

Views of Students, Teachers and Parents in Relation to Students' Experiences at School and their Learning and Achievement

In the discussion that follows we will investigate what students thought about their own learning and achievement and of some of their experiences of school in Years 9 and 10, as well as looking at what parents and teachers thought about students' learning and achievement. Finally, where possible, we will compare the views of students, parents and teachers to determine the extent to which their opinions appear to be similar or different and whether there are any differences evident for low and high achieving students.

Students' perceptions of school, learning and their achievement

At the various phases of the study, parents and teachers, as well as the students themselves, were asked a range of questions about student learning, including questions about progress in particular subjects and what seemed to impact most on learning⁷⁶. Firstly we will discuss the students' views.

What students thought about their own learning ability and achievement

Students generally had a higher perception of their overall learning ability than our aSTTle results and their teachers' assessments of them indicated. When we asked the students at the end of Year 8 whether they considered they were 'good at learning' the majority agreed that they were.

Students generally had a much higher perception of their overall learning ability than our aSTTle results and their teachers' assessments of them indicated.

When we looked at students' achievement results in mathematics by whether they were 'good at learning', we found that 89 percent of students in Year 8 considered they were good at learning, irrespective of their achievement levels. Just seven percent (N=6)⁷⁷ of students in this phase felt they were not good at learning and four of these students were achieving in the bottom quartile in mathematics. Thirty percent (N=25) of our students overall were achieving in the bottom quartile in mathematics.

Similar patterns were also evident for reading and writing, with 92 percent of students in each case describing themselves as being good at learning.⁷⁸ In our sample, 30 percent (N=26) of students in reading and 27 percent (N=21) in writing were achieving in the bottom quartile.

Only one of the five students who did not think they were good at learning was actually achieving in the

lowest quartile for reading, with the same number (1 out of 5 students) also achieving in the lowest quartile for writing.

Of the few students who felt they were not good at learning in Year 8, we found that it was the low achievers in mathematics, rather than in reading and writing, who were more likely to feel they were not good at learning.

While it is important for students to have positive self-esteem and confidence in their ability, which most of our students appeared to have had in Year 8, at least in the context of the question we asked them, it is also essential for their learning and achievement to receive effective, specific, positive and responsive feedback.⁷⁹

Students' views on aspects of learning in class

Getting used to the different ways in which the curriculum is organised and delivered at secondary school is just one of the challenges students face when they make the transition from primary to secondary schooling. Some research literature⁸⁰ has found that any change in learning environment can lead to a decrease in students' motivation and lowered achievement. We were interested in finding out what aspects of learning in class had changed the most for students as they moved from Year 8, to Year 9, and then into Year 10, and whether these changes appeared to affect particular groups of students more than others.

At each phase of the study, students were presented with a list of statements on aspects of classroom learning and were asked to rate them using the scale 'definitely true', 'mostly true', 'sometimes true, sometimes not true', 'mostly not true', and 'definitely

⁷⁶ Some of the questions asked were open-ended (free response), which meant that students' responses were 'unprompted' (i.e. they were not provided with specific response options from which to choose).

⁷⁷ Data were missing for three students, therefore percentages do not add to 100 percent.

⁷⁸ Data were missing for two students in reading and one student in writing.

⁷⁹ Alton-Lee, A. (2003).

⁸⁰ McGee et al (2003).

not true'. Table 12 details students' views on a selected number of the statements. Their responses over the four phases reflect the change in learning environment evident at secondary school where learning is more subject centred.

By the end of Year 9, students were less likely to consider that they did interesting or fun things in class, that they tried new or different things in class, or that they often went to the library to do research.

They felt their teachers listened to, or used their ideas, less than they had in Year 8, were less likely

to ask for their opinions and were also less likely to make sure that everyone understood.

The data in Table 12 also indicate that students felt that students were less likely to help one another in class than they had been in Year 8 and that they were less able to talk and discuss things in class.

However, by early in Year 10, students' opinions on a number of these dimensions regarding learning in class improved, albeit slightly.

Table 12: Students' views on particular aspects of learning in class over the course of the study

Aspect of learning in class	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
	%	%	%	%
	Definitely true/Mostly true			
The teacher listens to/uses our ideas	90.2	73.1	60.0	64.1
The teacher makes sure everyone understands	89.3	87.5	71.0	76.1
Students help each other	83.9	67.3	59.0	63.0
We do interesting things in class	79.5	68.3	54.0	55.4
We try new or different things	77.7	69.2	57.0	54.4
We do a lot of talking/discussing in class	77.7	60.6	52.0	50.0
The teacher asks for our opinions a lot	75.9	51.0	47.0	48.9
We do lots of fun things as a class	68.8	59.6	34.0	41.3
We often go to the library to do research	65.2	40.4	26.0	31.5

Note: To simplify the presentation of data in this table we have combined the rating categories 'Definitely true' and 'Mostly true'.

Students' experiences of school in Years 9 and 10

Once at secondary school, students were also asked to rate a series of statements about how they were currently finding things at school compared with their experiences in the previous year (in Phases 2 and 3 students were comparing Year 9 with Year 8, whereas in Phase 4, they were comparing Year 10 with Year 9).

Although students were originally asked to rate the statements using a five-point scale, for ease of reporting we have combined the two positive ratings of 'totally agree' and 'agree' and the two negative ratings of 'disagree' and 'totally disagree'. Students' responses to four of the statements are detailed in Table 13.

After almost a term in Year 9, around two-thirds of all students 'totally agreed' or 'agreed' that the work at secondary school was more demanding or challenging than it had been in Year 8. However, by the time they reached Year 10 they were finding the work less demanding and challenging than it had been (later) in Year 9. They were also less likely in Year 10 to indicate that they found the work more interesting than they had the previous year.

Next we will look more closely at whether there were any differences in the responses of the low and high achieving students to the four statements detailed in Table 13.

Table 13: Some of the students' experiences of school in Years 9 and 10

Students' experiences of school	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	Totally agree/Agree			Neither agree nor disagree			Disagree/Totally disagree		
The work (this year) is more demanding or challenging (than last year)	67.3	66.0	57.7	28.8	30.0	35.9	3.9	2.0	6.5
The work is easier (this year compared to last year)	18.3	15.0	12.0	50.0	43.0	51.1	30.8	39.0	34.7
I am repeating work I did last year	28.9	32.0	28.2	46.2	41.0	42.4	23.0	25.0	29.4
The work is more interesting (this year)	73.0	65.0	64.1	19.2	26.0	30.4	5.8	6.0	4.4

Note: Percentages for each phase do not equal 100 percent as a result of missing data. To simply the presentation of data in this table we have combined the rating categories 'totally agree' and 'agree' and 'disagree' and 'totally disagree'.

Whether students considered the work to be more demanding or challenging in Years 9 and 10

Towards the end of their first term in Year 9 the low achieving students were slightly more likely than the high achieving students to indicate that the work at secondary school was more demanding and challenging. However, by the end of Year 9, the high achieving students, particularly in mathematics and reading, were more likely to be finding the work more demanding or challenging.

One possible explanation for these findings is that by the end of Year 9 the teachers of the high achieving students had determined the academic capability of these students and were now giving them harder work to extend them, whereas earlier in the year teachers may have been more likely to 'go easy' on the students as they settled in and until they (the teachers) had had a chance to establish what they were capable of.

Although by early in Year 10 the high achievers in mathematics and writing were still more likely than other students to consider that their work had become more demanding, the number of students overall who felt the work was more demanding had decreased. During this final phase of the study, the low achieving students in reading were slightly more likely to consider the work to be more demanding.

Whether students considered the work to be easier in Years 9 and 10

Less than a fifth of all students at the end of their first term in Year 9 felt that the work at secondary school was easier. It was the low achieving students, however, who were more likely than their high achieving counterparts to think that this was the case. None of the high achieving students in mathematics or reading, and only two students in writing, agreed that the work was easier when interviewed at this phase. In saying that, both the low and high achievers in mathematics and writing, and the high achievers in reading, were more likely to disagree than agree that the work was easier.

However, by the end of Year 9 fewer low achieving students in mathematics and reading, but the same

number in writing, now felt that the work was easier at secondary school. Two of the high achievers in each of mathematics, reading and writing also felt this way.

While the low achievers in reading and writing were slightly more likely than the high achievers to disagree that the work was easier at this time (Phase 3), the high achievers in mathematics were also more likely to disagree. Over half of the high achievers in all three subjects 'neither agreed nor disagreed' that the work was easier.

Early in Year 10, we found it was the high achievers, particularly in mathematics and reading, who were much more likely than the low achievers to 'disagree' that they found the work easier. As was the case at the same time the previous year, the low achievers in mathematics and reading were again more likely than the high achievers to think that the work was easier.

Whether students considered they were repeating work in Years 9 and 10

Student opinion was divided over whether they were repeating work they had done before. Although in Phases 2 and 3 students were slightly more likely to agree than disagree that they were repeating work covered in Year 8, by Phase 4 similar proportions agreed and disagreed about the extent to which they were repeating work from Year 9.

In Years 9 and 10, we found it was the low achieving students in mathematics and reading who were more likely than the high achievers to consider they were repeating work they had already covered. And although in Phase 3 the high achievers in writing were more likely than the low achievers to consider they were repeating work, there were still a third of the low achieving students in writing who consistently indicated they felt they were repeating work at each of the phases.

It is interesting to note that the low achieving students were generally more likely than the high achievers to consider they were repeating work they had already done and were also more likely to consider that the work was easier at secondary school. Much is written in the literature about quality teaching and the importance of having high

By the end of Year 9 the high achievers were finding the work at secondary school more demanding or challenging.

expectation of students.⁸¹ One possible explanation for our findings could be that the teachers of the low achieving students made assumptions about the nature and extent of their prior knowledge and therefore perhaps had lower expectations of what they could achieve.

Whether students considered the work was more interesting in Years 9 and 10

At each of the phases, the low achieving students were more likely than the high achievers to consider that the work they were doing at secondary school was more interesting, although it is of concern that fewer low achieving students indicated they felt this way in Phase 4 compared with Phase 2.

A contrasting finding was that there was an increase in the number of high achieving students in mathematics in Phase 4 who now considered that the work they were doing was more interesting than it had been the previous year.

What students thought helped them to be a 'good learner'

"Probably the teachers. Also the environment that you're in. When everyone's not talking and yelling over one another. And what you're learning about. You can focus more when the work is interesting."
(Year 10 girl)

When we asked the students in Year 8, and again in Year 10, what they thought made them 'good at learning' they most often mentioned that it was when they listened well and paid attention in class, when they worked hard, or was because they had a good teacher. Smaller numbers of students also said that it was due to the help and encouragement they received from their parents or that their friends helped them to be good at learning.

Students were more likely in Year 8 than in Year 10 to mention factors such as attending a good school, knowing how to find out about things in the library or on the Internet, or simply being clever, as impacting positively on their learning. A few students also mentioned in Year 8 that having extra lessons or tuition helped them.

By early in Year 10, students were more articulate about what helped them to be a good learner and were now more likely to say that being interested in the topic or subject or having a good learning environment where there were no distractions helped them to be a good learner.

What students thought made learning difficult for them

The few students who thought they were not good at learning when in Year 8 were asked to comment further on why they thought this was the case. The largest number of these students (N=5) said they just felt they were not very clever. Even smaller numbers gave one or more of the following explanations: that their friends had an impact on why they were not good at learning, that the work at school was too boring, that they did not try hard enough, that the teachers did not explain things very well or were not good at teaching, that the work was too hard, and/or that they simply could not be bothered doing their schoolwork, indicating that they were generally quite disaffected from their learning at school.

In Year 10, this question was worded a little differently and students were asked to think about situations when they found learning difficult and to consider what factors made it most difficult for them to learn. Students most often said that learning was difficult when they did not find the work interesting or relevant, when they felt their teacher was not good at teaching and did not explain things well, when the class environment was noisy or their friends distracted them, or when they were feeling tired, unwell or generally 'out of sorts'.

Whether students thought their teachers expected them to do well

Early in Year 10, when asked whether they thought their teachers usually expected them to do well in their studies, almost all students told us they thought their teachers did.

The high achieving students most often mentioned that they felt their teachers expected them to do well because they were in one of the top ability classes⁸² and that their teachers would often tell them they *should* be doing well and achieving at a certain level.

In contrast, the explanations provided by the low achievers tended to suggest that their teachers provided them with more general encouragement, telling them that they wanted them to do well and pass their assessments.

⁸¹ Alton-Lee, A. (2003).

⁸² Both secondary schools operated some class streaming in Years 9 and 10, based on students' numeracy and literacy skills.

Slightly fewer of each of the high and low achieving students mentioned that they knew their teachers expected them to do well because they made sure that students understood their work and were well prepared for any assessments or assignments. One student, who was a low achiever in reading, felt that her teachers expected her to do well because:

“...they think all kids have potential in life and need education to get there.”

How long students intended to stay on at school

The majority of students in Phases 1, 3 and 4, irrespective of whether they were high or low achievers, said they intended to stay on at school until Year 13, with a number expressing their intention to go to university or undertake further training after finishing school.

In Phase 1, four students told us that they would like to leave school as soon as they could. Three of these students had learning difficulties, according to their Year 8 teacher, which impacted on their achievement in particular subjects (one student was a low achiever in mathematics, reading and writing, while another was a low achiever in reading and writing), and on their overall enjoyment of school.

However, when students were asked again in Year 10 how long they thought they would stay on at school, only one of the four students from Phase 1 (and in fact the only student who answered the question in this way at this point), Ethan⁸³, indicated he wanted to leave as soon as possible:

“Just until I can leave, 16, I think. I don’t like school, it’s boring.”

Ethan

Ethan had physical, as well as emotional problems, which impacted on his classroom learning and social interactions. He had limited social skills and did not make friends very easily.

His Year 8 teacher indicated that Ethan had particular learning difficulties in mathematics, reading and writing and felt he would continue to need remedial help in the future. She thought he would find the move to secondary school difficult as he was not well-organised and found it hard to stay focussed on his work. She also felt he would miss the more personalised attention he received at primary school.

It was obvious when we interviewed Ethan in Year 9 that he was not happy at secondary school. He was also not progressing well academically. His form teacher in Year 9 described his overall achievement as below average and although he indicated that Ethan had learning difficulties it was unclear what type of remedial support, if any, had been provided for him during his first year at secondary school.

Unfortunately, things did not improve for Ethan the following year either. After almost a term in Year 10, his form teacher commented that he felt Ethan had lost ground, rather than made progress, and was falling further behind his peers.

⁸³ This is not the student’s real name (nor is it the name of any other student in our study).

Students' future aspirations

Form teachers of low achieving students were less likely to feel they knew these students well than form teachers of high achieving students.

The majority of students had ideas about the types of jobs they would like to do when they finished school and had completed further training, showing that they had some sense of the future.

Over the course of the study students told us they would like to be involved in a wide range of occupations. A considerable number of students aspired to be sports professionals, primarily in either rugby or rugby league, but also in cricket, and in one case, sailing. Another group of students mentioned the following professions – becoming a doctor, lawyer, architect, teacher, nurse, accountant, physiotherapist, pilot or engineer – while yet another group aspired to a place in either the armed forces or the police force. Other career choices involved something in the arts, such as a singer, musician, actor, writer, animator, book illustrator, or photographer. For the remaining students, their choices ranged from working in the IT field, running their own business, taking up a trade, doing something in the field of science (including astronomy), working with animals (veterinarian, zookeeper, animal trainer), and entering the travel industry, including as an air hostess.

High achieving students were more realistic in the types of future occupations they aspired to, in terms of how they were achieving academically, than the low achieving students.

By Phases 3 and 4 of the study, students appeared to be thinking more realistically about what they would like to do as a job in the future than they had during the first phase of the study when they were in Year 8. But although some students had ideas about their future, they didn't necessarily link a particular occupation with the necessary steps for achieving such a goal. The high achieving students were often more realistic in the types of future occupations they aspired to, in terms of how they were achieving academically, than the low achieving students. A number of the low achieving students in Phase 4 (and also in earlier phases), for example, said they wanted to be doctors, accountants, architects, lawyers, engineers, pilots and teachers.

Teachers' perceptions of students' learning and their achievement

Teachers were also asked questions about their views of students' learning.

What teachers thought about students' learning ability and their achievement

We found that the Year 9 form teachers often did not see their students throughout the day, apart from at form times, and therefore, unless they also took them for one of their other subjects, they did not know how the students were achieving in specific subject areas.

In Phase 3, the Year 9 form teachers were asked to describe students' overall level of achievement in mathematics, reading and writing. Form teachers of the low achieving students were much more likely to be unsure of their overall achievement levels than the form teachers of the high achieving students. This was particularly the case for mathematics.

The form teachers of the high achieving students provided more accurate assessments of how the students were performing than the form teachers of the low achieving students. The form teachers of almost all of the high achieving students thought these students were achieving well or very well in mathematics, reading and writing at the end of Year 9. On the other hand, the form teachers of the low achieving students were more optimistic about their students than their actual achievement would suggest: for example, they were more likely to rate these students as achieving at an 'average' level or above rather than as achieving 'not very well' or 'not very well at all'.

It could be suggested that, rather than knowing the students in their form classes well, the form teachers of the high achievers were instead simply making assumptions about their students' achievement based on them being in high ability classes. However, when we looked at teachers' responses to the question '*How well do you feel you know this student?*', we found that the form teachers of the high achievers were far more likely than the form teachers of the low achievers to feel they knew their students well or very well, and that they considered the students to be open and easy to relate to.

The form teachers of the low achievers, on the other hand, indicated that they did not know at least half of the students in their form class very well, despite

the students being in their form class for most of the year. The teachers considered that these students were not easy to get to know.

How teachers described students' overall progress at school

At each phase of the study, teachers provided a description of students' overall progress during the year in relation to their own performance.

It can be seen in Table 14, that at all four phases of the study, teachers were much more likely to consider that students had made 'very good' rather than 'excellent' progress.

Around 23 percent of Year 9 mathematics teachers and a very similar proportion of English teachers in Phase 3 indicated that their students had made only 'a bit' or 'very little' progress during the year.

Nine percent of Year 9 English teachers were unsure about the progress of students in their classes (Table

14). The teachers indicated they did not know these students very well yet and therefore were unable to comment on their progress as they had not been teaching them for very long, in most cases less than three months.

Not surprisingly, the teachers of the high achieving students at both primary and secondary school were more likely to describe the overall progress of these students as 'excellent'. This was particularly the case in Year 9 where mathematics teachers rated the progress of the majority of students in our top achievement quartile group as 'excellent' or 'very good', with the remaining students considered to have made 'quite good' progress. Overall, Year 8 teachers provided more favourable ratings of students' progress than the teachers at secondary school.

Table 14: How teachers described students' overall progress at school in Years 8, 9 and 10

Student made...	Phase 1 Year 8 teacher (N=110) %	Phase 2 Year 9 form teacher (N=99) %	Phase 3 Year 9 English teacher (N=89) %	Phase 3 Year 9 maths teacher (N=86) %	Phase 3 Year 9 form teacher (N=72) %	Phase 4 Year 10 form teacher (N=84) %
Excellent progress	8.2	19.2	5.6	10.5	12.5	11.9
Very good progress	35.5	26.3	28.1	24.4	38.9	34.5
Quite good progress	34.6	42.4	34.8	41.9	27.8	47.6
A bit of progress	18.2	7.1	14.6	15.1	11.1	2.4
Very little progress	2.7	2.0	7.9	8.1	2.8	3.6
Not sure	–	2.0	9.0	–	5.6	–
Missing data	0.9	1.0	–	–	1.4	–
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

How teachers described their relationship with students

Earlier in this report we looked at how students felt about their teachers at primary and secondary school. Teachers were also asked to comment on how well they felt they got on with their students.

Year 8 teachers were more likely to describe their relationships with students as 'excellent' than teachers at secondary school.

As shown in Table 15, Year 8 teachers were more likely than teachers at secondary school to describe their relationships with students as 'excellent'.

Table 15: How Years 8, 9 and 10 teachers described their relationship with students

Relationship with student is...	Phase 1 Year 8 teacher (N=110) %	Phase 3 Year 9 English teacher (N=89) %	Phase 3 Year 9 maths teacher (N=86) %	Phase 3 Year 9 form teacher (N=72) %	Phase 4 Year 10 form teacher (N=84) %
Excellent	52.7	32.6	25.6	40.3	47.6
Good	37.3	40.4	51.2	45.8	48.8
OK	6.4	22.5	18.6	9.7	2.4
Not very good	2.7	4.5	4.7	1.4	–
Not good at all	–	–	–	1.4	–
Other	–	–	–	–	–
Missing data	0.9	–	–	1.4	1.2
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Students' mathematics and English teachers in Year 9 were less positive about their relationships with students than their Year 8 teachers or form teachers in Years 9 and 10 were.

The teachers of the high achieving students in Years 8, 9 and 10 were generally more likely than the teachers of the low achievers to describe their relationships with students as 'excellent'.

Parents' perceptions of their child's learning and achievement

We have discussed the differing views of students and their teachers. We will now look at how parents viewed their child's learning and achievement.

What parents thought about their child's learning ability and their achievement

A considerable number of the parents of the low achieving students felt their child was doing well or very well in Year 8 and were satisfied with their progress.

The majority of the parents who sent back completed questionnaires at each phase of the study⁸⁴ indicated they were satisfied with the progress their child was making in Years 8, 9 and 10.⁸⁵

When we looked at how the parents of the low and high achieving students described the overall level of achievement of their child we found that the parents of the high achieving students were fairly accurate in their assessments of how well they thought

their child was doing in Year 8. The majority of the parents of the high achievers thought their child was achieving well or very well in mathematics, reading and writing.

Of concern was that a considerable number of the parents of the low achieving students also felt their child was doing well or very well in Year 8 and were satisfied with their progress. They told us that their assessments of their child's learning ability were mostly based on their own knowledge and understanding of the child, as well as information provided by the child's current class teacher, from school reports, and from teachers who had taught the child in previous years.

Almost all of the parents of the low achieving students who responded felt that their view of their child's ability would be the same as that of the school. However, in a number of cases the

⁸⁴ Sixty parents in Phase 1, 55 in Phase 2, 59 in Phase 3 and 62 in Phase 4.

⁸⁵ The parents of the high achieving students were more likely to send back their questionnaires than the parents of the low achievers.

reality was quite the contrary, as evidenced by our asTTle results and the teachers' assessments⁸⁶. From the data we collected during Phase 1 of the study, however, it is difficult to determine why some parents held conflicting views of their child's progress at school. It may be that teachers, for whatever reason, found it difficult to be honest with some parents about their child's learning ability or progress, perhaps fearing they would be doing harm by presenting too negative a picture. If this is the case, we need to find ways to better support teachers so they are confident to provide accurate feedback to parents and also guidance for parents on how they can better assist their child to achieve well.

Their child's future plans at school and beyond

In Phase 4, like the students themselves, the majority of parents (75%) felt their child would stay on at school until Year 13. A further 15 percent hoped their child would stay on until at least Year 12. But other parents (10%) were less specific, making comments such as:

"Until she gains enough qualifications to do what she wants to do as a career."

The parents of the high achieving students were slightly more likely to indicate that their child would stay on at school until Year 13.

Parents were also asked in Phase 4 whether they thought their child would carry on with further education and training after leaving secondary school and, if so, what sort of education or training that would involve.

Almost all parents who responded said their child would carry on with further education after leaving school, although just over a fifth (21%) did not specify what type of education or training that might be. A small number of parents (5%) were unsure what their child would be doing. Only one parent expected that their child would be getting a job as soon as they finished school.

Just under half (45%) of parents anticipated that their child would be going to university when they

finished their schooling. They mentioned a variety of courses they thought their children would undertake, including architecture, law, veterinary science, sports medicine, engineering, computing and teaching.

In contrast, several parents (12%) anticipated that their child would undertake a trade related course through a polytechnic, while others felt their child was still considering a number of different options.

In general, the parents of the high achieving students were slightly more likely to say their child would go to university. This particularly applied in the case of students who were high achievers in reading.

We also asked parents what type of job they thought their child would like to do in the future. We found that the parents of the high achieving students, and in particular, of students who were high achievers in reading and writing, were more likely than the parents of the low achievers to know the types of occupations their child was interested in and to provide similar answers to this question as their child. In saying that, around two-thirds of parents of low achieving students were also aware of the sort of work their child would like to do in the future.

Analysing the different perspectives of teachers and parents

Over the course of the study teachers and parents were asked a number of similar questions related to students' ability, enabling us to compare their different views. In the following section, we look more closely at how teachers' and parents' perceptions of how students were progressing at school differed.

Teachers' and parents' views of the highest qualification students were likely to achieve in the future

Table 16 presents the data showing how Years 8 and 9 teachers, as well as parents when their child was in Year 8, responded when asked about the highest qualification they felt students were likely to achieve in the future.

⁸⁶ Refer to the case study of Dana in Chapter 5 of this report.

Teachers were more likely than parents to predict that some students would achieve minimal, if any, formal qualifications in the future.

Teachers were more likely than students' parents to be of the opinion that, in the future, students would either gain no school qualifications or would achieve NCEA Level 1 qualifications only. As shown in Table 16, around a quarter of Year 9 mathematics teachers, 16 percent of Year 8 teachers and 12 percent of Year 9 English teachers felt this was the case, compared with just three percent of students' parents.

Parents on the other hand were just as likely as the Year 8 teachers (38%) to think their child would achieve an undergraduate or postgraduate degree.

There were also a number of both parents and teachers, however, who were unsure about the highest qualification students would achieve in the future.

Table 16: Teachers' and parents' views of the highest qualification students were expected to achieve in the future

Highest qualification student was expected to achieve	Phase 1 Year 8 teachers (N=110) %	Phase 3 Year 9 English teacher (N=89) %	Phase 3 Year 9 maths teachers (N=86) %	Phase 1 parents (N=60) %
Postgraduate degree	10.0	9.0	7.0	11.7
Undergraduate degree	28.2	19.1	26.7	26.7
Tertiary diploma	10.9	9.0	7.0	5.0
Trade Qualification	8.2	5.6	10.5	3.3
NCEA Level 3	3.6	9.0	2.3	5.0
NCEA Level 2	10.9	14.6	11.6	–
NCEA Level 1	10.0	9.0	15.1	3.3
None	6.4	3.4	9.3	–
Don't know/not sure	10.0	13.5	5.8	15.0
Other comments	0.9	4.5	2.3	23.3
Missing data	0.9	3.4	2.3	6.7
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: 'Other comments' included that it was too soon to specify the highest qualification the student was likely to achieve, that the student was capable of achieving any qualification they put their mind to or that it depended on the student's attitude and the support they receive.

We examined the data in Table 16 further by looking at whether there were differences in the ways in which the teachers and parents of high and low achieving students responded to the question about students' future qualifications.

Not surprisingly, the Year 8 teachers of the low achieving students were much more likely to consider that their students would not achieve any qualifications in the future or would achieve NCEA Level 1 qualifications only. These teachers were

also more likely to indicate being unsure about the qualifications students would achieve.

In contrast, the majority of the Year 8 teachers responding to this question in relation to the high achievers indicated that their students would achieve an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in the future.

There was very little difference in the opinions of the parents of the high and low achieving students generally. Parents of the low achievers in

mathematics and writing were just as likely as the parents of the high achievers in these two areas to indicate that their child would complete an undergraduate or postgraduate degree.

However, we did find that the parents of the high achievers in reading were slightly more likely than the parents of the low achievers in reading to indicate that their child would complete a degree qualification in the future; but interestingly, were also more likely to indicate being unsure of what qualifications their child would gain.

The few parents (8%) who stated that their child would achieve NCEA Level 1 or Level 3

qualifications⁸⁷, a trade qualification or a tertiary diploma were most likely to be the parents of low achieving students.

How teachers and parents perceived students' achievement

In Tables 17 and 18 following we have combined the information from parents, Year 8 teachers, Year 9 form teachers and Year 9 mathematics and English teachers to investigate their views further.

Table 17 shows parents' and teachers' perceptions of the achievement of the low achieving students in mathematics, reading and writing.

Points to note

- Teachers were asked to consider students' achievement in relation to other students in their class. As some class streaming existed in the two participating secondary schools this is likely to have some bearing on the Year 9 mathematics and English teachers' data, in particular for the high achieving students.
- The parents of the high achieving students were more likely to return their questionnaires than the parents of the low achievers.
- Caution is needed when interpreting the results in Tables 17 and 18 as the number of respondents is small. However, in saying that, the data do provide valuable insights worthy of further investigation.

⁸⁷ No parents indicated that their child would achieve NCEA Level 2 qualifications.

Class teachers in Year 8 were generally more likely than students' parents to indicate that the low achieving students were achieving 'below average' or at a 'very low' level. No parents considered their child's achievement was 'very low'.

While a number of parents did feel their child was achieving 'below average' in mathematics and reading, parents generally tended to be reasonably positive about their child's achievement, with a greater number rating their achievement as 'average, but very good in some aspects' or 'very good'. Just over half of the parents of low achievers in mathematics indicated in this way.

Similar proportions of Year 8 teachers and parents also rated students' overall achievement as 'average, but very good in some aspects' or 'very good'.

Year 9 mathematics teachers were more conservative in their views of students' achievement in Year 9 than their Year 8 teachers were. Although they did not rate any of their students as having 'very good' achievement they also did not consider that any students had 'very low' achievement. Year 9 English teachers, on the other hand, did rate some of their students' achievement as 'below average' or 'very low'.

A significant proportion of the form teachers of the low achievers at the end of Year 9 felt they were unable to comment on students' achievement because they did not know the students' situation well enough. This was particularly the case for mathematics.

It is obvious from the information detailed in Table 17 that, despite being low achievers, teachers considered the overall achievement of some of these students, in relation to other students in the class, as 'average', 'average, but very good in some aspects' or 'very good'.

The comments made by parents in the 'other rating' category included that they felt their child had not achieved as well as they could have done during the year, that their child was beginning to make improvements in particular subjects, that their child required further help if they were to improve, or that their child's schoolwork had suffered because of out-of-school sports commitments.

Table 17: How the achievement of **low** achieving students was perceived by parents and teachers

Achievement in mathematics	Phase 1		Phase 3	
	Parent in Year 8 (N=15)	Year 8 class teacher (N=25)	Year 9 form teacher (N=18)	Year 9 maths teacher (N=20)
Very good/excellent	1	4	2	–
Average, but very good in some aspects	7	8	2	7
Average/medium	2	5	4	7
Below average	3	6	2	4
Minimal/very low	–	2	–	–
Other rating	1	–	–	–
Not sure	1	–	8	–
Missing	–	–	–	2
Achievement in reading	Parent in Year 8 (N=13)	Year 8 class teacher (N=24)	Year 9 form teacher (N=16)	Year 9 English teacher (N=22)
Very good/excellent	2	2	1	3
Average, but very good in some aspects	3	7	1	4
Average/medium	2	8	6	8
Below average	4	6	3	5
Minimal/very low	–	1	–	2
Other rating	2	–	–	–
Not sure	–	–	5	–
Achievement in writing	Parent in Year 8 (N=11)	Year 8 class teacher (N=20)	Year 9 form teacher (N=14)	Year 9 English teacher (N=16)
Very good/excellent	3	2	1	1
Average, but very good in some aspects	2	4	–	6
Average/medium	3	8	6	5
Below average	–	5	3	2
Minimal/very low	–	1	–	2
Other rating	3	–	–	–
Not sure	–	–	3	–
Missing	–	–	1	–

Note: Questionnaires were not returned by all parents and teachers. Therefore the totals in each column vary and are less than the total number of low and high achieving students analysed earlier in this report.

In contrast, Table 18 shows how parents and teachers, before and after the Year 8 to Year 9 transition, perceived the level of progress of students in the highest achievement quartile in mathematics, reading and writing.

There was a much closer match between the views of the parents and teachers of the high achieving students, before and after transition, than there was for the parents and teachers of the low achieving students. The majority of parents and teachers described the achievement of the high achievers

as 'very good' or 'average, but very good in some aspects'. Respondents, however, were more likely to choose the most positive rating of 'very good' than they were to choose 'average, but very good in some aspects'.

Year 9 form teachers appeared to know more about the achievement of the high achieving students in their class than the form teachers of the low achievers did. Just one form teacher of the high achieving students was unsure of their achievement in mathematics and English.

Table 18: How the achievement of the **high** achieving students was perceived by parents and teachers

	Phase 1		Phase 3	
	Parent in Year 8 (N=16)	Year 8 class teacher (N=19)	Year 9 form teacher (N=16)	Year 9 maths teacher (N=18)
Achievement in mathematics				
Very good/excellent	9	13	11	9
Average, but very good in some aspects	5	4	2	7
Average/medium	2	2	–	2
Below average	–	–	–	–
Minimal/very low	–	–	–	–
Not sure	–	–	1	–
Missing	–	–	2	–
Achievement in reading	Parent in Year 8 (N=18)	Year 8 class teacher (N=21)	Year 9 form teacher (N=19)	Year 9 English teacher (N=20)
Very good/excellent	11	13	15	15
Average, but very good in some aspects	2	4	2	3
Average/medium	5	3	1	2
Slow/below average	–	1	–	–
Minimal/very low	–	–	–	–
Not sure	–	–	1	–
Achievement in writing	Parent in Year 8 (N=14)	Year 8 class teacher (N=19)	Year 9 form teacher (N=18)	Year 9 English Teacher (N=18)
Very good/excellent	7	13	15	12
Average, but very good in some aspects	3	4	2	4
Average/medium	2	1	1	2
Below average	1	1	–	–
Minimal/very low	–	–	–	–
Other rating	1	–	–	–

Note: Questionnaires were not returned by all parents and teachers. Therefore the totals in each column vary and are less than the total number of low and high achieving students analysed earlier in this report.

Summary of the perceptions of students, teachers and parents

Students generally had a higher perception of their own overall learning ability than our asTTle results and their teachers' assessments of them indicated. In Year 9, around a quarter of mathematics and English teachers felt their students had made only 'a bit' or 'very little' progress during Year 9.

Irrespective of whether they were high or low achievers, the majority of students in Phases 1, 3 and 4 said they intended to stay on at school until Year 13, with a number expressing their intention to go to university or undertake further training after finishing school. However, a number of teachers were of the opinion that, in the future, students would either gain no school qualifications or would achieve NCEA Level 1 qualifications only.

We found that Year 8 teachers were more likely to describe their relationships with students as 'excellent' than the teachers at secondary school. The teachers of the high achieving students in Year 8, as well as in Years 9 and 10, however, were more likely overall to describe their relationship as 'excellent' than the teachers of the low achievers.

In many cases, form teachers at secondary school did not see their students throughout the day, apart from at form time, and often did not appear to know how their students were achieving in specific subject areas. The form teachers of the high achieving students in Year 9, however, appeared to know more about the achievement of these students in their particular subject classes than the form teachers of the students in the lowest achievement quartile. The form teachers of the low achieving students were more likely to be unsure of how the students were achieving and less likely to feel they knew these students well.

By the end of Year 9, students in our study were less likely to consider they did interesting or fun things in class or tried new or different things. They also felt their teachers listened to, or used their ideas, less than they had in Year 8, were less likely to ask for their opinions and were also less likely to make sure that everyone understood what they were required to do.

Although a large number of students agreed that the work at secondary school was more demanding or challenging after a term in Year 9, by the time they reached Year 10 they were finding the work less so. They were also less likely in Year 10 to indicate that they found the work more interesting than they had the previous year.

Towards the end of their first term in Year 9, the low achieving students were slightly more likely than the high achieving students to indicate that the work at secondary school was more demanding or challenging. However, by the end of Year 9 the situation reversed, with the high achieving students now more likely to be finding the work more demanding or challenging.

The low achieving students were generally more likely than the high achievers to consider they were repeating work they had already done and, interestingly, were more likely to consider that the work at secondary school was easier.

There was a much closer match between the views of the parents and the teachers of the high achieving students, before and after the transition, than there was for the parents and the teachers of the low achieving students. The parents of the high achieving students were fairly accurate in their assessments of how well they thought their child was doing in Year 8, with the majority considering their child was achieving well or very well in mathematics, reading and writing. Of concern was that a considerable number of the parents of the low achieving students also felt their child was doing well or very well in Year 8 and were satisfied with their progress. Almost all of these parents felt that their view of their child's ability would be the same as that of the school.