

Sandspit Road School

Te Kura o Rangiaawhea

A journey to clarity

Sandspit Road School set out to rebuild clarity around assessment so it could genuinely accelerate learning. By auditing existing practice, investing in professional learning, and resourcing leadership time, the school has developed a more coherent and confident assessment culture that supports acceleration and student agency. Early evidence suggests clearer expectations and improved outcomes for learners.

School context

Sandspit Road School, Te Kura o Rangiaawhea, is a Year 1 to 8 school in Waiuku with approximately 310 students. The school had a long history with Assessment for Learning and a strong commitment to practices that support diverse learners. Over time, changes in leadership and staffing led to variation in how these practices were understood and enacted. When a new principal arrived in 2023, leaders saw a need to rebuild shared clarity about what high-quality assessment practice looked like and how it should support acceleration across classrooms.

Inquiry emphasis

The work was grounded in research on assessment for learning and evidence-informed teaching. Leaders drew on ideas from Dylan Wiliam on instructional adjustment, Hattie's research on visible learning, and Nottingham's focus on learning within the zone of proximal development.

An audit of current assessment practices provided the starting point. This process clarified where assessment was being used deeply and where greater coherence was needed. The emphasis was on strengthening shared language, common expectations, and purposeful use of evidence.

Link for video of the full conference presentation on the NZAI website: [Sandspit School](#)

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Why does this story matter?

This case illustrates how revisiting the purpose of assessment can renew its impact. It highlights that effective assessment practice is enhanced by shared understanding, intentional resourcing, and relational trust.

Improvement focus

The focus was to strengthen coherence and consistency in assessment so that all learners experienced clear expectations, responsive teaching, and opportunities for acceleration. Leaders aimed to ensure assessment tools and schedules served learning rather than compliance.

The improvement story

Leaders began by asking whether assessment practices were truly supporting acceleration. Although many tools were in use, the connection between assessment and daily teaching was not always clear. Variation in confidence interpreting data meant that some teachers were using information deeply while others were less certain about how to respond.

The first step was a full audit of assessment tools and schedules. Teachers discussed the purpose of each assessment, how often it was used, and whether it provided useful information for learning. Some tools were streamlined, and clearer rationale was developed to distinguish between system level snapshots and classroom formative practices.

An Assessment for Learning team was formed and release time and leadership units signalled that this work was a priority. Professional learning combined in-house expertise with external support and focused on building assessment literacy for teachers. Leadership development focused on leading adult learning.

Teachers revisited e-asTTle, PAT, and writing moderation processes, clarifying what each tool was designed to show and how it should inform next steps. Practice analysis discussions became more structured, with a focus on how evidence shaped teaching decisions.

Building trust was critical. Leaders were explicit that assessment information would not be used to judge teachers. Observations were co-constructed, and feedback conversations were framed as shared inquiry into student learning. Over time, staff confidence grew and conversations became more focused on impact rather than compliance.

Attention was also given to inclusivity. Teachers considered how assessment conditions could be adjusted so students were set up for success, including appropriate test levels and accommodations where needed. The goal was for assessment to accurately reflect learning rather than create unnecessary barriers.

Partnership with whānau was strengthened through early positive contact, shared goal setting, and clear communication of progress. Assessment results were shared in ways that highlighted growth and next steps rather than simply reporting levels. Collaboration extended beyond the school. Writing moderation with neighbouring schools strengthened consistency and helped refine expectations. This external lens reinforced internal clarity.

Across the school, assessment systems, professional learning, and shared beliefs became more tightly aligned. Teachers reported greater confidence in interpreting evidence and clearer expectations about what acceleration required.



Enablers

- A clear commitment to assessment for learning
- Intentional resourcing of leadership time and professional learning
- Structured audit to create a shared starting point
- Relational trust and explicit non-judgemental stance
- Collaborative moderation within and across schools
- Alignment between assessment tools and instructional decisions



Tensions

- Variation in confidence and familiarity with assessment tools
- Rebuilding coherence during leadership and staffing change
- Balancing depth of inquiry with workload demands
- Ensuring assessment remained inclusive and meaningful for all learners
- Maintaining consistency over time

How challenges were navigated

Leaders paced the work carefully, recognising that sustainable change required time for understanding and ownership. The audit created a common understanding of current practice without positioning variation as deficit. Professional learning was embedded across the year rather than delivered as one-off sessions.

Trust was built by working alongside teachers and ensuring that observations and data discussions were framed as collaborative inquiry. Moderation across schools strengthened shared expectations and reduced isolation. By resourcing leadership time and creating space for structured dialogue, leaders signalled that this work was developmental rather than performative.

Consistency was strengthened through moderation and shared planning processes. These structures reduced ambiguity and supported dependable practice across classrooms.

Evidence and emerging learning

After twelve months, the school reports measurable shifts. e-asTTle reading and writing data shows upward movement across several year levels, alongside a reduction in the tail of underachievement. Effect size analysis indicates accelerated progress in some cohorts, including Māori students, with several groups achieving effect sizes above 0.4 and higher.

Teachers describe greater clarity and confidence in using assessment to guide instruction. Students are increasingly able to articulate what they are learning, why it matters, and how they know they are improving. Leaders' key learning has been that clarity, resourcing, and trust must work together. Assessment practices strengthened when belief, systems, and professional learning were aligned.



Questions for schools to discuss

- How clear are we about the purpose of every assessment tool we use?
- Do our assessment schedules genuinely support acceleration or create compliance load?
- How confident are teachers in interpreting and acting on progress data?
- What structures build relational trust so data is experienced as supportive?
- In what ways does our assessment practice strengthen student agency?
- Where could moderation strengthen shared expectations and consistency?
- How do we ensure that assessment processes are inclusive and meaningful for all learners?