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Principles and general objectives of education

The goal of education is to build the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values of Cook Islands people to ensure sustainability of the language and culture of the Cook Islands and its economic growth, and to enable individuals to put their capabilities to best use in all areas of their live, become valued members of the society, and adapt successfully to the modern, ever-changing world.

As a result, Cook Islands people will be empowered to fulfil their social and economic needs and aspirations by being prepared to compete successfully in the global economy and to prudently control their physical and cultural environment. The guiding principles of education are of partnership, equity, efficiency, relevancy and quality. These principles form the basis of education policy and are embedded in school practices. (Ministry of Education, 2002).

The purpose of the Education Bill Act 2009 is to provide for an education system in the Cook Islands with an emphasis on:

- learning for life, namely learning at any time during a person's life (from early childhood through to late adulthood), recognizing that each person's individual circumstances may mean that they want to access learning opportunities at different times in their life;
- strength in Cook Islands Maori language, culture, perspectives and aspirations, in order to provide a firm foundation for engaging with the wider world;
- everyone in the Cook Islands (including people with special needs, for example) has equitable access to quality learning, through a range of programmes that meet their individual needs and celebrate their individual talents;
- a high level of community involvement in determining quality educational outcomes;
- the right of everyone who is involved in the education system, including students, to be treated with dignity, respect and understanding.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The legal framework for education in the Cook Islands is the Education Act 1986-87, amended in 2003 (**Education Amendment Act No. 20**). The Act establishes the Ministry of Education, defines its functions and delegates responsibility for these functions to the Secretary of Education. The Act delegates responsibility for policy matters to the Minister of Education.

The Act centralizes authority with the Minister, Secretary and Ministry. The Minister, with the concurrence of Cabinet, has the authority to establish and close



schools. The Act legalizes the establishment of School Associations and Committees but restricts their activities to supporting schools and specifically prevents such organizations from interfering with the approved management of government schools.

The Act specifies criteria for suspensions, expulsions, corporal punishment, instructional times, teacher registration and compulsory attendance. Education is compulsory and from 5 years of age through to the end of the year in which a student turns 15 (until the child turns 16 years of age according to the Education Bill Act 2009). The new **Education Bill Act 2009** (and its 2010 revised version) contains provisions concerning the higher education system.

Other areas that warrant consideration for legislation and regulation development are national administration guidelines, criteria for school registration, guidelines for assistance to private schools, and regulations for all levels of education.

Administration and management of the education system

The Cook Islands consist of fifteen islands scattered over some two million square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean and located south east of Samoa and south west of Tahiti. The capital, Avarua, is on Rarotonga, the most populated island with about 65% of the total population. Geographically, the Cook Islands is divided into two groups of islands, the Northern Group and the Southern Group that includes Rarotonga. The scattered islands with small pockets of populations, and isolated from markets and trade opportunities makes the delivery of basic economic and social services very costly and a significant challenge. The Cook Islands is a self-governing nation in free association with New Zealand. Cook Islanders hold New Zealand citizenship and have unrestricted access to reside, study, work and draw social benefits in New Zealand. The official languages are Maori and English.

Education is administered by the **Ministry of Education** (MOE). The Minister is responsible for education policy and the Secretary of Education is responsible to the Minister for the functions of the Ministry and administering the provisions of the Education Act. All staff members are directly or indirectly responsible to the Secretary for the operation of the education system including the provision of curricula, teachers and schools. After the restructuring that took place in May 2010 following the 2009 capacity assessment of the education sector, the MOE consists of the following divisions: human resources management; planning, policy, and review; school support; financial management; and ITCs. Under the School Support Division there are two Managers, one for curriculum areas A (with advisors on visual arts, performance arts, physical education and health, and enterprise education), and the other for curriculum areas B (with advisors on numeracy, literacy, English, Maori, and early childhood education).

School principals are responsible to the Secretary of Education or the Secretary of Outer Island Development for the management of students, teachers, ancillary staff and resources and facilities. **School Associations/Committees** represent communities and support schools with maintenance and fund raising but have no control over government school management.



The **Department of National Human Resources Development** manages human resources development throughout the Cook Islands, including scholarships for Cook Islanders studying at overseas tertiary institutions, apprenticeships, and in-country training.

The **University of the South Pacific (USP) Extension Centre**, Rarotonga, offers degree and non-degree learning opportunities, the majority being USP courses delivered by distance education.

The **Ministry of Transport and Tourism** is responsible for the Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre (HTTC). The **Ministry of Health** is responsible for the Nurses Training School at the Rarotonga Hospital.

Structure and organization of the education system

Pre-school education

The Education Act defines a preschool child as a child between the ages of 3½ and 5 years attending a preschool institute. The Act stipulates that attendance at any preschool institute shall be voluntary. In terms of the Education Bill Act 2009, early childhood education is offered to children who are younger than school age.

Primary education

The Education Act defines primary education as “grades 1 to 6 inclusive of those grades” (or years 1 to 6 in terms of the Education Bill Act 2009). The Act stipulates that attendance at school shall be compulsory from the age of 5. Primary school pupils are expected to be aged from 5 to 10/11 years.

Secondary education

The Education Act defines secondary education as “forms 1 to 7 inclusive of those grades” (or years 7 to 13 in terms of the Education Bill Act 2009). Form 1 follows grade 6 and is equivalent to the seventh year of formal education. Each form represents one year of education except for Form 5, which previously involved two years. In the lower fifth form year, students studied for their Cook Islands School Certificate. In the upper fifth form year, students studied for their New Zealand School Certificate. However, the more able students usually spent seven years at the secondary level, often by being promoted from Form 3 to the lower Form 5. Secondary education currently comprises Forms 1 to 4 and three years at the senior secondary level (SL1 to SL3). Secondary school students are expected to be aged from 11 to 17/18. In 2002, the New Zealand National Certificate in Education Achievement (NCEA) has been introduced to focus education on standards-based assessment. This qualification has three levels of attainment which align to the final three years of secondary schooling. The NCEA also gives students the opportunity to continue into trade/vocational training. In 2004 the final phase of standards-based qualifications was implemented with NCEA Level 3 replacing Form 7 University Entrance/Bursary.



Higher education

Post-secondary programmes are offered by the Cook Islands Teachers Training College (primary teacher pre-service training, three-year diploma programme), the Rarotonga Hospital (training for nurses), the Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre (short-term hospitality/tourism courses), and the University of the South Pacific Extension Centre (degree and non-degree level courses, distance mode).

The Education Act of 2003 stipulates that preschool institutions shall be kept open for not less than two hours a day and for not less than 200 days a year; primary schools shall be kept open for not less than four hours a day and for not less than 200 days a year; and secondary schools shall be kept open for not less than five hours a day and for not less than 200 days a year. According to the Education Bill Act 2009, there must be at least 190 student-teacher days (e.g. days during the year when a school must be open for the instruction of students) in each school year; and there must be at least ten teacher development days in each year. The school year is normally divided into four terms.

The educational process

The new Curriculum Framework was finalized in July 2002. It applies to all government and private schools, all students regardless of gender, ethnic group, religion, location, background, ability or disability, and it covers all years of schooling, from early childhood to the completion of secondary school. It consists of a set of national curriculum statements, which set out the principles, achievement aims, and objectives that all schools in the Cook Islands are required to follow. The school curriculum consists of the ways in which the school plans to implement the policy set out in the national curriculum statements. It must take into account students' needs, the local community's aspirations, and resources, and must be developed in consultation with the parents and the community.

The new Curriculum Framework identifies eight essential areas of learning and sets out the essential skills to be developed by all students. The essential areas of learning are: languages; mathematics; social sciences (including history); science (including biology); technology; the arts; enterprise (including economics); health and physical well-being. The school curriculum will promote the use of Cook Islands Maori and English languages for transmission of knowledge, values and culture, and for creating and fostering understanding of self, of others and of the world around us. It will provide students with the opportunity to be proficient and confident in communicating in Cook Islands Maori and English in a variety of situations. The school will use a bilingual approach that is responsive to the language profiles and learning needs of the students, and that will promote *biliteracy*.

The essential learning areas together form the body of knowledge and understanding that all students need to acquire, and provide the context within which the essential skills, attitudes and values are developed. Individual Curriculum Statements will guide learning and teaching in each of the eight essential learning areas and the skills, attitudes and values appropriate to each learning area. Schools are to ensure that all students undertake courses of study in all the learning areas during



the first ten years of schooling (that is, up to Form 4 or Year 10). Thereafter, schools are to maintain a balanced curriculum, while providing for the pursuit of courses for a range of qualifications, in preparation for future training and career pathways for students. Form 5 (Year 11) students will be required to undertake study in a minimum number of subjects, including designated core subjects. At Form 6 and Form 7 (Years 12 and 13), students will be offered a choice of courses that will lead them to further study, or to employment and training opportunities.

The eight groupings of essential skills are: communication (including literacy) skills; numeracy skills; artistic and creative skills; self-management, work and study skills; physical skills; social and co-operative skills; information skills; and problem-solving skills. The eight categories represent the full range of skills that are considered essential to enable students to achieve their potential and to participate fully in society, both within the Cook Islands and outside of it. They also reflect and respond to the call from parents, the community, the workplace and other stakeholders for schools to produce fine, responsible, able young people capable of meeting the demands of the modern world, with a strong sense of who they are, where they have come from, and where they want to be. The categories are simply convenient ways of grouping and labelling the skills that students will develop. They are not linked to any particular essential learning area or subject, but will be developed through the essential learning areas and in different contexts across the curriculum. Teachers must plan learning programmes that provide students with opportunities to develop the whole range of essential skills at levels appropriate to their stage of learning and development, and in ways that make them meaningful and relevant. Students will develop the range of essential skills to the best of their ability in different contexts within the various curriculum areas through group and individual activities, classroom-based programmes, and activities outside the classroom or school. (Ministry of Education, July 2002).

According to the Education Bill Act 2009, the Minister of Education may make education guidelines that apply to schools, including curriculum statements, which are statements about: (i) the areas of knowledge that students must learn (the “essential learning areas”), which must include Cook Islands Maori language and culture; (ii) the minimum time to be allocated for the teaching of each of the essential learning areas in each year; and (iii) the desirable levels of knowledge and skills to be achieved by students in the essential learning areas.

The Cook Islands Curriculum Framework of 2002 is due for review in 2012. (MOE, 2008).

Pre-primary education

Preschool education aims to improve the quality of care and education experienced by children in early childhood settings. The goal is to assist the Cook Islands to achieve a stronger and better educated society through the development of a more effective and efficient early childhood education sector.

The main objectives related to preschool education are as follows: improving the quality of early childhood education (ECE) by developing and providing a variety of educational resources to support the new curriculum; increasing the number of



trained teachers and providing in-service training assistance; improving early childhood quality by the provision of better information about ongoing development of the early childhood sector; improving education of pre-school children by promoting awareness amongst parents and in communities of the parent's role as the first educator of their children.

The new ECE curriculum was drafted in June 2005, and it is based on a Cook Island Maori perspective. One of its purposes is to make available to the next generation the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are regarded as valuable in the local culture. The curriculum draws on the cultural heritage of children and acknowledges the differences in dialects and individual islands, and makes links with families and the wider community. Its starting point is the learner and the knowledge, skills and attitudes that the child brings to their experiences. The curriculum is specifically designed for children from birth to school entry, and provides links to learning in school settings. It emphasizes the critical role of social and cultural transmitted learning and of two way and responsive relationships for children with people, places and things. Children learn through working together with adults and peers, and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection.

The curriculum is based on six principles, and the related strands and goals. Implications for adult responsibilities for management, organization, and practice in early childhood settings are set out for each strand. Each strand has associated goals, which in turn have specific learning outcomes. Examples of experiences that will help to meet the needs of, and achieve the necessary learning outcomes, for infants, toddlers and young children, are also suggested in this part. Supporting resources will provide further assistance in planning, evaluation, assessment, and implementation. The curriculum is designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and anticipates that special needs will be met as children learn together in all kinds of early childhood settings. The programmes of each centre will incorporate strategies to fully include children with special needs.

The six principles are: (i) the indigenous language (*Te Reo Kuki Airani*), which is the means by which local values, traditions and customs are expressed and communicated; *Te Reo Kuki Airani* is the first language and will be the language spoken mainly at the early childhood level; (ii) values, customs and Traditions, and spiritual belief; (iii) holistic development; (iv) family and community; (v) empowerment; (vi) relationships. The strands arise from the principles. They provide more detailed descriptions of the ways in which the principles apply to the day-to-day planning and activities with the early childhood education setting. The strands are: (i) identity (children will know who they are and will develop a sense of belonging); (ii) involvement (children will have the opportunity to become involved, develop self-confidence, build relationships with their peers, and with adults other than their parents and family members); (iii) inquiry (children will be encouraged to increase their awareness of their environment, to inquire, to explore and to expand their understanding through active exploration of the environment); (iv) communication (the language and symbols of the local culture and other cultures are promoted and protected); (v) contribution (opportunities for learning are equitable, and each child's contribution is valued). (Ministry of Education, June 2005).



Evaluation is essentially diagnostic and is to measure individual progress against defined achievement objectives. Specific behavioural objectives in the cognitive, social, affective and psychomotor domains are defined and checklists used to produce a record of behaviour and a profile of individual achievement. The methods employed include learning centres, samples of children's work, informal non-written tests (i.e. specified tasks) and anecdotal records.

With the implementation of the new curriculum the main focus for ECE has been developing quality teaching practices to enhance the learning and development of young children. The actions have included: re-formatting ECE teaching from a 'formal' to play-based learning environment; providing monitoring, guidelines, support and advice for curriculum implementation, best practice, health and safety, assessment and planning; and producing a set of values of play display mini- posters and a play- based learning booklet. (MOE, 2008).

In March 2005 there were 473 children enrolled at the preschool level (of whom 89 in non-government schools) with 23 teachers, of whom seven teachers in non-government schools. In the same year, the gross enrolment ratio was beyond 70% and some 52% of the teachers were trained. The gross enrolment ration has been at least 100% since 2000, and during 2000-2005 the net enrolment ratio has remained fairly constant between 95–99.8%. (MOE, 2008).

In 2010 there were 452 children (of whom 207 girls) enrolled in 24 early childhood education (ECE) centres, predominantly attached to primary and area schools (an area school is a school providing education from ECE to secondary level under one management structure). The number of teachers was 31 (all females). The average children/teacher ratio was 15:1. (MOE, 2010).

Primary education

The strategic objectives for primary education are as follows: to provide qualifications which are nationally and internationally recognized; to ensure that all Cook Islanders are educated to their potential; to ensure that every Cook Islander has access to quality education and training; to develop an education and training system that operates to a high level of efficiency and effectiveness; to have Cook Islanders view education as a lifelong experience; to contribute, through education and training, to the development of an appropriate range of skills, knowledge and attitudes in the Cook Islands.

The Education Act provides for the establishment of legally binding regulations for curriculum requirements. The draft regulations of 1998 stated that primary schools provide formal instruction in: *Te Reo Kuki Airani* (Cook Islands local Maori language); English language; mathematics; science/technology; social science; arts (music, art, crafts, singing, dancing, culture); health education; physical well-being (includes physical education and health).

The total minimum instructional time for primary schools was set at 1,200 minutes (or 20 hours) per week. The minimum instructional time per week allocated to individual subjects in each grade according to the draft regulations of 1998 is shown in the table below:

Primary education: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Weekly time allocated to each subject (in minutes)					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Maori	480	420	380	340	110	110
English	120	180	250	340	460	460
Mathematics	150	150	200	250	250	250
Science/Technology	60	60	90	90	90	90
Social sciences	60	60	90	90	90	90
Health	30	30	30	30	40	40
Physical well-being	150	150	100	100	100	100
The Arts	150	150	60	60	60	60
Total weekly time	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200

Source: Ministry of Education, *Pre-school and primary school regulations 1998*. Draft, February 1998.

Standardized tests of achievement are sat by all pupils in Maori language at grade 5 and in English language at grade 6. A national examination is sat by all grade 6 pupils in Maori, health, social science, English and mathematics.

Pupils are assessed against achievement objectives for which there are descriptors and the criteria for four levels of achievement: pre-competent, gaining competency, competent and quality achievement. The primary school records system is evolving so that it is to be based on subject profiles reflecting standards achieved by students rather than on comparisons between students.

In March 2005 there were 2,201 pupils enrolled at the primary level (of whom 440 in non-government schools) with 137 teachers, of whom 26 teachers in non-government schools.

In 2007 there were 32 education providers in the islands, including eight primary schools, four secondary schools, and 19 area schools (school providing education from ECE to secondary level under one management structure). Included in this total there were five schools administered by churches (two primary, two area, and one secondary) and one private primary school. In addition, there was one private ECE centre. All church and private schools receive at least 90% of the equivalent allocation of funds that they would as a government school from the national budget. All government and government-funded church and private schools are required to be open to both educational and financial audit. (MOE, 2008).

In 2010 there were 1,841 pupils enrolled at the primary level (of whom 891 girls). There were 123 teachers, of whom 106 were women. The average pupil/teacher ratio was 15:1. (MOE, 2010).

Secondary education

The goals and strategic objectives of secondary education are the same as those stated for primary education.

Draft regulations state that secondary schools are to provide formal instruction in all compulsory subjects and one or more optional subjects as stated

below. Principals may stipulate certain optional subjects to be regarded as compulsory subjects for their school. However they cannot deem any compulsory subject to be regarded as voluntary. The minimum time allocation in minutes per week in Forms 1 to 4 according to the draft regulation of 1998 is shown below:

Secondary education (Forms I-IV): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Weekly time allocated to each subject (in minutes)			
	I	II	III	IV
<i>Compulsory subjects:</i>				
English language	180	180	180	180
Integrated commercial studies	120	120	120	120
Cook Islands Maori cultural studies	180	180	180	180
Mathematics	180	180	180	180
Science	120	120	150	150
Social sciences	150	150	150	150
Physical education	120	120	120	120
<i>Elective subjects:</i>				
Accounting	120	120	120	120
Home economics	120	120	120	120
Agriculture	120	120	120	120
Technical drawing	120	120	120	120
Art	120	120	120	120
Typewriting	120	120	120	120
Clothing	120	120	120	120
Woodwork	120	120	120	120
Computer science	120	120	120	120
Home science	120	120	120	120
Engineering	120	120	120	120
Total prescribed weekly time (min.)	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200

Source: Secondary school regulations 1998. Draft, February 1998.

**Forms 1 to 4:**

Compulsory subjects	Optional subjects	
English language (180)	Accounting	Home economics
Integrated commercial studies (120)	Agriculture	Technical drawing
Cook Islands Maori cultural studies (180)	Art	Typewriting
Mathematics (180)	Clothing	Woodwork
Science (FI-II : 120, FIII-IV: 150)	Computing	Home science
Social science (150)	Engineering	
Physical education (120)	(120 minutes for all options)	

Form 5 (lower fifth form):

Compulsory subjects:		
English, Cook Islands Maori cultural studies		
Optional subjects:		
Accounting	Clothing	Mathematics
Agriculture	Technical Drawing	Science
Art	Typewriting	Social Science
Clothing	Woodwork	Physical Education
Engineering		

The minimum instructional time for all subjects is 150 minutes per week except physical education, which is 90 minutes (*Secondary school regulations 1998. Draft, February 1998*).

Form V (upper fifth form)

Compulsory subjects:		
English		
Optional subjects:		
Mathematics	Science	Geography
History	Accounting	Economics
Human biology	Typing	Workshop technology
Art	Home economics	<i>Te Reo Maori</i> (New Zealand)

Upper fifth form students had to follow a programme totalling a minimum of 1,200 minutes per week of full-time secondary school study to be considered a candidate for the New Zealand School Certificate qualification.

Form 6:

Compulsory subjects:			
English			
Optional subjects:			
Biology	Chemistry	Physics	Mathematics
Accounting	Economics	History	Geography
Typing	Computer studies	Journalism	Workshop technology

For all subjects a minimum of 240 minutes per week of instruction was required to qualify as a candidate for the award of the New Zealand Sixth Form Certificate.

Form 7: All optional subjects:

Biology	Chemistry	Physics	Mathematics-statistics
Accounting	Economics	History	Mathematics-calculus
Geography	English		

Secondary students at all levels are able to enrol in correspondence courses from the New Zealand Correspondence School in subject areas that are not being offered at their particular school. In 2003 there were 191 students enrolled in 487 New Zealand Correspondence School courses.

The total minimum instructional time for Cook Islands secondary schools was set at 1,500 minutes per week. New Zealand qualifications generally require a

minimum of 1,200 minutes of full-time study and a minimum of 240 minutes per week for individual subjects.

Achievement-based assessment has been introduced with students being assessed against achievement objectives for which there are descriptors and the criteria for different levels of achievement.

Traditionally, lower fifth form students enrolled for Cook Islands School Certificate. Assessment in each subject generally included combining marks from internal assessment with marks from a traditional exam paper. Upper fifth form level students enrolled for the New Zealand School Certificate. Assessment in most subjects involved a single end-of-year exam. Sixth form certificate students enrolled for New Zealand Sixth Form Certificate. Seventh form students enrolled for New Zealand Higher School Certificate and New Zealand University Entrance, Bursaries and Scholarships awards. These generally involved end-of-year examinations with marks being scaled for inter-subject moderation.

In 2002, the New Zealand National Certificate in Education Achievement (NCEA) has been introduced to focus education on standards based assessment. This qualification has three levels of attainment which align to the final three years of secondary schooling. This allows students to study multi level without having to repeat subjects every year. The NCEA also gives students the opportunity to continue into trade/vocational training. In 2004 the final phase of standards based qualifications was implemented with NCEA Level 3 replacing Form 7 University Entrance/Bursary.

In March 2005 there were 1,899 students enrolled at the secondary level (of whom 257 in non-government schools) with 122 teachers, of whom fifteen in non-government schools.

In 2010 there were 1,893 students enrolled at the secondary level (of whom 943 girls). The number of teachers was 121 (of whom 69 women) and the average student/teacher ratio was 16:1.

Assessing learning achievement nation-wide

Grade 4 diagnostic tests were introduced in 1999. Pupils are tested in English, Maori and mathematics. The Maori and mathematics tests were translated into seven island dialects including *Pukapukan*. Pupils sat the Maori test in their local island dialect and elected to sit the mathematics test in either English or the local island dialect. The Maori and English tests comprised listening (5 marks), reading (5), writing (5) and dictation (4). The mathematics test comprised calculations (10 marks), numbers (4), measurement (3), algebra (2), geometry (5) and statistics (1). Marks for each subject were converted to a 5-point scale (achievement levels 1–5). Achievement levels 1–2 are considered to be below the minimum standard of basic competency in the subject concerned. Achievement levels 3–5 are deemed to be above the minimum standard and levels 4–5 are deemed to be a high standard of basic competency.

Grade 4 pupils who achieve the minimum standards in basic learning competencies (1999)

	Maori	English	Mathematics
Northern Group	84%	35%	48%
Southern Group	78%	53%	73%
Rarotonga	63%	82%	76%
National average	71%	66%	72%

Source: Ministry of Education, 1999.

Grade 4 pupils who achieve high standards in basic learning competencies (1999)

	Maori	English	Mathematics
Northern Group	49%	8%	4%
Southern Group	36%	25%	37%
Rarotonga	25%	54%	46%
National average	32%	38%	39%

Source: Ministry of Education, 1999.

Competency in Maori is directly related to isolation from Rarotonga. The more isolated Northern Group islands have the highest percentage of pupils attaining minimum standards in Maori as well the highest percentage of pupils attaining high standards in Maori. Achievement of Southern Group pupils, although not as high as Northern Group students, is nevertheless significantly higher than the achievement of pupils in Rarotonga. Over a third of Rarotonga pupils fail to reach the minimum standard of competence in Maori. The low level of achievement in Maori in Rarotonga is generally attributed to parents and teachers assigning priority to English as the main language required for higher education and professions. The reverse trend is true for competency in English, which is strongest in Rarotonga, weaker in the Southern Group and weakest in the Northern Group where only one third of pupils achieve the minimum standard of competence. In the outer islands Maori is the dominant language. Mathematics also follows a similar trend to English although the gap between Rarotonga and the Southern Group is not so pronounced.

All students sit Standardized Tests of Achievement-Cook Islands (STACI) papers from grade 5 to Form 1. The subjects are Cook Islands Maori (Rarotongan dialect) in grade 5, English in grade 6 and mathematics in Form 1. The purpose of the tests is both diagnostic and to monitor national standards and standards within each school. English and Maori tests assess reading comprehension, listening comprehension, vocabulary and grammar. The standard of English and mathematics is highest on Rarotonga, less in the Southern Group and lowest in the Northern Group.

All grade 6 pupils sit exams in: Maori; health (in Maori); social science (in English); English; mathematics (in English). Pupils are ranked in each subject and in



overall marks, and public recognition is accorded to high achieving pupils and their schools. The tests are not standardized; therefore annual trends cannot be determined.

In 2003, 349 grade 6 pupils were tested in Maori, English and mathematics. An estimated 22% of the students were found to be at risk in language, higher than in 2002 (19%) but less than in 2001 (32%) and 2000 (32%). An estimated 36% of the students were found to be at risk in mathematics, higher than in 2002 (29%) but less than in 2001 (38%) and 2000 (45%). In 2004, 331 grade 4 pupils were tested in Maori, English and mathematics. Students at risk in language have decreased from 24% in 2000 to 14% in 2004 while at risk students in mathematics have decreased from 36% to 25%.

Literacy in the primary school has been measured using different instruments. Between 1999 and 2006 formal diagnostic testing at grades 4 and 6 was used to assess literacy in both Cook Islands Maori and English. In 2007, this changed to use evidence gathered by teachers over the year using newly developed instruments and reported to the Ministry against agreed standards and levels. (MOE, 2008).

Teaching staff

The Education Act specifies that all teachers must be registered. This requires a teacher to hold a teacher's certificate issued in the Cook Islands, New Zealand, Australia or other country considered by the Secretary to have a comparable teachers' certificate. Conditional registration may be granted to those who have completed an initial course of teacher training or are holders of a relevant university degree or diploma. Other than being registered as a teacher there are no official criteria for teaching at preschool, primary or secondary level.

At least 80% of teachers are expected to participate in in-service training. Participation is not officially sanctioned as being compulsory. However, it is generally accepted that a teacher selected by principals and/or Ministry officials to attend a specified course should attend unless there are special circumstances preventing such attendance. Opportunities are available for in-service training for the vast majority of teachers. Principals and senior teachers are required to provide professional support for their staff and all schools have ready access to the Ministry's Curriculum Advisers and Professional Development Facilitators.

In March 2005 there were 282 teachers (including principals and senior teachers); 234 teachers (of whom 230 were certified) were in government schools and 48 (of whom 31 certified) were in non-government schools. A total of 58 teachers were degree holders. Seventy-five percent of teachers were women and 84% of teachers were from Cook Islands. A total of 165 teachers were in the island of Rarotonga. (Ministry of Education, 2005).

Historically, early childhood education (ECE) centres have been staffed either by teachers with primary teaching qualifications or by ancillary staff who have shown an interest and willingness to take these duties on. The change in approach to ECE has also changed the expectation of the Ministry of teachers in this area in terms of



specific ECE training and qualifications. The minimum expectation of ECE teachers is now the Certificate in Early Childhood Education. (MOE, 2008).

The Cook Islands Teachers Training College is responsible for the pre-service training of primary school teachers. It offers a three-year diploma course with the following focus areas: curriculum knowledge and practice; personal and professional education; and professional inquiry and practice. Since July 2003, the College has been a separate division of the Ministry of Education with its own budget and with authority for all functions and activities delegated to the Principal who is responsible directly to the Secretary of Education. (*Ibid.*).

Phase I of a new teachers' salary scale was implemented in February 1998. The salary scale has four divisions: Q1 (<1/3 of a university degree), Q2 (>1/3 and < 2/3 of a university degree), Q3 (>2/3 and < a complete university degree), and Q4 (completed university degree). Step 1 is the first year of teaching after graduation from the Teacher College. After one year of satisfactory performance on one step a teacher will move onto the next step. Step 8 is a salary bar and only those teachers which demonstrate exceptional performance will proceed past this bar.

In addition to the basic salary there are allowances for positions of responsibility (e.g. the principal of the largest school). Phase I has generally resulted in the implementation of Steps 1 and 2 of the salary scale.

The majority of teachers are members of the New Zealand Government Superannuation scheme contributing 6.5% of their salary with the Ministry of Education paying the employer's contribution of 7.7%. The scheme is no longer available to new recruits. The new salary scale includes incentives for continued study at university level, satisfactory and exceptional performance, and taking on positions of responsibility. Extra allowances may be payable to attract teachers to outer island schools.

Professional development for principals includes monthly articles on school management published in the Education Gazette, annual visits from Audit and Quality Assurance staff and in-service courses conducted in Rarotonga. All senior Ministry staff attend, on average, at least one formal training course or seminar each year. Middle-level staff have formal training opportunities, on average, approximately once every two years. Formal training opportunities are rare for junior staff. Overseas courses are usually sponsored by international cooperation agencies (New Zealand and Australia) and international organizations (UNESCO, Asian Development Bank).

References

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For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>