



# Reading literacy achievement: primary schooling

**Year 5 students in New Zealand have a reading literacy achievement significantly better than the international average, and like most countries girls have a reading achievement significantly better than boys**

## Indicator Description

Reading literacy scores for Year 5 students.

## Why This Is Important

Reading and understanding written text is fundamental to learning and to effective participation in society and the workforce. Written language is a vital medium for communication, accessing information, developing cultural, social and personal identity and understanding other perspectives. Students can learn to think critically

and creatively through reading, writing, viewing, interpreting, interrogating and responding to texts. Writing also enables students to gather, process, and present information. Children encounter written language with important information for them in a variety of settings in the home, school and community. When students have opportunities to write for an audience, they can communicate across time and location, enabling wider participation in society and the global community.

Moreover, reading and writing are foundational literacy skills critical to student achievement across the curriculum. This reading achievement indicator reflects the extent to which students have developed early foundations in reading as a result of both their early childhood education and early schooling.

## How We Are Going

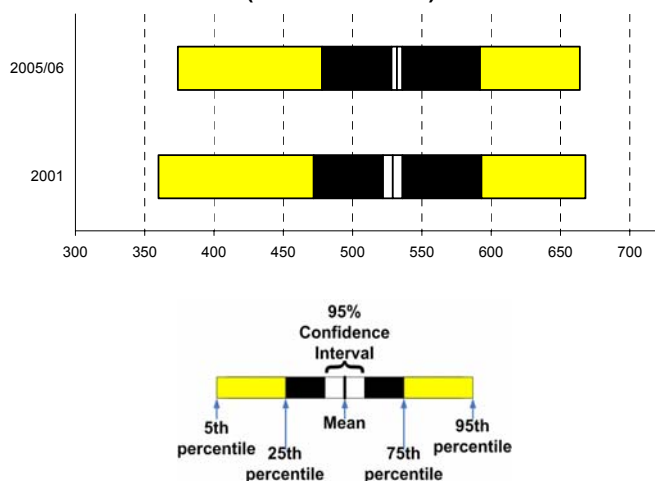
This indicator draws on the second cycle of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, 2005/06 (PIRLS-05/06). Two areas of reading were assessed: reading for literary purposes; and reading for informational purposes. PIRLS also assesses two sets of comprehension skills: retrieving and straightforward inferencing; and interpreting, integrating, and evaluating.

### New Zealand Year 5 students' mean reading literacy scores in PIRLS, by gender (2001, 2005/06)

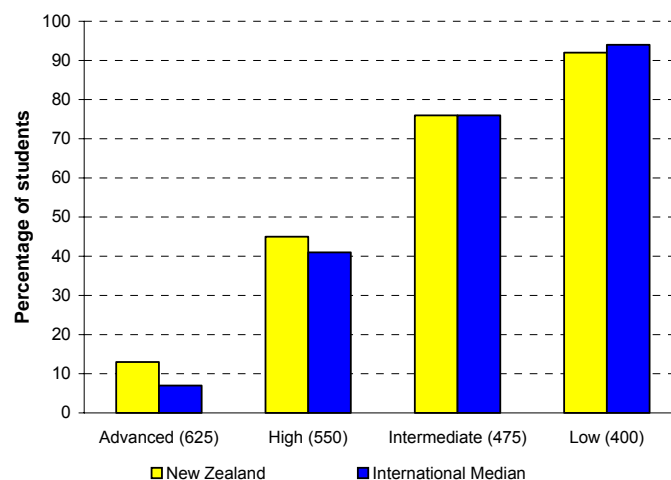
Year	Mean (Standard Error)		
	Overall	Girls	Boys
2001	529 (3.6)	542 (4.7)	516 (4.2)
2005/06	532 (2.0)	544 (2.2)	520 (2.9)

New Zealand's overall mean reading score was 532, compared with the PIRLS international mean score of 500. New Zealand Year 5 students achieved, on average, scores significantly above the international mean (500) for the 40 countries that took part in PIRLS-05/06.

### Distribution of PIRLS reading literacy scores for New Zealand (2001 and 2005/06)



### Percentage of New Zealand Year 5 students reaching the PIRLS-05/06 international benchmarks



There was no significant change in the New Zealand mean from 2001 to 2005/06. In 2005/06, New Zealand's Year 5 students performed slightly better on reading tasks that assessed reading for informational purposes (534) than on tasks that assessed reading for literary purposes (527). This was opposite to what was found in 2001. Year 5 students' performance was relatively better on texts which required them to show their interpreting, integrating, and evaluating skills (538) than on texts where they had to show their retrieval and straightforward inferencing skills (524).

In order to provide a more complete picture of student achievement, four points on the reading achievement scale have been internationally identified for use as benchmarks. These benchmarks describe the types of reading skills and strategies students used during the assessment.

The performance of many New Zealand Year 5 students was relatively strong compared with their international counterparts in 2005/06. Approximately 13% of New Zealand students achieved scores above 625 (Advanced International Benchmark), implying they were able, among other things, to integrate ideas across a text to provide interpretations of a character and provide full text-

based support. This was the ninth highest proportion internationally (and nearly doubles the international median of 7%).

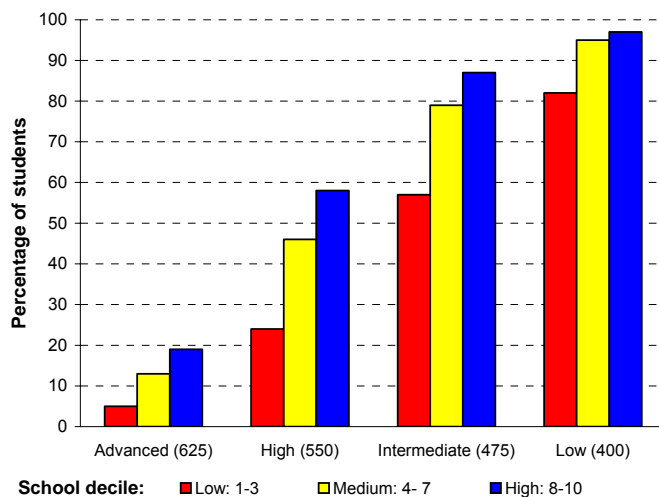
The Low International Benchmark excluded students that had difficulty recognising explicitly stated information and locating a part of a story and making a straightforward inference. Eight percent of New Zealand students did not reach the Low International Benchmark of 400 (compared with the international median 6%) in 2005/06. In comparison to many other higher-achieving countries, the spread in achievement between the weakest performing and the strongest performing New Zealand students (the 5th and 95th percentiles) was large at 290 points.

The indicator shows that there was a significant difference between the mean scores for boys and girls, with girls scoring 24 points higher, on average, than boys. The mean score for girls was significantly higher than the mean score for boys in all but two countries. The difference for New Zealand was the fifth largest to be observed across all countries.

The mean reading literacy scores for European/Pākehā and Asian students in PIRLS-05/06 were significantly higher than the mean scores for Māori and Pasifika students. The percentages of students who reached the four PIRLS benchmarks also highlight the differences in student achievement among the four ethnic groups. Eighteen percent of Māori and 16% of Pasifika students did not reach the Low International Benchmark (i.e. scored below 400). This compares with 3% of Asian and 4% of European/Pākehā students. There were no significant changes in the mean reading literacy scores from 2001 to 2005/06 for any ethnic group.

There were significant differences between the mean scores for students from all three school decile groups, and in the percentages reaching the PIRLS benchmarks. The percentage of students from low decile schools who did not reach the Low International Benchmark was 18% compared with 5% of students from medium decile schools and 3% of students from high decile schools.

**Percentage of New Zealand Year 5 students reaching the PIRLS-05/06 international benchmarks, by school decile**



## Where To Find Out More

For information on reading and literacy at other ages, see the indicators on:

- Reading literacy achievement: senior secondary schooling
- Literacy skills in the adult population.

To obtain other information about levels of achievement in other educational skill areas at primary schools consider the indicators:

- Mathematics achievement: primary schooling
- Science achievement: primary schooling.

The Ministry of Education has established an Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Programme to systematically identify, evaluate, analyse, synthesise and make accessible, relevant evidence linked to a range of learner outcomes. Evidence about what works for this indicator can be found in:

- Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis.

## References

- Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Caygill, R., & Chamberlain, M. (2004). *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS): New Zealand Year 5 Student Achievement 2001*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
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- Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Gonzalez, E.J., & Kennedy, A.M. (2003). *PIRLS 2001 International Report: IEA's Study of Reading Literacy Achievement in Primary Schools in 35 Countries*. Chestnut Hill, MA: International Study Center, Boston College.
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