Beginning and experienced teachers report receiving a similar amount of internal PLD, with some indication that experienced teachers access slightly more external PLD. Internal PLD appears to have a slightly greater impact on teaching practice for beginning teachers, who are more likely to report improvements in both their teaching and student outcomes.

The most notable difference lies in how internal PLD is used—beginning teachers are more likely to know how to apply what they've learned and to be using it with most or all of their students.

Mentoring and support from experienced colleagues remain critical in helping beginning teachers bridge the gap between theory and classroom practice. Many schools take a whole-school approach to PLD, encouraging collaboration across experience levels. Beginning teachers value this inclusive environment and the opportunity to learn alongside more experienced peers.

“If I have questions I can go and see [experienced colleagues]... it enables us to see where our strengths are ... the best PLD that's happened is with the teachers that we have available.”

SECONDARY SCHOOL BEGINNING TEACHER.



Conclusion

There are opportunities to strengthen PLD across New Zealand to have more impact for teachers and more effectively shift student outcomes. This includes making changes to how PLD is designed, selected and embedded and reducing burden on school leaders. There are also opportunities to make sure PLD reaches the teachers who most need it. The next chapter outlines ERO's key findings and recommendations, including actions to improve the efficiency, quality, and equity of PLD across the system.



Chapter 5: Recommendations

The four questions that we asked as part of this review have led to 15 key findings. Based on these findings we have identified nine recommendations that will improve how PLD is selected, delivered, and embedded. This chapter sets out our key findings and recommendations.

ERO was commissioned to review professional learning and development (PLD), to look at how PLD is delivered and embedded and how effective it is at improving teacher quality. In undertaking this review we drew on evidence from a range of data and analysis, including:

- a review of national and international literature
- administrative data from the Ministry of Education
- ERO's own data collection including over 2000 survey responses, visits to 20 schools, observations of internal and external PLD sessions in practice and interviews with over 140 participants – with teachers, school leaders, board members and PLD providers.

From this evidence, we have identified 15 key findings across the following four areas.

- **Area 1:** Why does teacher development matter?
- **Area 2:** How much do we invest in developing our teachers?
- **Area 3:** What is good teacher development?
- **Area 4:** How can we strengthen development for New Zealand's teachers?

Context

Quality teaching practice is important for improving student outcomes. High-quality teaching is one of the strongest predictors of student success, and PLD is one of the most effective ways to enhance quality teaching practice. In New Zealand, we invest heavily in teacher development, both centrally and in schools. There is no specific requirement for what or how much PLD teachers must take part in. Engaging in PLD is a requirement for registration with the Teaching Council. PLD can be provided both externally (by specialist organisations and experts working outside of a particular school) and internally (within a particular school by members of its own staff).

Our review led to 15 key findings

Why does teacher development matter?

Finding 1: Quality teaching is critical for student outcomes. Developing our teachers is one of the biggest levers for raising student achievement.

How much do we invest in developing our teachers?

Finding 2: We invest substantially in teacher development, both centrally and in schools. In New Zealand, formal PLD is not a requirement for teachers, unlike similar professions and some other countries.

What is good teacher development?

Finding 3: The international evidence shows why quality PLD has the biggest impact – teachers’ development needs to be well-designed (so it is based on the best evidence) and well-selected (so it meets teachers’ needs) and well-embedded (so it sticks).

Finding 4: In New Zealand, we found external PLD that provides stepped-out teaching techniques and tools (like maths and English PLD), makes the biggest difference.

Finding 5: Internal PLD provided by schools can also improve practice if it builds on what teachers know and they are motivated to use it.

Finding 6: The recent English PLD in primary schools has been very impactful. Most teachers are using what they have learnt, using it often, and seeing improvement in student outcomes.

Finding 7: In New Zealand, school leaders and PLD providers are good at ensuring a strong focus on building teachers’ knowledge, and motivating teachers to use PLD.

How can we strengthen development for New Zealand’s teachers?

Despite the substantial investment and the value teachers and leaders place in PLD, ERO found that not all PLD is as impactful as recent English PLD. There are key improvements that can be made.

Finding 8: We need teacher development to have more impact for teachers and a stronger return on investment. Too much PLD does not shift teacher practice.

Finding 9: We need teacher development that shifts student outcomes. Around a quarter of teachers report PLD does not improve student outcomes much or at all.

Finding 10: We need to improve the design and selection of PLD, as currently it is focussed least on what matters the most.

Finding 11: We need development for teachers to be better embedded, particularly in secondary schools.

Finding 12: We need teacher development to be planned and developed over years to sustain change. Currently, it does not always build on previous learning, but instead, shifts with changing school leaders and changing priorities.

Finding 13: We need to remove the burden on leaders who find that selecting or applying for teacher development is often time-consuming and inefficient.

Finding 14: We need to do more to ensure PLD supports schools with the greatest challenges. Schools in low socioeconomic communities do not have more teacher development, despite having greater challenges. Teachers in rural or isolated schools struggle to access development opportunities.

Finding 15: There is an opportunity for PLD to have the most impact in schools with more challenges.

Areas for action

Based on these key findings, ERO has identified three priority areas for action to improve the design, selection, and embedding of quality development for teachers. Our recommendations are set out below.

Area 1: Improve the selection of teachers' PLD

To improve the selection of teachers' PLD, ERO recommends:

Recommendation 1: Continue investing in centralised PLD like, English and maths, that supports deliberate and sustained improvement in critical areas for improvement.

Recommendation 2: For locally developed PLD, school leaders use ERO's clear guidance on how to select quality external PLD and design quality internal PLD.

Area 2: Ensure all PLD is high-quality

To ensure all PLD is quality, ERO recommends:

Recommendation 3: The Ministry of Education continues to track and record the impact of all nationally-funded PLD and where PLD is not having sufficient impact, stops funding.

Recommendation 4: ERO is resourced to review any PLD provider where there are consistent concerns about the quality of PLD provided.

Recommendation 5: The Ministry of Education or ERO explore options that make it easier for leaders to select quality PLD, including considering introducing a 'quality marking' scheme.

Area 3: Ensure PLD reaches the schools and teachers that most need support

To better ensure all schools, teachers, and students are able to benefit from teacher practice improvements, ERO recommends:

Recommendation 6: The Ministry of Education streamlines processes for applying for centrally-funded PLD to make it less burdensome.

Recommendation 7: The Ministry of Education strengthens approaches to enable small schools and rural schools to more easily access PLD.

Recommendation 8: The Ministry of Education prioritises access to Ministry-funded PLD for schools with highest need, including schools identified by ERO as needing support.

Recommendation 9: The Ministry of Education examines options to make PLD in key areas a requirement for teachers.

Conclusion

Effective professional learning and development (PLD) is essential for strengthening teaching practice and improving student outcomes. To be impactful, PLD must be thoughtfully designed, carefully selected, and well embedded. High-quality PLD is more important than ever, as not all students in New Zealand are currently achieving at the levels they should.

The findings in this report show that while PLD has strengths, there are clear opportunities to improve its design, selection, and embedding. The areas for action identified by ERO have the potential to drive meaningful improvements that benefit students, teachers, school leaders, and PLD providers alike.



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