

# When Students Move from Primary to Secondary School: Feedback for Students

SEPTEMBER 2005

We are very pleased you have been involved in our research looking at what it is like for students as they move from primary to secondary school. You are one of around 100 students who have taken part in Wellington and Auckland and we are very grateful for your participation. It has been great getting to know you over the past 18 months and to hear of your experiences at school.

There is information that says that students can find it a big change when they move from primary to secondary school and that this change can sometimes influence how well they get on in their school work. We were interested to hear how things were for you when you changed schools and what you thought were the best things about being at secondary school and what you found the worst or hardest things were for you about your new school. It is extremely valuable to hear what students have to say as this helps a lot to increase our understanding of what students are really going through.

The brief report which follows details some of the things you have told us over the course of the study, as well as the results from the tests you did for us in reading, writing and maths. We hope you enjoy reading it.

Thanks again for taking part

Sharon, Shelley and Fred  
On behalf of the Research Team

## What you said before going to secondary school

When you were still in Year 8 (your last year at primary or intermediate school), we asked you to say one word to describe how you felt about going on to secondary school.

Just over one-third of you said that you felt “Excited”, “Happy”, or “Good”. Most often, those of you who answered this way said you were looking forward to learning new subjects and meeting new people — both students and teachers. Some of you were also glad that you had older friends or relations at the new school or had got to know a bit about the school already. As well, some of you said you were ready to move on in your life, and were looking forward to being more grown up.

But a lot more of you described yourselves as “Nervous”, “Scared” or “Sad” at the thought of going on to secondary school. You said things like “I dread it” or “I’m very nervous — it’s a huge step”.

Those of you who were worried about secondary school before you went there often mentioned that you were scared about the “bigger kids” and getting bullied. Other times, you were worried about having to make new friends, whether you would “fit in”, and whether you would be able to handle what you thought would be much harder work and more of it.

Other fears you had included getting lost in a much bigger, unfamiliar school, getting into trouble for being late for class, having lots more teachers, and what you thought would be “much stricter” teachers.

Other things that made you sad or worried included having to leave favourite teachers and younger friends or brothers and sisters behind in your old school. And a few of you were nervous because it was a big ‘change’ and you just didn’t know what to expect:

*“I’m worrying ‘what if I don’t know what I’m supposed to do or say’.”*

A few of you said you were feeling both “Nervous and excited” or “Happy and sad” about going on to secondary school. Although those of you who answered like this had some concerns about how you would cope with things that were different from being at primary school, you were looking forward to new challenges and experiences at secondary school.

The information above shows that many of you were quite fearful of ‘the unknown’ when the time approached for you to move on to secondary school.

### **What you hoped secondary school would be like**

From your answers to other questions, we also found out that you had certain ideas about what secondary school would be like. For example, you hoped that you would experience new challenges and opportunities there; have the chance to meet and make friends with lots of different young people; have a greater choice of subjects, and be able to learn new and different things.

Quite a lot of you also looked forward to having greater sporting opportunities, especially being able to play in school teams against other schools, while others were keen to have more opportunities in music and drama.

This is important information for teachers in both primary and secondary schools to know about.

### **What you would like teachers to know about you**

As well as what you hoped secondary school would be like, you told us that it is very important to you for teachers to know things about you as a person. For example, a lot of you said you would like teachers to know that you are good at something or have special qualities, such as a positive attitude to life, willingness to work hard, the ability to get on well with others, do well

### **The sorts of things you or other students would like your teachers to know or pass on about you :**

- *“That I like being with my friends. That I enjoy maths, and computers.”*
- *“They might say how good, and responsible and trustworthy I am and how good at writing I am. I’d like them to pass on how I can speak two languages and how I like reading and stuff.”*
- *“I get along very well and I learn and I adapt to new things. That I can learn very quickly.”*
- *“That I’m a very confident person. That I get along with everyone. And I can work by myself. But that I talk all the time!”*
- *“That I am well-behaved. That I can follow instructions. That I can cooperate with other kids and can set goals and achieve them.”*
- *“That I like sports and playing guitar.”*
- *“That I am well behaved and that I enjoy school and I always have a positive attitude to what I do.”*
- *“Maybe, that I got all ‘A’s’ last year. That I’m good at my work.”*
- *“That I work well with friends so they don’t split you up.”*
- *“Probably about the stuff I’ve done with my music and all. The college might then give you more opportunities to do things with music or whatever you’re good at.”*
- *“That I’m a kind person.”*
- *“I’m a hard worker and I behave well.”*
- *“Good at sport. Outgoing. That I’m fit, healthy and strong.”*
- *“Good behaviour. Good at reading, maths and English.”*
- *“That I will go all the way through college.”*
- *“I’m a hard worker, polite, reliable and trusting.”*
- *“I try hard.”*
- *“Well behaved. I like sport, hands-on stuff rather than academic stuff.”*

in your schoolwork, sports or other activities, or behave well or take on responsibilities. The shaded box opposite has just a few examples of some of the things that you said you would like teachers to know about you.

Some of you also said you specially wanted it to be known that you sometimes have difficulties and that you may need understanding and practical help with these:

*“I’d like teachers to know I have got a difficulty learning. That it’s a little bit hard for me to learn and you have to repeat things more than once.”*

### How you found secondary school when you arrived there

Although you may have had fears about secondary school before you went there, our study shows that after almost one school term at secondary school, almost all of you said you were enjoying school, most of the time anyway! You especially liked meeting up with friends at school. And even though some of you were still missing your old school at the end of Year 9, the majority of you said you now preferred to be at secondary school.

Most of you also felt you got used to things like finding your way around your new school and getting to class on time, wearing a uniform, and having several teachers, quite quickly. But although you said this, many of you also said Year 9 had been quite a “topsy-turvy” year for you as you got used to longer school days, different teachers expecting different things from you, making new friends, balancing all the things you have to do, especially homework, and getting used to other changes in your life as well.

### The tests you did for us

As you will remember, you did tests for us in reading, writing and mathematics at each of the four times we came to talk to you, which was a lot of work for you!

The tests we used are called asTTle. asTTle stands for ‘Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning’.

asTTle is a software package (it has won a special prize for excellence) that schools can use to develop tests designed to show teachers the sorts of things that students can do well in their reading, writing and maths, and show where they might need help with particular parts of their learning.

We used asTTle because we wanted to see if your test scores soon after you moved to secondary school were different from your test scores when you were still in Year 8 (form 2). We also wanted to see if there were any changes in your scores in reading, writing and maths at the end of Year 9, and again in Year 10.

Some people think that the transition to secondary school can change how well students’ get on in their schoolwork for awhile and we wanted to see if this seems to be true for New Zealand students.

Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning  
He Pūnaha Aromatawai mō te Whakaako me te Ako

asTTle

# WRITING

First Name

Last Name

School Name

Room Number / Class

For teacher use only

Objectives	Audience	Content	Structure	Language Resources	Grammar	Punctuation	Spelling
Level <2B to >6A							

Test Name: Phase 4 Writing Owner: asTTle Created 31/03/2005 12:42

Although the tests were different each time you did them, the sorts of questions were kept much the same each time (in terms of the sorts of skills you need to have or the things you need to know to answer them).

The difficulty levels of items in the asTTle tests used for this study were mainly between levels 2 and 4 of the curriculum (what you learn about at school).

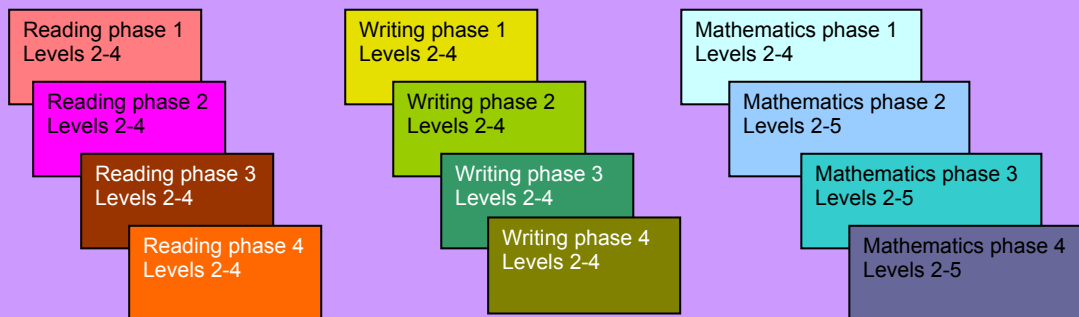


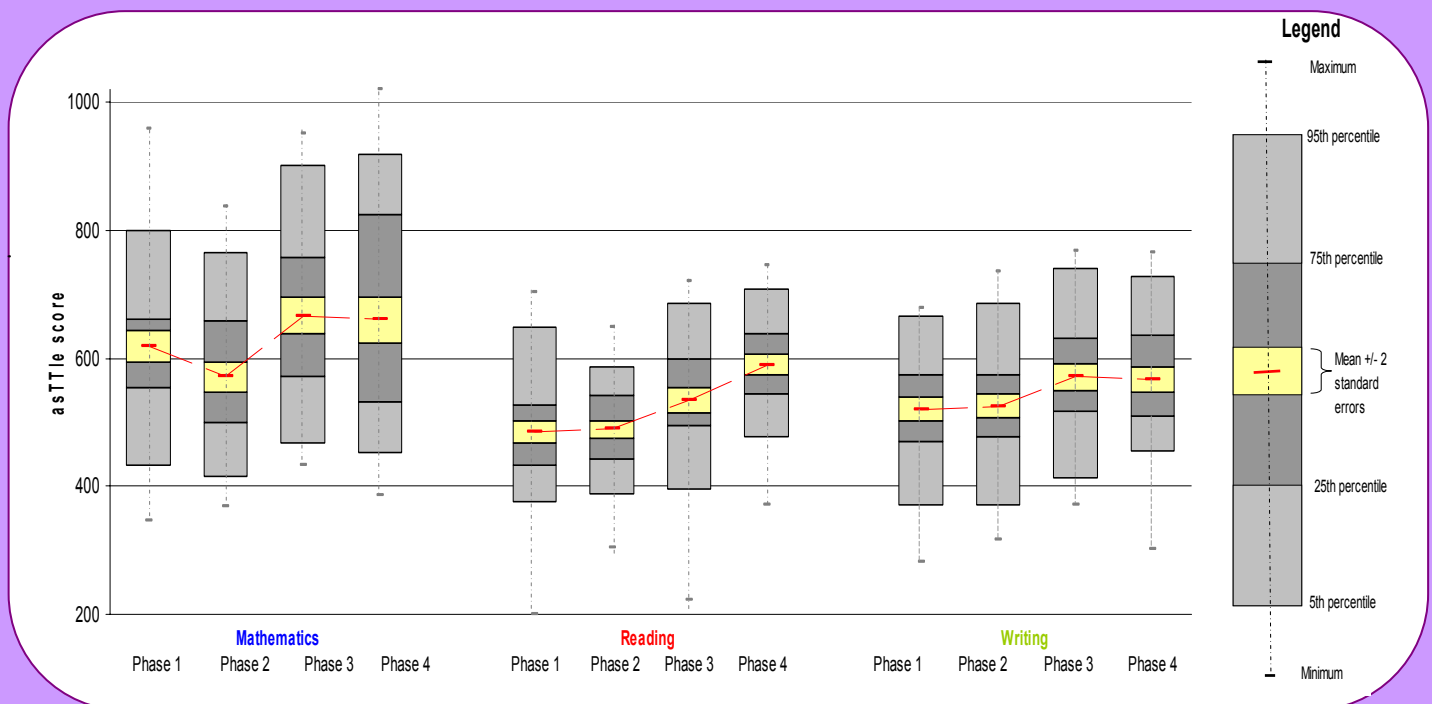
Figure 1 below shows that when you first started at secondary school (Phase 2 of the study), for most of you, your scores were lower in reading and maths than they had been at primary school (Phase 1). This was especially the case in maths. This was perhaps because you were still getting used to everything in your new school.

But as you can also see, by the end of your first year at secondary school, your scores in each subject were higher than they had been when you were in primary school. This meant progress had been made during the year.

When we tested you again at the end of Term 1 this year (Phase 4) different patterns emerged for each of the subjects you were tested in. While most of you had made progress in reading since the end of the previous year (Phase 3) your writing scores generally remained similar to those obtained in Phase 3.

In maths, the results for Phase 4 were more wide spread than for reading and writing. Although some of you increased your maths scores from Phase 3, slightly more of you either scored at a similar level to the end of the previous year or at a slightly lower level.

**Figure 1: How students' asTTle scores changed between Phase 1 (November 2003), Phase 2 (April 2004), Phase 3 (October 2004) and Phase 4 (April 2005)**



You may remember that before beginning each test you were asked six attitudinal questions, such as how much you liked the particular subject and how good you thought you were at it.

As you can see in Figure 2 on the next page, most of you said you did not like reading, writing and maths as much when you were at secondary school as you did when you were still at primary or intermediate school.

However, how much you liked a subject did not seem to make much difference to how well you did in the asTTle test for that subject.

It is important for us to know that most of you say you do not like reading, writing and maths so much when you get to secondary school and we will look at all the other information you have given us so we can learn more about that.





But we were glad to hear that, for many of you, there were lots of things about your subjects at secondary school that you do like, at least some of the time. Different people have different views about their favourite subjects and the ones they don't like much at all.

You also told us that although you might like a particular subject most of the time, sometimes you didn't like it because of a particular topic or activity you were doing at the time. And sometimes you were put off your favourite subject because you found the way it was being taught was too boring (eg, too much writing / taking notes), or what you were doing at the time was either too easy (maybe because you'd done it before), or too hard and not explained very clearly.

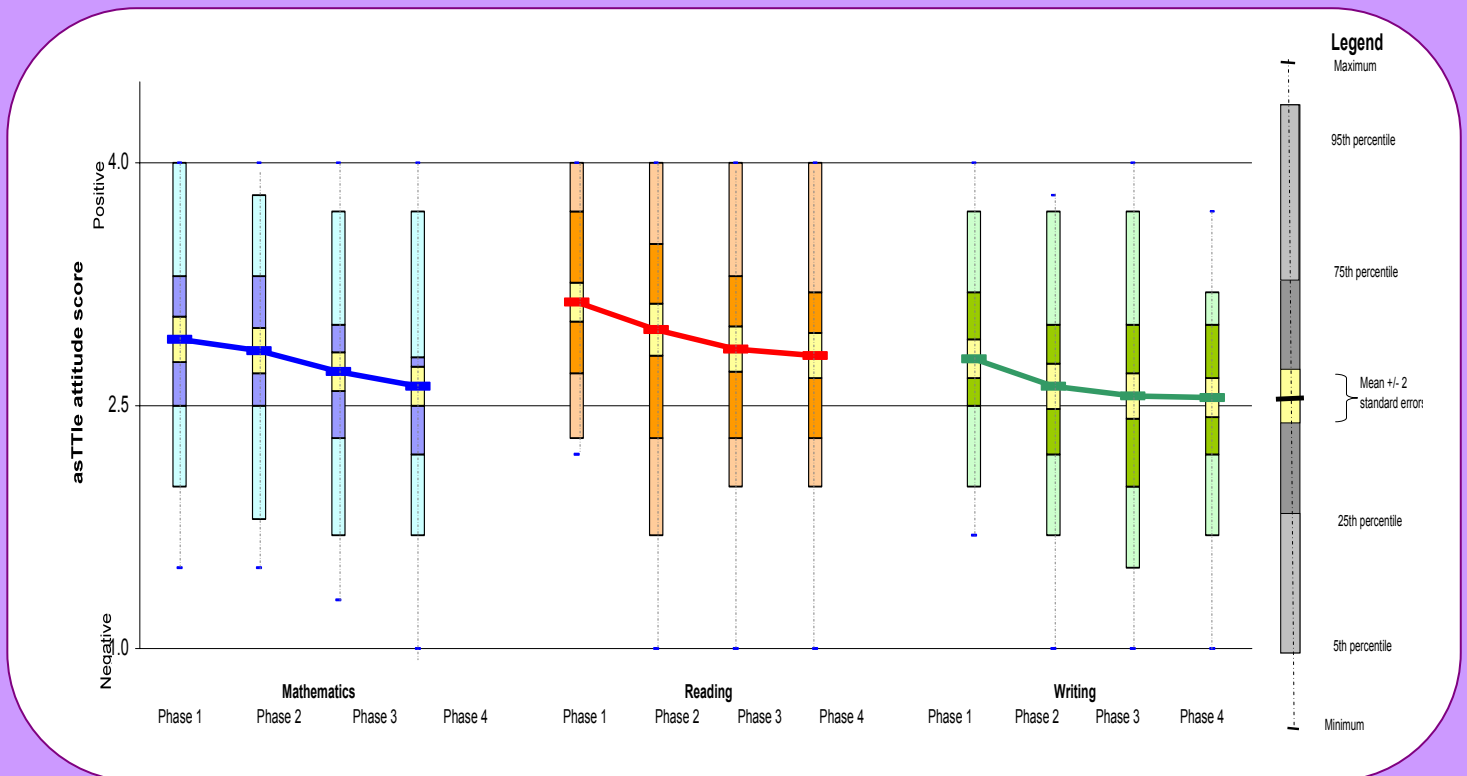
Another thing you told us is that you often really like a subject because of the teacher:

*“I enjoy social studies. The teacher, she’s really cool. She explains so we understand. And she jokes with us so it’s not boring.”*

*“Maths is one of my favourite subjects now. I really like the teacher and he makes it really fun.”*

Tick the box that is <b>closest</b> to how <b>you</b> feel about each question	1 	2 	3 	4 
A1. How much do you like reading at school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A2. How good do you think you are at reading?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A3. How good does your teacher think you are at reading?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A4. How good does your Mum or Dad think you are at reading?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A5. How much do you like reading in your own time (not at school)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A6. How do you feel about going to a library to get something to read?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Figure 2: How students' scores about how they felt about reading, writing and maths changed between Phase 1 (November 2003), Phase 2 (April 2004), Phase 3 (October 2004) and Phase 4 (April 2005)**



### What you liked best about your teachers

Each time we talked to you we asked what you liked best about your teachers. One of the things you told us is that you really like it when teachers have a sense of humour:

*“I like it when they aren’t so serious and they can turn work into fun — not just boring stuff all the time. I like it when some comments are turned into jokes.”*

Another thing you really value is when teachers are “good at explaining”.

You also said the teachers you like best are the ones who relate well to young people, take an interest in them, listen to what they had to say, and understand and respect them:

*“Because they treat us like teenagers, not like little kids. They have respect for us. They talk to us how we want to be talked to. They listen to us and they give us chances. One teacher [told us she] was a naughty girl [at school] and she understands us. We respect her.”*

## What you don't like so much about teachers

Some of the things you don't like about some teachers is when they tell people off a lot, when they don't treat people the same (aren't fair), when they don't make learning fun or seem relevant or important to you, when they don't listen to what you have to say, and when they don't seem to like young people much, or respect them for who they are.

*"I don't like it when they [some of them] get angry all the time for reasons we don't understand."*

*"...when they don't listen, when they shout at us, and when they treat us like five-year-olds."*

## How teachers could help you more with work

When you were in Year 9, we asked you if you thought there were more things you would like the teachers to do to help you with your work. Some of the things you said would help you were teachers explaining better what they expected from you, making your school work more interesting, relevant and fun, and less boring, and letting you work more in small groups in class and have more chance to talk about your work with other students.

*"I'd like them to explain their expectations better — what they expect of you. I get a shock sometimes at what you have to do here at this school."*

*"Would be good to have more fun activities — when it's boring we want to talk and they get angry. We would probably behave better if it was more fun."*

*"I used to like science — but there are no interesting experiments now. Science is not as interesting as it was in Years 7 and 8 or as interesting as I thought it would be. There's too much just writing. It doesn't seem like an important subject anymore."*

## Some other information

Most of you said you expected or hoped to stay on at school until Years 12/13, although a few of you said you would like to leave right now. You also told us about the sorts of things you would like to do in the future. For example, some of you mentioned that you might like to travel overseas, study at polytech or university, operate your own business, or work in a wide range of jobs including being an architect, computer animator, chef, physiotherapist, teacher, air steward, musician, underwater photographer, aircraft engineer, mechanic, doctor, counsellor, or a professional sportsperson, to mention just a few.

## Getting more information

We will let you know more about the study a bit later on. In the meantime, if you would like to ask any questions, you can contact us on:

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