

Stonefields School

Te Kura o ngā Pāraepōhatu

Improvement: getting it in our DNA

Stonefields School set out to ensure improvement was not a project but part of everyday practice. A schoolwide Teaching, Learning, and Assessment model provides the inquiry framework that guides teachers and leaders to examine their impact and adapt practice. By clarifying what success looks like and strengthening the tools to measure what they value, including building a live dashboard, the school has aligned vision, inquiry, and evidence to make progress visible in real time.

School context

Stonefields School is a large urban full primary in eastern Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, serving a diverse community. The school's vision emphasises building learning capacity, collaborating, making meaning, and breaking through.

Following the disruption of COVID, leaders paused to reflect on how well their systems were showing progress in the outcomes they valued most. Achievement information was available, but other priorities such as hauora, learner agency, engagement, and parent partnership were harder to see consistently through existing tools and reporting cycles.

Inquiry emphasis

Improvement at Stonefields is anchored in a school-designed Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (TLA) model that guides how teachers inquire into the impact of their practice. The model prompts teachers to notice learner needs, analyse gaps, design deliberate responses, and reflect on impact.

The work draws on Assessment for Learning principles and improvement ideas focused on defined success measures.

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

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Why does this story matter?

This case demonstrates how schools can design improvement systems that align vision, inquiry, and evidence. By clarifying what success looks like, embedding a shared inquiry framework for teaching and learning, and making progress visible through accessible data tools, Stonefields strengthened its ability to examine impact and adapt practice over time.

Improvement focus

The focus was to strengthen a coherent, schoolwide approach to improvement that was tightly aligned to the school vision. Leaders aimed to make progress visible across both learning and wider outcomes such as wellbeing, agency, engagement, and partnership. By clarifying these success measures and making evidence for inquiry, strategic planning, and governance conversations, visible in real time, the school aimed to support sustained improvement over time.

The improvement story

Leaders at Stonefields School set out to strengthen the school's overall improvement capability by ensuring that inquiry, evidence, and decision-making were embedded across everyday practice. They focused on creating a coherent approach that linked classroom teaching, professional learning, and strategic planning.

Central to this approach was the development of a 'Teaching, Learning, and Assessment' (TLA) model. The model provides a structured inquiry cycle that guides teachers to examine the impact of their practice. It prompts teachers to ask a sequence of questions: How do I know these learners need this learning now? What actions will I take to cause that learning? What approaches or strategies will I use? And what evidence will show whether the teaching was impactful? This inquiry logic supports both day-to-day instructional decisions and deeper investigations when learning is not progressing as expected.

Leaders deliberately applied the same improvement logic across multiple levels of the organisation. The inquiry questions used by teachers also informed leadership discussions and strategic planning. This created a shared language for improvement across the school and ensured that evidence-informed thinking became a part of everyday professional conversations.

Alongside the TLA model, leaders worked to clarify what success should look like for learners. Seeking alignment with the school's vision and values, they identified a broader set of success measures that extended beyond traditional academic outcomes. Alongside progress in core learning areas these measures captured areas such as learner agency, hauora and wellbeing, engagement, and partnership with whānau. For each area, leaders identified what evidence was already available and where new tools were needed. This process helped the school articulate what it valued most for learners and ensured that improvement efforts remained aligned with those priorities.

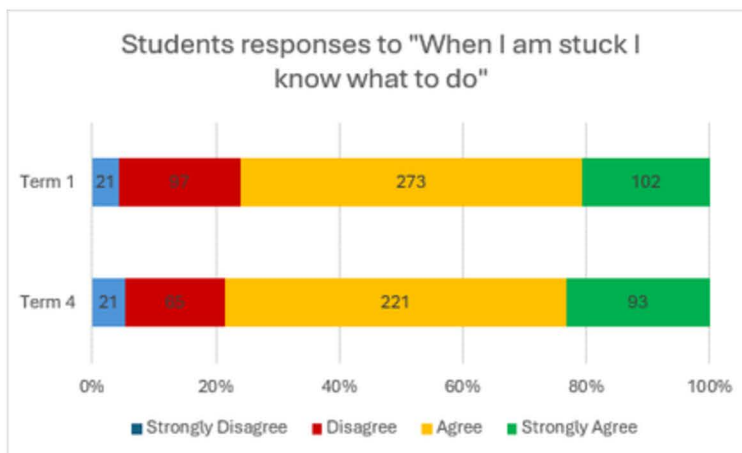
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To support visibility of progress, data from multiple sources was brought together in a live improvement dashboard built in Google Looker Studio. The dashboard enables teachers and leaders to view patterns by cohort or group, examine changes across timepoints, and connect survey information with attendance and achievement patterns. Rather than waiting for end-of-year summaries, teams can review shifts as they occur.

Importantly, the dashboard is not used in isolation. It operates as one tool within a wider improvement system. Evidence gathered through the dashboard feeds into professional conversations, team reflection, and strategic planning. Professional learning strengthened confidence in interpreting evidence and using it to guide inquiry. Playbooks became a key improvement tool. Teachers documented their focus, actions, evidence, and reflections in shared Google slide decks. These were used during professional learning sessions to share impact stories and emerging insights.

Over time, the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment model, dashboard, and playbooks have created greater coherence between classroom practice, strategic planning, and governance oversight. Improvement is increasingly viewed as shared work rather than a leadership task. Stonefields has strengthened the school's ability to ask purposeful questions, examine evidence, and adapt practice in response to what learners need.

Communication with whānau was also refined. Rather than sharing large volumes of dashboard data, leaders used simplified summaries to report progress and next steps. This supported transparency without overwhelming families.



Student survey data
Term 1 vs Term 4
(Image taken from
school's PowerPoint
presentation)



A teacher at Stonefields
School sharing their
impact story.
(Image taken from
school's PowerPoint
presentation)



Enablers

- A clearly articulated vision that guided the definition of success measures
- Strong analytic expertise supporting dashboard development
- Consistent use of a Teaching, Learning, and Assessment framework across levels
- Investment in staff data fluency alongside improved data access
- Structured playbooks that normalised sharing and reflection
- Deliberate triangulation of student, teacher, and whānau perspectives



Tensions

- Managing the cognitive load created by increasing volumes of data
- Balancing national reporting requirements with locally defined measures
- Ensuring dashboards remain accessible rather than overly technical
- Sharing rich evidence with whānau in manageable formats
- Sustaining focus on areas where progress is slower or uneven

How challenges were navigated

Leaders prioritised clarity and usability. Success measures were kept anchored to the vision, and the dashboard was designed to surface patterns quickly without requiring staff to work from raw spreadsheets. Professional learning time was used to strengthen shared understanding of measures, interpretation, and practical next steps.

Where progress was limited, the evidence was kept visible and used to shape the next cycle of inquiry rather than being set aside.

Evidence and emerging learning

Leaders report that improvement processes are becoming more embedded and coherent across the school. Staff demonstrate increased confidence in interpreting evidence and identifying next steps. Data conversations are more common in team meetings and strategic sessions.

Longitudinal achievement patterns indicate strong foundational outcomes for learners who remain across the full primary years. Survey data shows high levels of learner and whānau wellbeing, with targeted initiatives leading to measurable improvements in engagement in some areas. Leaders describe a shift from end-of-year variance reporting toward more continuous review, with decisions increasingly shaped by shared analysis rather than retrospective summaries.



Questions for schools to discuss

- How clearly have we defined what success looks like in our setting, including outcomes beyond achievement?
- What do we currently measure well, and what matters that we do not yet see clearly?
- How easy is it for teachers and leaders to access evidence and use it in real time?
- What routines help us keep inquiry consistent across classrooms and teams?
- How do we share evidence with whānau in ways that are clear and useful?
- What would help improvement become embedded in daily practice rather than driven by initiative cycles?