

# Supporting teacher judgments at Porirua school.

## About us

We are a small, decile 2 school in Porirua. The heart of our vision is “Active learners achieving success within an inclusive, supported learning community”, and these words matter to us. We are all active learners, and PaCT has strengthened our entire learning community.

## Why we use PaCT

Prior to using PaCT we had an extensive assessment schedule: running records every five weeks for juniors and for students requiring regular monitoring; e-asTTle reading for some; e-asTTle writing across the school; and JAM, GloSS and STAR at the beginning of terms 1 and 4. We also dabbled with PATs. Our schedule even received glowing praise from ERO. We were assessing something, somewhere in the school, nearly every week of the year, yet we still had nagging concerns that despite all this data, we weren't getting the information we really needed. The leadership team realised that we needed to know more about our students' learning and progress so that our teaching could be more effective. In particular, we wanted to know about the breadth of reading, writing and maths knowledge and skills the students were using as they engaged with learning across the curriculum.

## How we got started

Our leadership team went to some of the early PaCT workshops run by the Ministry of Education and quickly realised that we should use PaCT in our school. We knew that we needed to understand the frameworks that underpin PaCT before using it to make judgments. We also recognised that we would need to support teachers with this new learning. We began slowly by exploring the writing framework in weekly meetings, becoming familiar with the progressions, the signposts, and the illustrations.

Once we were ready to make judgments, we kept it manageable by asking the teachers to focus on just three students and we worked together to identify their best-fit signpost on the aspects of the writing framework. This took several sessions and generated lots of discussion as teachers delved into the detail of the illustrations. Teachers soon realised that the framework not only supported judgments about students' achievement, but it also deepened their own professional knowledge about learning to write. Teachers particularly liked the way PaCT illustrated students' writing-related knowledge and skills as they responded to real classroom tasks across the curriculum. Following the meetings, many teachers decided to keep delving into the frameworks. We didn't expect this, but they were keen and were regularly taking the opportunity to discuss their students' writing.

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## What we did first

We continued to build in-depth knowledge about the frameworks until early in 2018 when we agreed that we were ready to use PaCT for our overall teacher judgments (OTJs) in reading and writing. For their mid-year reporting, teachers had a window of three weeks to make their PaCT judgments. The leaders analysed the data and identified two students from each class to moderate – one student for whom the teacher felt confident about their judgments, and one student for whom the teacher was less confident. The students in the latter category tended to be our

more able students. Teachers developed a profile for their selected students that included observations, work samples and examples of student voice. Then we met to look at what the student knew and was able to do. Every teacher made judgments for each student, which we then discussed, identifying discrepancies and looking at the evidence. However, there was too much information for us to deal with, so we realised that we needed to streamline the process.

### **What we do now**

Teachers now make judgments independently but they also have a moderation buddy with whom they can discuss any judgments that they are unsure of. We identify students for moderation in a range of ways. All target students are included, and the leadership team also reviews judgments, focusing on students whose progress has accelerated or declined. Teachers can also nominate any students they would like assistance with. We no longer bring piles of information to moderation meetings because we already know so much about our students and our programmes. We use what we know as the basis for a professional discussion, working to identify the best fit signposts. We know that not all judgments are a perfect match, and as our knowledge has grown we have become more confident about which is the best fit. New members of staff work through the process of making judgments with members of the leadership team and their colleagues. This supports them to become more familiar with the frameworks, and more confident about how to use them.

PaCT is now the only assessment tool we use for all students across the school in reading, writing and maths. It is gold to us because it does much more than just tell us where students are: it shows us the breadth of knowledge and skills they have in reading, writing and maths across the curriculum. At first we were slightly nervous because we weren't sure whether or not we were moving away from something important. It seemed like a big leap. However, it's working out really well. Now we have the information we need about our students' progress, and the frameworks scaffold our planning and teaching.

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### **The impact of PaCT**

PaCT has had a huge impact in developing our understanding of our students' progress. Initial PaCT data confirmed that our students weren't making enough progress in reading and writing. By exploring the particular signposts that represent students' current achievement, and looking ahead to where they are going, we can identify how our teaching programmes can support their learning. The data also led us to query how we might improve our teaching, and we concluded that we weren't involving students enough in their own learning. Teachers now have more informed conversations with their students about their learning and progress, and they use the Literacy Learning Progressions to discuss next steps with them. They ask questions such as "How is what I'm doing helping you?" They hear students say things like "I loved the worksheets, but they don't really help me with my learning." And students ask questions such as "Is this just enjoyable, or is it helping me with my learning?"

The biggest impact has been in the consistency of our judgments. Teachers are more confident and capable when discussing their interpretations of the framework and describing the decisions they have made. Our conversations with each other, with students and with whānau are getting richer and richer. We're not there yet; we still have more learning to do; but we've come a long way. We're now looking forward to having a similar impact as we delve into, and use, the maths framework.