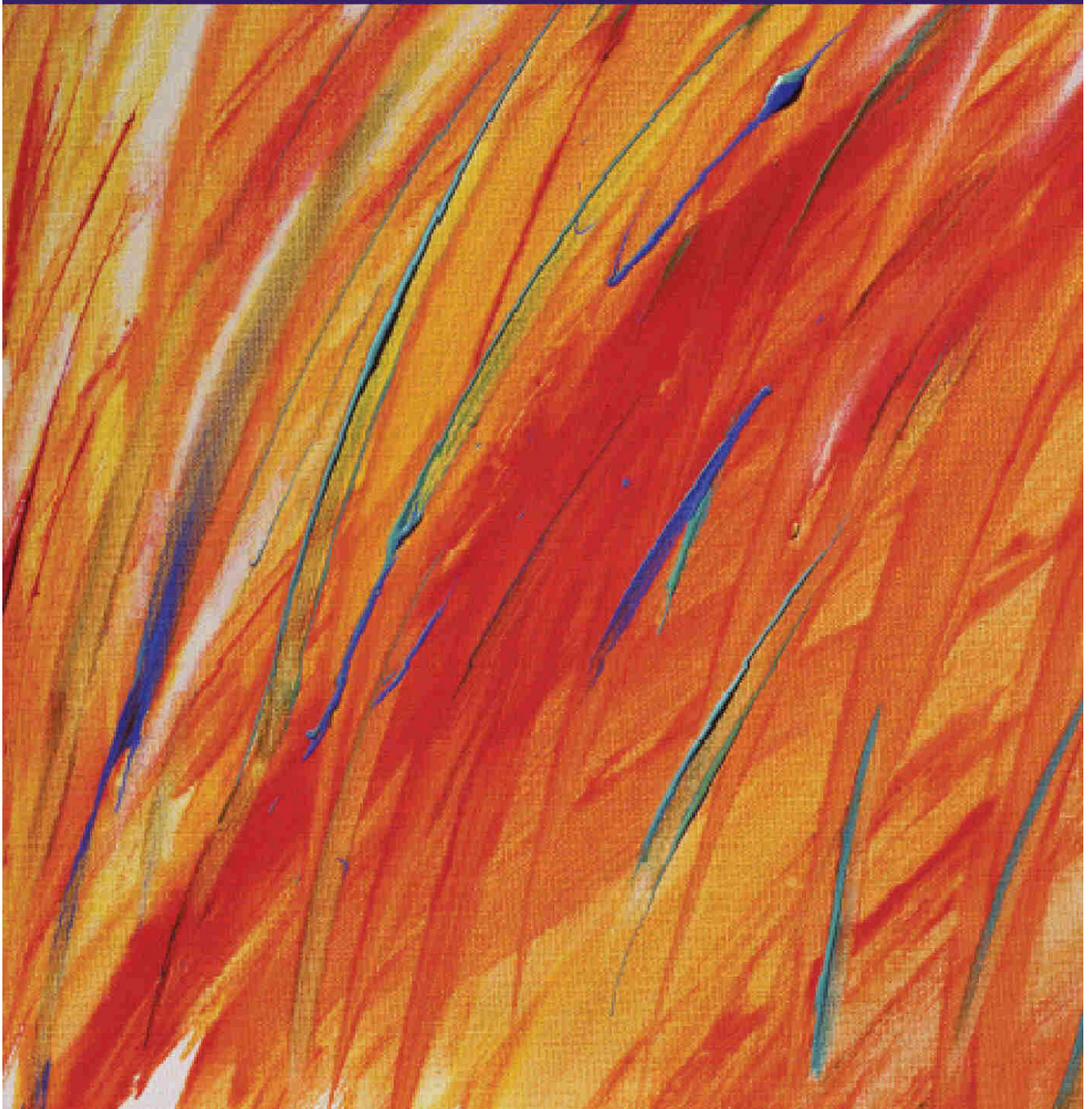




MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

TE Tīkirihi o te Māhara

**A Study of the Use of  
School Entry Assessment  
(SEA) in Schools**



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School Entry Assessment  
(SEA) in Schools

Authors

Sharon Dewar  
with Maree Telford

Research Division Ministry of Education

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## PREFACE

School Entry Assessment (SEA) was introduced into New Zealand primary schools in 1997. Its purpose was to fulfil a need for a standardised assessment procedure that could be used by teachers to determine the nature and extent of certain knowledge and skills shown by new entrant children when they begin school.

The intention was that SEA results would be used in two main ways: as helpful feedback for teachers about individual children in their class and to contribute to a national picture of the range of knowledge and skills available to children when they begin their schooling. There is not, however, any requirement for schools to use SEA.

SEA assesses aspects of children's literacy, numeracy, and oral language. It has three components, one devoted to each of these areas:

- Concepts about Print (literacy);
- Checkout (numeracy); and
- Tell Me (oral language).

The three components have remained unchanged in the time that SEA has been available to schools. But recent advances in early literacy and numeracy research and the introduction of alternative assessment strategies, such as the New Zealand Early Numeracy Project (ENP), led the Ministry of Education to initiate a review of SEA. Two separate evaluations were undertaken in 2001 to determine the extent to which teachers and schools were using SEA and to obtain information which would inform any decisions on whether changes may need to be made to one or more components of SEA.

The Ministry's aim in seeking a review of SEA was to not only gain an insight into how a greater number of schools might be encouraged to use SEA to inform teaching and learning in the classroom, but also to enhance the collation and analysis of SEA data in order to build a national picture of the sorts of knowledge and skills new entrant children possess soon after they enter school.

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Sharon Dewar

Maree Telford

## BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

School Entry Assessment (SEA) is an assessment package which assesses some of the literacy and numeracy skills new entrant children have when they first begin school. It was first introduced in New Zealand schools in 1997.

In August 2001, a sample of schools was surveyed to determine the extent of SEA usage in schools and to obtain information which would inform any decision on whether changes may need to be made to one or more components of the SEA kit.

Questionnaires were completed by over 80 percent of the schools and 64 percent of the new entrant teachers surveyed.

Results showed that:

- SEA was used in well over half (59%) of primary schools during 2001.
- Twenty-eight percent of schools were not using SEA in 2001.
- Only a third (31%) of schools were sending in SEA summary data to the Ministry of Education for analysis.
- The majority (86%) of teachers using SEA in 2001 'always' used Concepts about Print when they assessed a child compared with just 46 percent who 'always' used Tell Me.
- Teachers were more positive about using Concepts about Print than they were about using the other two SEA components.
- The Tell Me component was generally considered to be time-consuming and difficult to administer.
- As well as identifying positive aspects about SEA, two-thirds (67%) of new entrant teachers using SEA in 2001 felt that SEA needed to be updated or modified.
- Teachers most often commented on ways in which Tell Me could be updated or modified.

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## BACKGROUND

The main purpose of school-based assessment is to improve students' learning and the quality of learning programmes. When children first begin school they bring with them a wide range of skills. The School Entry Assessment (SEA) kit presents tasks for children that help teachers to observe what literacy and numeracy skills new entrant children have when they first begin school. The tasks in the kit enable children to demonstrate what they understand and what they can do in oral language, and in aspects of early literacy and numeracy. They also provide a framework, using a consistent set of criteria that can be added to depending on the child and the setting, for describing children's understanding and skills. While tasks in the SEA kit are focused around three key learning areas, the assessment processes involved also provide a teacher with opportunities to interact with individual children, and to closely observe their approach to learning.

There are three distinct components of the SEA kit: a reading task based on Concepts about Print (developed by Dame Marie Clay)<sup>1</sup>, a story retelling task — Tell Me (developed by Professor Stuart McNaughton), and a numeracy assessment using a supermarket game — Checkout (developed by Dr Jenny Young-Loveridge).

The SEA kit became available for use in schools in 1997 and training for teachers on how to administer the different components was provided during 1997 and 1998. All schools with students at the primary level were invited to send a teacher to these training sessions. Since then, professional development in the use of SEA has been a component of other professional development programmes, rather than as a stand-alone programme. In 2001, for example, SEA training was part of the *Assessment for Better Learning* professional development programme.

SEA assessments are intended to be carried out within a few weeks of each new entrant starting school. The individual results are scored on record sheets and can be used to gauge new entrants' skills in, and understanding of, the selected aspects of early literacy and numeracy covered by the SEA tasks, and to plan appropriate teaching and learning activities based on the results. Schools are also encouraged to summarise individual children's results (using the data sheets provided) and to send them to the Ministry of Education, where they are collated on a database and analysed to provide a national picture. Over the past two years, schools that sent in their summary data to the Ministry have received feedback on how their new entrants' compare with national averages, as well as two reports on the national results<sup>2</sup>.

Although the Ministry of Education is aware of the number of schools that both use SEA and send their summary data to the Ministry for analysis, the extent to which there are schools that use SEA but do not send in data is essentially unknown. In light of the Ministry's aim to encourage a greater number of schools to use SEA and to enhance the central collation and analysis of SEA data, two evaluations were planned. The collective purpose of the evaluations, both carried out in 2001, was to determine the extent to which teachers and schools were using SEA<sup>3</sup>, and provide sound information on whether changes to individual components of the SEA kit were likely to be necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> Concepts about Print was originally developed as part of a comprehensive survey of children's progress in reading and writing which is usually administered around a child's sixth birthday. The survey is referred to as the six-year-net. Permission was given by the author, Dame Marie Clay, for it to be used as one of the components of SEA.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education. (1999). *School Entry Assessment: The First National Picture — July 1997–May 1998*. Wellington: Research Division, Ministry of Education. and Ministry of Education. (2001). *School Entry Assessment: June 1997–December 2000*. Wellington: Research Division, Ministry of Education.

<sup>3</sup> The assessment kit was also developed in Te Reo Maori as Aro Matawai Urunga-ä-Kura (AKA). The current evaluation, however, focuses on the use of SEA only. An evaluation of what teachers think of AKA, how they use it, and what modifications they consider are needed to improve the kit, was undertaken in 2001 by Bishop, R, Berryman, M, and Richardson, C, under contract to the Ministry of Education.

More specifically, the Australian Council for Educational Research Limited (ACER) was contracted by the Ministry of Education to evaluate the technical and methodological aspects of SEA: that is, to determine whether changes needed to be made to the ways in which SEA data were analysed, whether there should be changes in the design of the instruments in order to improve their validity, and whether individual components of SEA needed to be updated or modified to improve their reliability. The results of the ACER evaluation are reported separately<sup>4</sup>.

The second evaluation was undertaken by the Ministry's Research Division to establish the extent to which teachers and schools were using SEA, find out what teachers thought about each SEA component, and, along with their reasons, whether they felt that any components needed to be revised. The present report details the results from this second evaluation.

## Research Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the study was to establish the extent to which teachers and schools were using SEA.

The particular objectives were to determine:

- how widespread the use of SEA is in schools;
- why schools or teachers are not currently using the kit and whether they use other forms of assessment instead of SEA;
- the ways in which schools and teachers use the SEA kit;
- who carries out the assessments;
- when the assessments are carried out;
- the main ways in which SEA is used in schools;
- whether SEA simply confirms what teachers already know about their new entrants or whether it provides them with additional information;
- whether teachers complete summary data for each component of SEA and how they use this information to make decisions at the child, class and school level.
- whether schools send in summary data sheets for all children they assess by means of SEA to the Ministry of Education;
- with whom teachers share SEA information (eg, parents, other teachers, and/or the principal);
- whether teachers specifically link SEA results for an individual child to a teaching/learning framework;
- how teachers learned to use SEA;
- what teachers' experience is of using SEA;
- teachers' views on or attitudes towards each component of SEA; and
- whether the Ministry of Education needs to look at updating or revising all or some components of SEA and, if so, what specific changes would need to be made.

## Method

In order to select a representative sample of schools to participate in the study, primary schools were grouped by whether or not they had sent in SEA summary data to the Ministry of Education. As at August 2001, Ministry records showed that 319 primary schools had sent in SEA data for 2001 and that a further 379 had sent in summary data in one or more of the years between 1997 and 2000, but not in 2001. A large majority (N=1,547) of primary schools had never submitted SEA summary data sheets for analysis by the Ministry.

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson, P, Lindsey, J, Schulz, W, Monseur, C, Meiers, M, (2001). An Evaluation of the Technical and Methodological Aspects of the School Entry Assessment Kit. Camberwell, Australia: ACER. Copies of this report are available on request from the Research Division, Ministry of Education, P O Box 1666, Wellington or can be obtained through the Ministry's website: [www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz).

A random sample of 40 percent of schools that had ever sent in summary data to the Ministry was first selected to participate in the study. The sample was stratified according to whether schools had (a) submitted data in 2001 (N=127), or (b) submitted data in any of the previous four years but not in 2001 (N=150).

Although Ministry records showed that 1,547 schools had never submitted summary data, it was recognised that teachers in these schools may nevertheless still have been using SEA. In order to obtain as complete a picture of SEA usage as possible — that is, by ascertaining the extent to which there were schools that used SEA but did not send summary data into the Ministry of Education and the extent to which there were schools that had not used SEA at all — a second random sample, comprising 20 percent (N=299) of schools that had never sent in SEA data, was also selected.

A total sample of 576 schools was drawn.

Two questionnaires were designed for the study:

- a school-level questionnaire, to be completed by the person with responsibility for new entrant classes in each sampled school, designed to provide an overall school perspective of the use of SEA in schools; and
- a questionnaire to be completed by each regular classroom teacher in the school who had new entrants in their class at any time during 2001.

As the exact number of teachers with new entrant children in any one school was unknown, an estimated number of teacher questionnaires (ranging from one to four questionnaires) was sent to each school, based on the number of five-year-olds in the school. If a school had more than four teachers of new entrants, further questionnaires were available on request from the Research Division.

In late August 2001, questionnaires were mailed to the principals of the 576 selected schools with a letter requesting that the questionnaires be distributed to the appropriate staff. All questionnaires were to be returned directly to the Ministry of Education by September 2001.

## Response Rates

Of the three ‘groups’ of schools selected to take part in the study, 94 percent (N=120) of those that had sent in summary data in 2001 returned completed school-level questionnaires, whereas 81 percent (N=122) of schools that had submitted summary data between 1997 and 2000 (but not in 2001) did so. In addition, 84 percent (N=250) of the schools that had never sent in summary data, returned completed school questionnaires.

On the basis of information in the school-level questionnaires received, there were an estimated 896 teachers in the schools that participated in the study who had new entrants in their classes in 2001. Completed teacher questionnaires were received from 572 new entrant teachers, yielding a response rate of approximately 64 percent.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> There was not always a direct match between school-based and individual teacher questionnaires — that is, in a few cases, a school-level questionnaire was received but no teacher questionnaire(s) from the same school; sometimes the reverse situation occurred. For this reason, teacher numbers may not be exact.

## **Points to Note when Reading this Report**

The report is divided into two sections. Section One details the results from the school-level questionnaire and provides a general overview of SEA usage in schools. Section Two then details the results from the questionnaire that was completed by new entrant teachers and provides more specific information on how SEA is used and what teachers think about each of the three components of SEA. It is likely that, in many schools, the person who completed the school-level questionnaire also completed an individual teacher questionnaire.

### **Section One**

The data in most of the tables in Section One have been ‘weighted’. This is because schools were randomly selected to take part in the study from three different ‘groups’ of schools, based on when or whether the school had sent SEA data into the Ministry of Education. As the proportions of schools sampled in each group differed, the data were weighted to ensure that views expressed by any particular group of schools were neither under or over-represented in relation to the other groups. The total number of primary schools in each of the three groups prior to being sampled was used to weight the data obtained from school respondents.

In Tables 3, 5, and 6, however, which detail comments made by schools in response to three openended questions, the data (percentages) presented are simply a proportion of the total number of comments made in response to each question.

### **Section Two**

The questionnaire for new entrants was divided into two parts. Part one was to be completed by all new entrant teachers irrespective of whether they were using SEA in 2001. Their responses have been disaggregated according to whether they were using SEA in 2001, whether they had used SEA previously but not in 2001, or whether they had never used SEA. Responses are detailed in the first part of Section Two. The second part of the questionnaire was only to be completed by those new entrant teachers who had used SEA in 2001. Their responses are summarised in the second part of Section Two.

**SECTION ONE**

## RESULTS FROM THE SCHOOL-LEVEL QUESTIONNAIRE

The school-level questionnaire, intended for the person in each school with responsibility for overseeing new entrant classes, was designed to provide an overall school perspective on the use of SEA. It comprised a series of questions asking about the school's policy on assessing children, who in the school had used SEA in 2001, whether the school had sent SEA data into the Ministry of Education, whether further guidance and support was needed in particular aspects of administering SEA, and views on how the school used SEA and whether it was felt that SEA needed to be updated or modified.

### The Use of SEA in Schools

#### **The Number of Teachers in Participating Schools with Responsibility for Teaching New Entrants**

The questionnaire began by asking all respondents to indicate how many classroom teachers there were in their schools in 2001 with responsibility for teaching new entrant children. Around two thirds (65%) of the schools that participated in the survey had one new entrant teacher, 20 percent had two, eight percent had three, and six percent had four or more. (A small number — 1% — omitted to answer the question.)

Almost all (94%) new entrant teachers were reported to work in a regular classroom setting, with the remainder working in some other setting, such as a multi-level class. Considerably more than half (59%) of all respondents who completed school-level questionnaires indicated that new entrant teachers in their school had administered SEA to at least some new entrant children in 2001. In saying that, however, respondents sometimes also indicated that teachers in their schools were using only one or two, rather than all three, components of SEA when assessing children.

#### **The Situation in Schools Using SEA in 2001**

Respondents from schools currently using SEA were asked to indicate from a list provided, which statements best described the situation in their school in 2001 in relation to assessing new entrants, and in particular the use of SEA in the assessment process. Respondents could tick as many or as few of the statements as they felt were applicable. As can be seen in Table 1, responses fell into three main categories: the school's policy in relation to teachers' use of SEA; the school's aim with regard to the proportion of students assessed; and who within the school administered SEA.

##### **• *School policy***

Almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents whose schools used SEA in 2001, chose the statement that it was school policy for new entrant teachers to use SEA to assess the knowledge and skills of children when they first begin school. In contrast, however, 16 percent indicated that their school policy allowed individual teachers to choose whether or not they wished to use SEA.

##### **• *The students assessed***

Two of the statements which respondents could choose to describe the use of SEA in their school concerned the extent to which schools assessed all new entrant children by means of SEA. The majority (70%) of respondents from schools that used SEA in 2001 chose the statement indicating that the school aimed to assess all of its new entrants using SEA. Only two percent chose the statement that the school aimed to assess a cross-section rather than all new entrants.

• **Persons administering SEA in 2001**

Most commonly, only new entrant teachers were reported to have responsibility for administering SEA in 2001 (in 69% of schools that used SEA in 2001).

Forty-six percent of respondents further indicated that teachers of new entrants in their school administered SEA to children in their own class or group only, with a few others (5%), noting that new entrant teachers sometimes administered SEA to children from another teacher's class or group.

To determine whether other people administer SEA within schools, respondents were asked to indicate who else besides new entrant teachers had administered SEA in their school in 2001. Most often (13%), respondents reported that the principal, or deputy or assistant principal, had also undertaken SEA assessments in their school. Smaller proportions of respondents mentioned that other teachers (ie, who were not teaching new entrants in 2001) (5%), teacher aides (4%), and staff such as resource teachers (8%), also sometimes administered SEA. Table 1 provides details.

**TABLE 1:  
The situation in schools in which new entrants were assessed using SEA in 2001**

<b>Statements about school policies</b>	<b>%</b>
Our school's policy is that new entrant teachers should use SEA to assess children's knowledge and skills when they first begin school	62.9
Our school's policy is that individual teachers choose whether or not they wish to use SEA	15.9
<b>Statements about persons administering SEA</b>	
New entrant teacher only administers SEA	69.5
New entrant teacher administers SEA to new entrants in own class/group only	45.7
Principal / deputy principal / assistant principal (also) administers SEA	13.1
Teacher aide	4.0
Other teacher (ie, who is not teaching new entrants this year)	5.4
New entrant teacher sometimes administers to new entrants from another teacher's class/group	4.8
Other staff	7.6
<b>Statements about the students assessed by means of SEA</b>	
School aims to assess all new entrants	70.1
School aims to assess a 'cross section' of new entrants rather than all new entrants	1.9

*Percentages in the table are based on the number of schools who indicated they were using SEA in 2001.*

*Note that respondents could select as many or as few of the statements listed as they wished. This is why there appears to be considerable 'gaps' in the data.*

**The Situation in Schools Not Using SEA in 2001, including Schools that had Never Used SEA**

Just over a quarter (28%) of all respondents reported that their schools were not using SEA in 2001. Over four-tenths (42%) of this group, however, indicated that their school had used SEA in previous years.

While around one-third (30%) of respondents whose school did not use SEA in 2001 stated that it was school policy not to use SEA to assess new entrants, an even larger proportion (45%) indicated that it was up to individual teachers within the school to choose whether or not they wanted to use SEA.

A further 39 percent of respondents from schools not using SEA in 2001 gave other reasons for its non-use, for example, that in their school they used their own assessment tools. However, there were also several other respondents who noted that teachers in their school were interested in, or considering using SEA in the future.

## **Sending SEA Data to the Ministry Of Education**

The SEA kit includes data summary sheets which are designed to capture the relevant information about a child on one simple form. Once the data from one or more of the SEA components used to assess the child are recorded on the summary sheet, the form may then be faxed or posted to the Ministry of Education. Once there, the information for each child is entered onto a database from which a national picture of aspects of new entrants' knowledge and skills can be obtained. The *School Entry Assessment Guide For Teachers*<sup>6</sup> details the procedure for sending in the data and informs schools about how the information will be used. On page six of this Guide it states:

*'This valuable information will enable the Ministry of Education to analyse the differing needs of cohorts of children in different areas, contributing to policy development and resource allocation at a national level.'*

While the Ministry encourages schools to send in their SEA data for analysis, it is not mandatory for schools to do so.

All respondents, regardless of whether or not their school was using SEA in 2001, were asked if the school had ever sent summary data sheets to the Ministry of Education. More than half (56%) of the respondents reported that SEA data had never been submitted from their school, while almost a third (31%) said that their school had submitted data. The remaining (13%) were not sure or did not answer the question. This finding is consistent with information already held by the Ministry of Education which showed that, as at August 2001, 14 percent of all schools with new entrants had sent in summary data during 2001 and that 17 percent had sent in SEA data in previous years.

### **Reasons for not Sending Summary Sheets to the Ministry of Education**

The questionnaire went on to ask respondents whose schools were using SEA in 2001 but not sending in summary sheets to indicate why their school was not doing so. A quarter of the 170 comments made concerned the fact that schools did not think that it was applicable for them to send in their data because teachers were not using all three SEA components. For example:

*We only carry out parts of the SEA kit. If it is at all valuable we could send in parts of the summary sheets we complete.*

These respondents often described their school's data sheets as being 'incomplete':

*For the first time this year we are not administering all three components. [I] was not aware that incomplete data was acceptable.*

It is evident therefore that some schools did not know that the Ministry of Education would still like to receive summary sheets even when not all three components of SEA had been used to assess the child.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education. (1997). *School Entry Assessment: Guide for Teachers*. Wellington: Learning Media Limited.

<sup>7</sup> Even when not all three SEA components are administered, data may still be submitted to the Ministry of Education, provided all relevant tasks within a particular component have been completed and the information is recorded on the child's record and summary sheet. This situation is not made explicit in the *School Entry Assessment Guide for Teachers*.

Time factors (20%) and the school not being aware that it could submit summary sheets to the Ministry (16%) were further reasons mentioned. Smaller number of respondents noted either that their school was using SEA data for its own purposes (13%) or that they could not see that their school had anything to gain by sending in the data. Even smaller numbers mentioned that the school did not submit their SEA results because it was not compulsory to do so, that they had simply overlooked the task, or that they were unsure of the procedure for doing so.

### ***Views on the Need for Further Guidance and Support in Using SEA***

Respondents were then asked whether they felt their schools needed further guidance and support in using particular aspects of SEA. These respondents most often indicated a need for teachers to receive guidance and support in interpreting and/or using Ministry of Education information about SEA data (18%), with sharing results for individual children and/ or groups of children with others (15%), and with sending SEA results into the Ministry (14%).

A further nine percent of respondents variously commented that SEA training was required for new staff, that teachers in the school specifically wanted training to use the Tell Me component, or simply stated that the school would benefit from (further) training in SEA. For example:

*All support welcomed. Our new entrants are few and far between so one can become rusty.*

A number of diverse, one-off comments were also offered. One respondent used the opportunity to request a SEA kit for the school:

*Getting a kit and learning to use it!*

## **Views on SEA**

To obtain a school-level view of SEA, respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement to seven statements given in the questionnaire (repeated in Table 2).

The data in Table 2 show that respondents answering on behalf of the school were much more likely to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with each of the first six statements about SEA (which are all 'positive') than they were to express disagreement.

However, the data in relation to the statement about the scope of SEA was more equivocal: whereas almost a quarter (24%) of school respondents agreed that SEA was too limited in scope, 16 percent did not agree that this was the case. A further 24 percent were 'unsure'.

**TABLE 2:  
The extent to which respondents agreed with various statements about SEA**

Statement about SEA	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not sure
	%	%	%	%	%	%
It enables teachers to form an accurate and reliable view about a child's skills and understandings when they begin school	11.8	52.2	15.0	4.8	0.8	1.5
It helps teachers set appropriate expectations for their new entrants	12.0	55.9	10.8	5.2	0.4	1.2
Information obtained through SEA is helpful in early discussions and interviews with parents and caregivers about how well a child is getting on at school and what support they may need	16.5	51.3	12.1	3.9	-	1.4
Information obtained through SEA is helpful in discussions with staff about how well a child/group is getting on at school and what support they may need	11.4	50.1	15.8	4.4	0.4	1.5
Information obtained through SEA is helpful for reporting to the board of trustees on the needs and progress of students	10.0	44.3	19.2	6.4	0.7	2.0
I feel that SEA provides a valuable perspective on new entrants in this school compared with new entrants nationally	10.2	36.9	22.4	5.7	0.8	4.6
SEA is too limited in scope	6.1	17.8	24.4	13.9	2.3	2.2

*Percentages in the table are a proportion of all respondents.*

School-level respondents were then given the opportunity to offer comment on their answers to the statements about SEA, detailed in Table 2. Just over one-fifth (21%) of the comments made concerned a need for SEA to include additional aspects.

One such respondent stated:

*SEA does not provide all the information that I find useful to know about my new entrants starting school — for example, alphabet knowledge, sound/letter and letter/sound relationship knowledge.*

Eleven percent of respondents in each case also stated that SEA was time-consuming and difficult to administer and that new entrant teachers in their school used, or planned to use, alternative assessment tools to replace or supplement one or more components of SEA. A further six percent also commented that they believed other assessment tools provided a better indication than SEA of where children were at.

**The following remarks are representative of the comments made:**

*We use a simpler/quicker assessment kit at our school.*

*SEA does not give a true indication of the language, or lack of, that children enter school with. The JOST<sup>8</sup> resource kit gives us a closer idea of the language specifics that the individual has.*

**Positive comments about the usefulness of SEA as an assessment tool (8%) were also offered by a number of respondents. For example, one respondent stated:**

*This SEA kit has been an excellent MOE initiative. It signals clearly to teachers the importance of assessing children on entry to school and the valuable information that can be gained.*

Ten percent of school-level respondents made a variety of one-off comments about SEA. For example:

We used SEA to help develop our own [assessment methods] and:

*We have never collated any results of SEA since 1997 but [I] can see how it can be valuable.*

Table 3 provides further details on the sorts of comments made by respondents to explain why they did or did not agree with the statements about SEA listed in Table 2.

**TABLE 3:  
The reasons given by school-level respondents to explain their ratings  
of aspects of SEA (or particular components within SEA)**

<b>Comments offered</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>SEA overall</b>	
Needs to be supplemented with additional aspects	21.1
Needs to be less time-consuming to administer /is difficult to administer	10.7
School uses or is likely to use alternative or supplementary assessment tools in the future	10.7
Positive comments about the usefulness of SEA	7.5
Does not provide as good an indication as other assessment tools	5.7
Positive comments about the Ministry of Education feedback	5.0
Do not use all three components	4.6
It is too limited in scope (eg, for gifted children)	3.6
Release-time issues	2.9
Would prefer to undertake assessments earlier	2.1
General comments	10.0
<b>Tell Me</b>	
Needs to be more accurate	6.1
Needs to be less time consuming to administer	4.3
<b>Checkout</b>	
General comments (eg, needs to be updated, it is time consuming, we are involved with ENP)	2.5
<b>Concepts about Print</b>	
General comments (eg, do not find it useful for five-year-olds; it is very predictable)	3.2

*Respondents from schools were asked to rate aspects of SEA according to seven statements as given in the previous table (Table 2).*

*Note that percentages are a proportion of the total number of comments made (N=280). Some respondents made more than one type of comment.*

<sup>8</sup> The Junior Oral Language Screening Tool (JOST) was developed by Specialist Education Services (SES).

### Views on whether SEA Needed to be Updated or Modified

The questionnaire went on to ask respondents whether they felt that SEA needed to be updated or modified. As Table 4 shows, half of the respondents felt that it did, while 16 percent did not.

**TABLE 4:**  
**Whether school-level respondents felt that SEA needed to be updated or modified**

Update or modify?	%
Yes	50.0
No	15.7
Not sure	18.3
Missing Data	15.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The respondents representing schools where it was felt that SEA needed to be updated or modified were then asked to indicate what changes were considered necessary. Table 5 lists the range of comments made.

**TABLE 5:**  
**The ways in which school-level respondents would like SEA to be updated or modified**

Comments offered	%
<b>SEA overall</b>	
Needs to include additional literacy aspects (eg, alphabet, letter and word identification)	12.5
Needs to be less time-consuming to administer	9.0
Needs to be updated/modified	43.8
Kit needs to be more user-friendly	3.1
General comments	2.8
<b>Tell Me</b>	
Scoring standards (eg, needs to be more accurate, less subjective)	14.6
Needs to be less time consuming to administer	6.1
Update and modify language (eg, review texts)	5.6
Simpler and easier to administer	5.6
Not as good as/include/replace with more accurate test (eg, JOST)	3.6
Some parts are too complex/difficult	3.1
<b>Checkout</b>	
Early Numeracy Project issues (eg, update or replace with ENP, link with other learning programme)	10.2
Include additional aspects (eg, colour, shape, and other maths concepts)	10.5
General comment	3.8
<b>Concepts about Print</b>	
General comments	5.6

*Note that percentages are a proportion of the total number of comments made (N=391). Some respondents made more than one type of comment.*

As can be seen in Table 5, over a third of all comments focused on the Tell Me component. In particular, concern was expressed about the scoring standards of this component, with some respondents questioning the accuracy, objectivity and predictability of the tool. Some simply stated that better guidelines for scoring this component were needed.

*I would like to see the oral component easier to mark/assess so it is not judgmental.*

*We gave up on this one as we felt it did not give us an accurate picture of oral language.*

*The Tell Me task is too difficult to administer, analyse and score – hard to standardise – open to different interpretations.*

Issues regarding the reliability of Tell Me were also highlighted in the ACER evaluation<sup>9</sup> of the technical and methodological aspects of SEA.

Other concerns about the Tell Me component were that it was time-consuming, that it needed to be easier to administer, or that it should be updated or modified. More specific comment from a few respondents was that the books used in Tell Me needed to be reviewed as some were not appropriate.

*The language section needs modifying. Some of the stories aren't well known ones.*

*[Needs to be] easier to administer in a busy class atmosphere.*

As well as the specific comments about Tell Me, nine percent of comments referred to the time-consuming nature of SEA overall. But the largest proportion of all comments referred to the need to update or modify SEA. In particular, respondents suggested the addition of literacy tasks such as alphabet, writing ability, and letter and word identification tasks. And some respondents felt that Checkout should be updated to include colour, shape and other mathematical concepts<sup>10</sup> or, alternatively, that it be replaced by Early Numeracy Project (ENP) assessment tasks.

*[Checkout needs] to fit in with the Early Numeracy Project.*

*[The] numeracy section [of SEA] may not be needed if schools use the ENP assessment.*

There was also a small proportion (6%) of comments relating to Concepts about Print: the comments variously suggested that this component could be modified or updated (eg, by replacing the books currently used for this task), that the component was not necessary, that it was too difficult for some children, or that they did not find it very useful in their school.

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<sup>9</sup> See footnote 4 for details about the ACER evaluation.

<sup>10</sup> The ACER evaluation came up with a similar result and concluded that Checkout was currently under-utilised and could incorporate additional numeracy skills.

### Final Comments on SEA from Schools

At the end of the school-level questionnaire, respondents were invited to add any last comments they would like to make about the SEA kit or its use in their school. Table 6 details the responses.

**TABLE 6:**  
**Final Comments about SEA offered by Schools**

<b>Comments offered</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>SEA overall</b>	
Time-consuming to administer/would prefer SEA to be quicker to use	11.6
Positive comments about the usefulness of SEA	11.1
Release-time issues	9.6
Difficult/not appropriate to administer in a classroom situation	5.2
Useful for early identification of needs and one-to-one time with the child	3.4
Do not use all components/use in conjunction with other tools	3.2
Supplement with additional literacy aspects	2.9
Positive comments about the Ministry of Education feedback	2.9
Children can be more easily assessed within teaching programmes	2.5
Professional development and support needed in use of SEA	2.3
Needs to be easier to administer	1.8
Useful for class purposes (eg, decision-making for class programmes/grouping )	1.4
Question the reliability of test (eg, precise timeframe)	1.2
General comments	3.0
<b>Tell Me</b>	
Needs to be less time-consuming to administer	5.4
Scoring standards (eg, needs to be more accurate, less subjective)	3.4
Too complex/difficult (eg, use more well known stories)	2.9
We don't use this component	2.0
Needs to be broader in scope	1.8
General comments	3.0
<b>Checkout</b>	
Children enjoy this component 3	.7
Is a useful tool	3.6
Needs to link with the Early Numeracy Project (ENP)	2.5
Needs to be broader	1.8
General comments	2.5
<b>Concepts about Print</b>	
Useful assessment tool	1.6
Useful to compare results	1.6
General comments	2.1

*Note that percentages are a proportion of the total number of comments made (N=560). Some respondents made more than one type of comment.*

As shown in Table 6, respondents more often commented generally about SEA rather than commenting on individual components. Many also reiterated their responses to previous questions, documented earlier in this report. For instance, respondents again stated that SEA, especially Tell Me, was too time-consuming to administer, while others commented about difficulties in obtaining release-time in order to administer SEA. A smaller number of comments referred to the difficulty, or inappropriateness of assessing children using SEA in the classroom situation:

*We test our new entrants with SEA but find it is time-consuming and can become expensive to the school if release time has to be purchased. I have found it not practicable to administer in class as other children wish to participate or help.*

*My main reason for not using SEA is the time factor — not enough release time to do such comprehensive tests as the maths. I agree it is useful and have used it occasionally.*

But as well as identifying concerns, some respondents also took the opportunity to provide positive comment on SEA as a whole (11% of all comments made). For example:

*I do like the overall concept of SEA and we use it lots of ways — for example, making decisions about groupings, progress, etc; discussions with parents and identifying trends in the school.*

*We have found the SEA kit an excellent resource and I believe children have benefited from this assessment initiative.*

Overall, present results showed that respondents answering on behalf of their schools were much less likely to make specific comments about Checkout and Concepts about Print than they were to comment on the Tell Me component. Also, when they did comment on the first two components, their comments were most often positive. For example, Table 6 shows that comments about Checkout included that it was useful and that children enjoyed it; similarly, comments regarding Concepts about Print included that it was useful, especially as it could be used as a point of comparison with data from the six-year-net.<sup>11</sup>

## Summary of the School-Level Results from Section 1

The feedback provided in the school-level questionnaires suggests that schools were reasonably positive about SEA overall. For example, when asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each of six positive statements about SEA, respondents were more likely to ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ than they were to disagree. Two statements that attracted the highest levels of agreement were that: ‘SEA helps teachers to set appropriate expectations for their new entrants’ (68% of respondents) and ‘SEA information is helpful in early discussions and interviews with parents and caregivers’ (68%).

Although well over half (59%) of all school-level participants indicated that new entrant teachers in their school had administered SEA to at least some new entrants in 2001, in some schools teachers were using only one or two of the SEA components, rather than all three.

Schools were reported to be far more positive (satisfied) about Concepts about Print than they were about the other two SEA components, and very few suggestions were offered on how this component could be updated or modified.

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<sup>11</sup> The six-year-net is a comprehensive survey used to check children’s progress in reading and writing in the first two years of school. It is usually administered around a child’s sixth birthday. Concepts about Print was initially developed by Dame Marie Clay as part of this survey. (Refer also to footnote 1 of this report.)

The Tell Me component was the least popular of the three components, with a significant number of the school-level respondents' comments highlighting the view that this component needed to be improved. Most comments focused on the scoring standards of the tool, for example, that it needed to be more accurate or less subjective.

While half of the respondents thought that SEA needed to be updated or modified in one way or another, often their suggestions for change were general rather than specific.

Around two-thirds (63%) of respondents whose schools had used SEA in 2001 indicated that it was school policy for new entrant teachers to use SEA to assess children's knowledge and skills when they first began school. An even greater proportion (70%) also advised that their school aimed to assess all, rather than only some, new entrants by means of SEA.

Although 28 percent of participating schools were not using SEA in 2001, nearly half of this group had used it in previous years. Schools' main reason for never, or no longer, using SEA was that the school was using alternative assessment tools to assess their new entrants.

Despite the finding that 59 percent of participating schools were using SEA in 2001, only 31 percent of all schools in the study were sending in SEA summary data to the Ministry of Education in 2001.

Many schools (56%) had *never* sent in SEA summary sheets, even though they were using, or had previously used, SEA. When respondents were asked why their school had not submitted data, the most common response was that they did not think they needed to as they were not using all three components. Other reasons given included time constraints, being unaware that the Ministry collected this information, that SEA data was used for school purposes only and that the school could see no benefit in sending in the summary sheets.

Interestingly, in light of the reasons given for not sending in their data, when asked in what areas schools felt they needed further guidance and support, just 14 percent of all participating schools indicated they required further assistance in sending SEA data into the Ministry of Education. However, despite this particular finding, it appears that if greater numbers of schools are to be encouraged to send in their SEA data to the Ministry of Education for analysis, then clearer guidelines will be important to inform schools about how to send in their data, why it is required, and how they can benefit from and use the results.

## SECTION TWO

## RESULTS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS OF NEW ENTRANTS

The questionnaire for individual teachers was designed to obtain an up-to-date picture of the extent to which teachers of new entrants were using SEA, how they were using it to inform teaching and learning processes, and whether they considered changes needed to be made to the SEA kit to improve its validity and usefulness. All new entrant teachers who took part in the study, regardless of whether they had (a) used SEA in 2001, (b) used it in previous years but not in 2001, or (c) had never used it, were asked to complete Part One of the teacher questionnaire. For reporting purposes, the data from this first part of the questionnaire, discussed below, have been disaggregated to reflect the three groups of teachers<sup>12</sup>.

Part Two of the questionnaire, which focused on how SEA was currently being used by teachers, was to be answered only by those using SEA in 2001.

### Part One: The Extent to which Teachers were Using SEA

To determine the extent of SEA use, the 572 new entrant teachers who completed questionnaires were first asked to indicate whether they were currently using SEA and/or had used it in the past. Three-hundred-and-ninety-four teachers indicated they were using SEA in 2001 (44% of the estimated 896<sup>13</sup> new entrant teachers who were identified as eligible to participate in the study), 81 (9%) were not using SEA in 2001 but had used it previously, while 97 (11%) reported that they had never used SEA.

Both teachers who were using SEA in 2001 (N=394) and teachers who were not but had had previous experience of using the tool (N=81), were then asked to indicate in which of the years between 1997 and 2000 they had used SEA. As Table 7 shows, the large majority of those using SEA in 2001 had also used it in the previous two years. By comparison, considerably lower proportions of those not using SEA in 2001 had used the kit in each of 1999 and 2000, but particularly in 2000.

**TABLE 7:**  
**The years in which new entrant teachers had used SEA**

Years	Using SEA in 2001 (N=394)%	Not using SEA in 2001, but used previously (N=81)%
2000	85.8	45.7
1999	71.1	60.5
1998	58.0	42.0
1997	35.5	30.9

<sup>12</sup> As there was no way of knowing the extent to which all new entrant teachers in each participating school were users or non-users of SEA, the decision was made to separate out the data according to whether teachers were using SEA in 2001, had used it prior to 2001 but were no longer using it, or had never used SEA.

<sup>13</sup> See discussion of response rates in Section 1 of this report.

### Teachers with Responsibility for Teaching New Entrants in 2001 who were Using SEA

Respondents were asked to indicate how many classroom teachers there were in their school with responsibility for teaching new entrants in 2001, and, of these, how many administered SEA.

Around half of all teachers who responded said that they were the only new entrant teachers in their school (see Table 8).

The majority of respondents taught in a regular classroom; less than 10 percent said that they worked in some other setting, such as in a sole charge or job-share position.

More than a third (37%) of the group of teachers using SEA in 2001 reported that there were other new entrant teachers in their school who administered SEA. However, considerably smaller proportions of the respondents who had either only used SEA prior to 2001 or never used it, indicated that other new entrant teachers in their school administered SEA (9% and 8% respectively), suggesting that individual teachers may often be influenced by what their colleagues are doing.

**TABLE 8:**  
**Whether new entrant teachers other than the respondent administered SEA in their school in 2001**

	Using SEA in 2001 used previously N= 394)%	Not using SEA in 2001, (N= 81)%	Never Used SEA (N=97)%
Other new entrant teachers use SEA in my school	37.1	8.6	8.2
No other new entrant teachers use SEA in my school	6.3	37.0	38.2
Not applicable — I am the only new entrant teacher	54.8	49.4	48.5
Not sure	0.5	1.2	1.0
Missing Data	1.3	3.8	4.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Percentages in each column are a proportion of a different total 'N' in each case — ie, a proportion of N=394 teachers in the first column of figures, N=81 in the second column, and N=97 in the third column.*

Teachers using SEA in 2001 reported that, in their schools, 90 percent of all new entrant children had already been assessed, or were soon to be assessed, using SEA. Remaining teachers (10%) were asked to indicate their reasons for not assessing all new entrants in the class. These reasons are outlined below.

#### • **Reasons given for not assessing all their new entrant children with SEA in 2001**

The data in Table 9 show that lack of time was the reason most often given for not assessing all new entrants. These teachers' statements included that they did not have enough time due either to other class/school priorities (9%) or because several new entrant children had arrived close together (9%). As well, when teachers who gave more than one reason for not assessing all new entrants were asked to prioritise their reasons, time factors were cited as the main barrier. The following brief comments were typical:

*Not enough time.*

*SEA is too time-consuming.*

*No release-time available.*

Other reasons teachers gave for not assessing all new entrants were that they gained adequate information about the skills and abilities of some of their new entrants by other means (7% of all teachers using SEA in 2001), or that, in the case of some children, they were concerned that the assessment process would cause them unnecessary distress in their early days at school (3%).

A further 10 percent of teachers who had not assessed all of their new entrant children with SEA in 2001 variously stated that this was because: children who transferred schools were sometimes not assessed; that, at the time they completed the survey questionnaire, some of their new entrants had not yet been at school long enough to be assessed; and that they would not be using SEA with their special needs and ESOL children.

**TABLE 9:  
The reasons teachers gave for not assessing all new entrant children in 2001**

Reasons	Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)	
		%
I do not have enough time to do SEA assessments for every child due to other class/school priorities		8.9
I do not have enough time to assess every child by means of SEA when several new entrants arrive close together		8.6
I feel I get adequate information about the skills/abilities of some of my new entrants by other means		6.9
I feel it would cause individual children unnecessary distress in their early days at school to undergo SEA		2.8
Other reasons		10.4

*These percentages are based on N=394, the total number of respondents who were using SEA in 2001. However, as only 10% of these teachers had not assessed all of their new entrants, this question was not relevant to the majority of this group.*

*Note that those to whom the question applied could give more than one reason.*

#### **Why Teachers who were Not Using SEA in 2001 Did Not Use It**

Teachers not using SEA in 2001 were asked to indicate their reasons for either never having used SEA or for discontinuing their use of it. The questionnaire provided a list of options to choose from and respondents were asked to tick as many reasons as they felt were applicable. The options fell loosely into four categories: the teacher's attitude to the assessment tools, and how this influenced the choices they had made; issues around SEA as an assessment tool; the number of new entrant children; and training issues.

Table 10 shows that the most frequently given reason for not using SEA was that the teachers preferred to use alternative assessment methods (67% of those who had used SEA previously and 73% of those who had never used SEA). SEA being too time-consuming to administer was another reason commonly mentioned by teachers who had used SEA previously (67%) and, interestingly, by a considerable proportion (40%) who had never used this form of assessment.

Both teachers who had used SEA previously but were not doing so in 2001 and teachers who had never used SEA, indicated that there was someone else using SEA with new entrants in their school in 2001 (17% of the former group and 13% of the latter).

Twenty-nine percent of the teachers who had never used SEA and 14 percent who had previously used it but were not doing so in 2001, indicated that it was their school's policy not to use SEA.

Around a fifth (19%) of the 81 teachers who had used SEA previously indicated that they had not found the tool helpful when they used it, while seven percent considered that SEA was not suitable for the new entrants in their class in 2001.

Just under a third (31%) of the 97 teachers who had never used SEA reported that they knew little or nothing about the tool, while a similar proportion (32%) advised that they had not administered the tool because they had not received training in its use. Sixteen percent of the teachers who had never used SEA said they did not feel confident about using it. Lack of confidence was also mentioned by six percent of those who had once used SEA but were no longer doing so.

**TABLE 10:**  
**New entrant teachers' reasons for not using SEA in 2001**

Reason	Not using SEA in 2001, but used previously	Never used SEA
	(N= 81)%	(N= 97)%
Someone else administers SEA with the new entrants in my class	17.3	13.4
I use other methods to assess new entrants	66.7	73.2
It is my present school's policy not to use SEA	13.6	28.9
I do not like formalised 'tests' such as SEA	2.5	1.0
I find SEA too time-consuming to administer	66.7	40.2
I have used SEA in the past, but did not find it helpful	18.5	1.0
I do not feel SEA is suitable for my new entrant students this year	7.4	9.3
I have not yet had the opportunity to use SEA as I have had no new entrants so far this year	11.1	3.1
I have too many new entrants this year	4.9	6.2
I have never used SEA and know little or nothing about it	–	31.0
I have not received training in using SEA	7.4	32.0
I do not feel confident about using SEA	6.2	16.5
Other reasons	8.6	6.2

*Percentages in the first column are a proportion of N=81, the number of teachers who had previously used SEA but were no longer doing so in 2001, whereas percentages in the second column are a proportion of N=97, the number of teachers who had never used SEA.*

*Note that respondents could tick more than one option.*

Respondents who had given more than one reason for not using SEA were asked to specify the main barrier for them. Repeating findings discussed earlier, the time involved in administering SEA was said to be the chief reason for not using SEA, followed by a preference for other assessment methods, or that they did not use SEA themselves because someone else in the school carried out the SEA assessments.

### SEA and Other Assessment Tools

All respondents were asked to indicate whether they used other assessment tools to assess their new entrant children's knowledge and skills on beginning school.

As evidenced by the data in Table 11, the large majority (87%) of teachers who used SEA in 2001 supplemented SEA with other forms of assessment. Only a small number (12%) of these teachers indicated that SEA was the only assessment tool they used.

**TABLE 11:**  
**Assessment tools other than SEA used to assess new entrants' knowledge and skills**

Use of other assessment tools?	Using SEA in 2001 (N= 394)%	Not using SEA in 2001, used previously (N= 81)%	Never used SEA (N= 97)%
Yes, instead of SEA	–	74.1	89.7
Yes, as well as SEA	86.6	18.5	–
No, I only use SEA	12.2	4.9d	–
No, I don't use SEA or any other assessment tools with new entrants [this year]	–	2.5	5.2
Missing Data	1.2	–	5.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Percentages in each column are a proportion of a different total 'N' in each case — ie, a proportion of N=394 teachers in the first column of figures, N=81 in the second column, and N=97 in the third column.*

*It is likely that these respondents either had another teacher assess their new entrants with—SEA or were those who had not yet had the opportunity to use SEA in 2001 because no new entrant children had come into their class.*

#### • **Assessment tools used as well as, or instead of, SEA**

Eighty percent (N=455) of all teachers who took part in the study provided details of the assessment tools they were using as well as, or instead of, SEA. In many cases teachers provided details of more than one alternative assessment method.

Just over half of the other assessment tools used by teachers (52%) were said to be developed either by the teacher or the school for their own purposes, and designed to assess a range of children's knowledge, including numeracy and other mathematical concepts, oral language, comprehension and writing ability. Teachers' descriptions of these assessment tools were often very general, for example, teachers' simply noted that they were 'maths observations' or 'alphabet checks'.

Most other assessment tools (48%) used were reported to have been developed by an educational organisation or a test developer. Of these, the Early Numeracy Project (ENP) (17%), Beginning School Mathematics (BSM) (5%) and the Schedule of Early Numeracy (SENA) (2%) were the most frequently mentioned tools used to assess numeracy and other mathematical concepts. In some other instances, teachers did not mention the name of the numeracy tool they used so it may be that they were also using one or more of the three above mentioned tools.

In terms of 'commercially-produced' tools to assess oral language, teachers most frequently mentioned using the Record of Oral Learning (ROL) (19%) and the Junior Oral Language Screening Tool (JOST) (13%). Again, however, a number of teachers did not clearly specify the particular tool they were using but rather just the area they were assessing.

• ***Reasons for using other assessment tools***

To ascertain why teachers used other assessment tools, respondents were asked to indicate their reasons for doing so from a list of options provided in the questionnaire. The results are summarised as follows.

Among teachers who had used SEA in 2001:

- nearly half (47%) indicated that they used other assessment tools as well as SEA because they wanted to assess a wider range of new entrants' knowledge and skills;
- a third reported that they used other assessment tools to complement SEA results;
- 28 percent said they used other methods as well as SEA because they felt they were more closely linked to their programme planning; and
- around a quarter (23%) reported that it was their school policy to use alternative methods of assessment in addition to SEA.

Among teachers who were not using SEA in 2001 but had used it previously:

- well over half (57%) indicated that they were using other assessment tools instead of SEA because they were easier to use than SEA; and
- 52 percent indicated that they were now using methods instead of SEA because they were more closely linked to their programme planning.

Among teachers who had never used SEA:

- the reasons most often given for not using SEA were that other assessment tools were easier to use than SEA and were more closely linked to their programme planning.

Analysis of data also showed that teachers who had formerly used SEA were more likely than those who had never used SEA to report that they used alternative assessment tools because they wanted to assess a wider range of knowledge and skills (33% compared to 22%).

Table 12 provides further details about respondents' reasons for using other assessment tools.

**TABLE 12:**  
**The reasons that respondents gave for using tools other than SEA to assess new entrants' knowledge and skills on beginning school**

Reasons for using other tools	Using SEA in 2001 (N= 394)%		Not using SEA in 2001, used previously (N= 81)%		Never used SEA (N= 97)%
	Tools used instead of SEA <sup>a</sup> %	Tools used as well as SEA%	Tools used instead of SEA%	Tools used as well as SEA%	Tools used instead of SEA%
Easier to use than SEA	11.2	N/A	56.8	N/A	41.2
More closely linked to my programme planning	13.7	27.9	51.9	6.2	43.3
School policy to use this tool	3.3	22.8	27.2	7.4	35.1
Assesses wider range of knowledge/skills than SEA (either overall or individual component(s))	14.5	47.0	33.3	8.6	21.6
To provide confirmation of SEA results	N/A	4.3	N/A	–	N/A
To complement SEA results	N/A	33.2	N/A	8.6	N/A
Other reasons	2.3	3.6	11.1	2.5	20.6

*Percentages in the various columns are a proportion of different total 'Ns'— ie, a proportion of N=394 teachers in the first two columns of figures, N=81 in the middle columns, and N=97 in the last column.*

*These respondents were those who were not using all three SEA components in 2001; they were therefore using other assessment tools instead of one or two SEA components.*

*It is likely that these respondents either had another teacher assess their new entrants with SEA or were those who had not yet had the opportunity to use SEA in 2001 because no new entrant children had come into their class.*

*Note that respondents could indicate more than one reason.*

## Part Two: Teachers' Use of SEA in 2001

The focus of Part Two of the questionnaire was specifically on how teachers were currently using SEA and was only to be completed by teachers who had used SEA in 2001 (N=394).

### Administering SEA

Firstly, teachers using SEA in 2001 were asked to indicate whether they mainly used SEA with new entrant children in their own class or with children in a colleague's class. Almost all (94%) of the teachers indicated that they most often administered SEA to the children in their own class. Only four percent assessed new entrants from a colleague's class. A further five percent mentioned some 'other situation'— for example, that another person (eg, the principal or deputy principal, a resource teacher, a teacher aide or a part-time teacher) also administered SEA to some of their new entrants.

But the large majority of teachers (79%) indicated that no other person administered SEA to their new entrants.

### The Frequency with which Teachers Used each of the Three Components of SEA

Table 13 shows that when asked how often they used each SEA component when assessing a child, teachers most often said they 'always' used Concepts about Print (86%). Eighty percent of respondents also said they 'always' used Checkout. The Tell Me component, however, was said to be 'always' used by fewer than half of the teachers (46%) — well over a third (38%) of teachers never used this component and 12 percent used it just some of the time.

**TABLE 13:**  
**The relative frequency with which SEA components were used**

SEA Components	Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)		
	Always %	Some of the time %	Never %
Concepts about Print	85.5	5.3	5.6
Checkout	80.2	7.4	7.6
Tell Me	45.9	12.4	38.1

**Teachers' Reasons for Never or only Sometimes using Individual Components of SEA**

Teachers who never or only sometimes administered one or more of the three components were asked to indicate their reasons for not always using the particular component(s).

As just 46 percent of teachers said that they always used the Tell Me component (Table 13), compared with the 80 percent or more who 'always' used the other two SEA components, it is not surprising that the answers to this question focused primarily on Tell Me (Table 14).

Reasons for never or seldom using the Tell Me component included that it was:

- very time-consuming (39% of the 394 teachers);
- difficult to administer (23%);
- did not add much to what they already knew about a child from using other forms of assessment (25%);
- not helpful for planning a programme of learning for a child (16%); and
- too difficult for some new entrants (14%).

Eleven percent of teachers in each case further stated that they did not feel confident about using this component or just did not like it.

Although some teachers also commented that Checkout and Concepts about Print were time-consuming, or that these components did not add much to what teachers already knew about a child from using other forms of assessments, such comments were made much less frequently about these components, especially Concepts about Print, than they were for Tell Me.

The most frequently reported reason for not (always) using Concepts about Print was that it was too difficult for some new entrant children (7%).

Table 14 provides further details.

**TABLE 14:  
Reasons for never or only sometimes administering individual components of SEA in 2001**

Reasons	Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)		
	Concepts about Print	Tell Me	Checkout
	%	%	%
It is difficult to administer	1.8	22.8	3.6
It is very time-consuming to administer	5.3	39.3	9.4
I find it doesn't add much to what I already know about the child from using other forms of assessments	4.6	24.9	8.6
I don't find it is very helpful in helping me plan a programme of learning for the child	2.5	15.7	1.8
I consider this component is too difficult for some/many of the children who come into my new entrant class	6.6	14.0	1.0
I consider this component is too simple for some/many of the children who come into my new entrant class	—	1.3	0.8
The children often don't enjoy this component	1.5	4.6	0.3
I don't feel confident about using this component	0.5	11.2	1.0
I just don't like this component	1.0	11.2	0.8
Other reasons	1.5	10.4	2.5

*Note that respondents could give more than one reason.*

Most of the 'other' reasons given also focused on the Tell Me component, with 10 percent of all respondents saying that they had concerns about the accuracy and reliability of this tool which discouraged them from using it.

**The Extent to which Teachers Used All of the Tasks (Items) within a SEA Component each Time they Administered It**

To determine how often teachers used all of the tasks (items) within each SEA component, the questionnaire asked respondents whether they used all tasks each time they used the component, whether they used all tasks only some of the time, or whether they never used all tasks when they used a particular component.

Table 15 shows that the majority of teachers used all of the tasks each time they administered the Checkout (82%) and Concepts about Print (76%) components. But repeating earlier trends in the data relating to Tell Me, just under half of the respondents (47%) used all tasks each time they used the Tell Me component.

Ten percent or fewer teachers indicated that they only sometimes used all tasks within the component of SEA they were using, and less than five percent said that they never used all tasks when using a component.

Confirming results reported on earlier in this report, 31 percent of teachers indicated that they did not use Tell Me at all.

**TABLE 15:**  
**The frequency with which teachers used all tasks (items) within an individual SEA component each time they administered it**

Component of SEA	Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)			
	Use all tasks each time this component	Use all tasks only some of the times that I use this component	Never Use all tasks when I use this component	Not applicable I don't use this component
	%	%	%	%
Checkout	81.7	4.8	1.8	6.6
Concepts about Print	76.4	10.2	3.6	5.3
Tell Me	46.7	5.3	4.1	31.0

• **Teachers' reasons for not using all tasks within a component**

When respondents who did not use all tasks (items) within a component were asked to say why this was the case, teachers answering in respect of the Concepts about Print component most often said that the level of difficulty of some tasks was inappropriate for their new entrants.

Teachers answering in relation to the Tell Me component, however, most frequently indicated that they selected specific items and omitted others so as to reduce the time spent administering this component (7%).

Table 16 provides further details.

**TABLE 16:**  
**Teachers' reasons for not using all of the tasks (items) within each SEA component that they used**

Reason	Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)		
	Concepts about Print %	Tell Me %	Checkout %
Some of the tasks are difficult to administer	1.3	4.1	1.8
I pick and choose tasks so as to reduce the time it takes to administer the overall component	2.0	6.9	3.0
I feel that (some of) the tasks do not add much to the overall information obtained through this component	2.0	4.8	1.8
I find that (some of) the tasks are too difficult for some/most of the children	12.7	3.6	2.8
I find that (some of) the tasks are too simple for some/most of the children	0.3	–	1.5
Other reasons	2.0	2.0	1.0
Not applicable — I do not administer this component	3.8	14.7	4.3

*Note that respondents could give more than one reason.*

### When and Where Teachers Administered S E A

Teachers were asked to indicate both the time of the day when they usually administered each of the SEA components and also where they usually conducted the assessments.

As can be seen in Table 17, all three components were most often administered at the same time as normal class activities, although some teachers assessed new entrants during special activity times, such as when other children in the class were taking part in a joint activity with another class.

**TABLE 17:**  
**When in the school day teachers administered each of the SEA components**

Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)				
Time of the day	Concepts about Print %	Tell Me %	Checkout %	
At the same time as normal morning/afternoon class activities	42.6	24.4	40.1	
During special activity times (eg, when other children in the class take part in a joint activity with another class, go to the library, etc)	22.6	11.9	23.1	
During lunchtime	5.6	3.6	6.6	
During interval	11.8	1.3	2.0	
Other times	28.9	18.3	25.9	
Not applicable – I don't administer this component	2.5	16.8	6.6	

*Note that some respondents ticked more than one option.*

Most of the teachers who administered SEA some 'other' time (see Table 17) explained that the amount of time they could spend was dependent on when they were able to get release time. One such teacher noted:

*[I do the assessments when] I get released by another teacher.*

Several others simply commented that they administered SEA when they could find the time to do so.

Teachers further reported (Table 18) that they generally administered SEA in a special room, such as a resource room. Most of the remaining respondents administered SEA components in the classroom when the rest of the child's class was occupied with other activities.

**TABLE 18:**  
**Where teachers administered SEA**

Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)				
Location	Concepts about Print %	Tell Me %	Checkout %	
In a special room (eg, resource room)	53.8	34.0	51.0	
In the classroom where the rest of the child's class/group is working on other activities	25.4	14.7	24.9	
Other locations	15.0	8.4	13.2	
Not applicable – I don't administer this component	2.5	17.0	6.1	

*Note that some respondents ticked more than one option.*

### How Long Children were at School before being Assessed with SEA

The *School Entry Assessment Guide for Teachers* advises that SEA should be administered after a child has had time to settle into a class but before the school programme has had a significant impact. The Guide suggests that this is usually between four and eight weeks after a child begins school but that some new entrants may be ready for the assessment earlier. Teachers are advised, however, against assessing a child beyond eight weeks of their starting school as the results are likely to be affected by classroom instruction.

Teachers were asked to indicate the time frame in which they assessed their own particular new entrants. As Table 19 shows, only a few teachers administered SEA after a new entrant had been at school more than eight weeks, with the large majority of children being assessed within the time frame recommended in the SEA manual.

**TABLE 19:**  
**How soon after a child begins school do teachers administer SEA**

Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)	
Child assessed...	%
in first 1 to 3 weeks of beginning school	23.1
between 4 and 8 weeks of beginning school	72.1
8 or more weeks after beginning school	2.5
Missing data	2.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Teachers then commented briefly on what determined when assessments were carried out. Most often it was said to depend on the child being settled at school:

*‘when the child is confident’ or ‘when the child is settled into the school routine’.*

The following comment from one teacher was typical:

*I want to allow the child sufficient time to settle into school and feel comfortable, but not too long that learning at school interferes too much in SEA results.*

Several teachers mentioned that a child’s attitude and ability may also determine when the assessment is carried out.

Some teachers, too, reported that finding the time or obtaining release-time to conduct the assessment were factors in determining when they administered SEA. As well, a few teachers reported that determining factors included having to work within a set time frame specified by the school or the need to use the SEA results for school purposes, such as for planning programmes or reporting to parents.

### Discussing SEA Results

When asked who they discussed or shared SEA results with, teachers most often said they shared results with parents or caregivers (72%) and with other teachers in the school (70%). Around half (51%) of teachers shared results with the principal, and 24 percent stated that they also shared information with their school's board of trustees. Table 20 has the details.

The 15 percent of teachers who shared results with some 'other' person usually reported this person or persons to be their assistant or deputy principal, or a specialist teacher, such as a Reading Recovery teacher.

**TABLE 20:**  
**Those with whom teachers discussed or shared SEA results**

<b>Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)</b>	
<b>Person(s) with whom results shared</b>	<b>%</b>
Parents/caregivers	71.8
Other teachers in the school	69.5
Principal	51.3
Board of trustees	24.1
Other person (s)	15.0
Not applicable —SEA results are purely for teachers use	6.1

*Note that some respondents ticked more than one option.*

### Teachers' Preparation for Using SEA

The questionnaire went on to ask how teachers had learned to use SEA. Reading the SEA manual was the most common method, mentioned by 60 percent of teachers, while around half of teachers reported that they had watched the video on SEA (52%) and / or undertaken professional development when, or soon after, SEA was introduced (49%) in 1997. In-school training from a colleague at a teacher's present school was another method reported by just under a quarter (23%) of the teachers. Table 21 provides details.

**TABLE 21:**  
**How teachers learned to use SEA**

<b>Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)</b>	
<b>The way teacher learned about SEA</b>	<b>%</b>
Through professional development which was provided when, or soon after, SEA was introduced in 1997	49.0
As part of some other professional development programme	7.9
During initial (pre-service) teacher training	5.3
By reading the SEA manual	59.6
By watching the SEA video	52.3
In-school training from a colleague at my present school	22.6
In-school training from a colleague at a previous school	4.8
Other ways	6.3

*Note that some respondents ticked more than one option.*

Comments from the six percent of teachers who identified ‘other ways’ they had learned about SEA were diverse. For example, a few teachers took the opportunity to mention that they had not received any training in how to use SEA, and a few others stated either that they had trained themselves, or had learned to administer Concepts about Print when training for Reading Recovery.

#### **Areas of SEA in which Teachers Considered they Needed Further Guidance and Support**

Asked whether they felt they needed further guidance and support with aspects of administering SEA or with using the results, it was clear that respondents most often wanted help with the Tell Me component (see the data in Table 22).

Nearly a third of teachers (30%) said they required assistance with the scoring standards of Tell Me, and almost a quarter (24%) that they required assistance with interpreting the scores. Teachers further indicated a need for further training in administering SEA (15%) or in how to use the assessment information from Tell Me (20%).

Teachers commenting in respect of the Checkout and Concepts about Print components most often indicated a desire for further guidance and support in relation to using the assessment information. However, the numbers commenting were considerably fewer in number than those who specified they would like help in this and two other aspects of Tell Me (Table 22).

The evaluation of SEA carried out by ACER<sup>14</sup> also found that teachers appeared to be unclear about how to use the assessment information from SEA. Their report recommended that support be provided to schools to help them interpret SEA data for the purposes of evaluating programmes.

**TABLE 22:  
Aspects of SEA in which teachers felt they needed further guidance and support**

<b>Aspect of SEA</b>		<b>Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)</b>
		<b>%</b>
<b>Tell Me</b>	Administering Tell Me	14.7
	Scoring Standards	29.9
	Interpreting Scores	24.4
	How to use assessment information	20.3
	Other aspects of Tell Me	3.0
<b>Checkout</b>	Playing and scoring the game	6.3
	How to use assessment information	13.7
	Developing other mathematical activities using Checkout	13.2
	Other aspects of Checkout	2.0
<b>Concepts about Print</b>	Administration and scoring	2.0
	Interpreting scores	4.8
	How to use assessment information	8.9
	Other aspects of Concepts about Print	1.0
<b>General</b>	Other aspects of SEA	2.5

<sup>14</sup> The ACER evaluation is referenced in footnote 4, earlier in this report.

## Views on SEA

The final part of the questionnaire asked teachers what they thought about various aspects of SEA and whether they considered that changes needed to be made to some or all of the SEA components. Some of the questions paralleled ones in the school-level questionnaire discussed in Section 1 of this report. However, unlike the respondents who were asked to provide an overall school perspective, the comments made by new entrant teachers were based on their personal experience of using SEA in 2001.

Table 23 replicates a series of statements about SEA that were included in the teacher questionnaire. Respondents were to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each of these statements.

The data in Table 23 shows that teachers, like the respondents to the school-level questionnaire, were more likely to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with each of the positive descriptors about SEA, than they were to 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' with them. In particular, they were more likely to agree with the statements that:

'[SEA] provides a representative snapshot of a child's competence at a specific time' (83%); '[It] helps teachers to set appropriate expectations for new entrants' (73%); and 'SEA information is helpful in early discussions and interviews with parents and caregivers about how well a child is getting on at school and what support they may need' (73%).

By contrast, teachers were less positive about the time it takes to administer SEA and its scope: for example, 31 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that 'SEA takes too much time for what you get out of it', and 28 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that 'SEA was too limited in scope'. School-level respondents also expressed concern about the scope of SEA.

A fifth of teachers also disagreed with the statement that 'SEA was the best tool they knew of to get an idea of the sorts of skills and understanding new entrants bring to school'.

**TABLE 23:**  
**The extent to which teachers agreed with each of a series of statements about SEA**

Statement about SEA	Teachers using SEA in 2001 (N=394)				
	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly agree %
It provides teachers with a representative snap-shop of a child's competence at a specific time	22.1	61.2	5.6	1.0	–
It helps teachers set appropriate expectations for their new entrants	15.5	57.4	11.7	5.6	0.3
It enables teachers to form an accurate and reliable view about a child's skills and understandings when they begin school	14.0	55.0	15.2	5.1	–
Teachers are able to develop individual programmes for each child on the basis of specific learning needs/strengths identified by SEA	6.9	52.3	19.8	8.1	1.0
SEA information helps teachers to group children more effectively for teaching and learning purposes	12.2	52.5	16.2	4.3	1.0
Information obtained through SEA is helpful in early discussions and interviews with parents and caregivers about how well the child is getting on at school and what support they may need	18.8	54.3	12.7	3.6	0.5
Information obtained through SEA is helpful in discussions with colleagues about how well a child/group is getting on at school and what support they may need	12.2	54.8	14.7	3.8	0.5
I feel that SEA provides a valuable perspective on how new entrants in each class compare with new entrants nationally	11.2	33.8	29.2	10.9	1.5
SEA takes too much time compared to what you get out of it	11.7	19.5	22.1	31.0	3.3
SEA is straightforward to use	10.7	44.2	16.2	14.0	3.5
Repeating SEA tasks at a later stage helps teachers to effectively evaluate a child's progress	5.3	32.5	29.4	5.8	1.3
SEA is too limited in scope	5.1	23.4	32.2	20.1	1.8
SEA is the best tool I know of to get an idea of the sorts of skills and understandings new entrants bring to school with them	4.3	27.9	36.0	16.5	3.6

Teachers were then given the opportunity to comment on why they rated the statements about SEA in Table 23 in the ways that they did. Around a third of the teachers provided comment. As found in the school-level results (see Table 3), teachers most frequently mentioned that SEA needed to be supplemented with other literacy aspects, such as alphabet, letter and word identification. Others simply stated that SEA did not gather enough information to enable them to fully plan for a child's learning. One such teacher commented:

*I do not think it provides enough information in its entirety. New entrants need to have ABC assessment – letter, name and sounds.*

This finding is consistent with the results from the ACER evaluation which recommended that letter identification, phonological awareness, naming vocabulary skills and word recognition skills be added to the SEA assessments.

Teachers were more likely to make specific comments about the Tell Me component than they were about the other two components. For example, 11 percent commented that they felt Tell Me was not accurate enough.

Nine percent of respondents identified aspects of SEA that they had found particularly valuable or useful. One teacher commented:

*I think these are an excellent series of tests. There are a wide range of skills tested and the results provide an excellent snapshot of the child's skills. I enjoy administering them.*

A similar proportion of teachers (8%), however, commented that they could get the same information from their own observations.

A variety of general comments were offered about Checkout (7%), including some teachers saying that they and the children enjoyed this component, or that it provided useful information.

Similarly, Concepts about Print attracted a number of positive comments (7%). As one teacher put it:

*I find CAP and Checkout straightforward and [they] provide clear 'can do' or 'can't do' information.*

Seven percent of teachers reported that SEA overall was time-consuming, with some of these teachers saying that the issue of time was particularly pressing when new entrant classes were larger, when teachers were new to using SEA, or when they did not use the assessment tool often.

Table 24 provides further details about the sorts of comments made.

**TABLE 24:**  
**The reasons teachers gave to explain their ratings of aspects of SEA**  
**(or particular components within SEA).<sup>a</sup>**

Comments concerning statements about SEA	%
<b>SEA overall</b>	
Needs to be supplemented with additional aspects	12.5
Positive comments about the usefulness of the tool	9.4
I can get similar information from own observations	7.8
Needs to be less time-consuming/is difficult to administer	7.3
I do not use all three components	6.3
Positive comments about the Ministry of Education's feedback	5.2
I use or am likely to use alternative assessment tools in the future	5.2
Release-time issues	5.2
General comments	5.7
<b>Tell Me</b>	
Needs to be more accurate	10.9
Needs to be less time-consuming	4.7
<b>Checkout</b>	
General comments	7.3
<b>Concepts about Print</b>	
Positive Comments	7.3
General comments	5.2

*Teachers were asked to rate aspects of SEA according to 13 statements as given in the previous table (Table 23).*

*Note that percentages in the table are a proportion of the number of comments made (N=280). Some respondents made more than one category of comment.*

#### **Whether Teachers felt that SEA needed to be Updated or Modified**

Two-thirds (67%) of teachers who had used SEA in 2001, compared with half of the equivalent school-level respondents (refer Table 4), felt that SEA needed to be updated or modified. Of remaining respondents, almost a quarter (24%) did not think that changes needed to be made to SEA and nine percent omitted to give an opinion.

The two-thirds of teachers who felt that SEA needed to be updated or modified were asked to indicate what they would like to see changed. Most of these teachers offered comments, and, as shown in Table 25, around half (44%) of their comments related to the Tell Me component.

In relation to Tell Me, teachers most often (13% of all comments) identified issues around its scoring standards. Some teachers also made more specific comments, for example, that it does not accurately reflect children's oral language or that it is judgmental, subjective, or limited in value. The following comments illustrate some of these teachers' concerns:

*Tell Me — [need] to make it more of an assessment of ability rather than confidence.*

*Tell Me is difficult to interpret and score in an objective way. Better guidelines [are] required.*

Other comments about Tell Me were that the tasks were too difficult or complex for the children in their class, and that the texts needed to be reviewed and updated to make them more attractive or relevant for children.

Comments from teachers about Checkout most often referred to the need to include colour, shape and other maths concepts in the component or that it should be either linked to or replaced by the Early Numeracy Programme (ENP) or other learning programmes. One of these teachers simply commented:

*Include Early Numeracy Project [in Checkout] or replace [it] with ENP.*

A range of general comments were offered about modifying or updating Concepts about Print, including the view that the accompanying texts should be made more attractive or replaced and that the component was too difficult for some children (see Table 25).

The data in Table 25 also show that, in relation to SEA overall, 13 percent of teachers' comments focused on a need to include additional literacy tasks in the SEA kit, such as alphabet knowledge, letter and word identification, and writing ability.

**TABLE 25:**  
**The ways in which teachers would like SEA to be updated or modified**

<b>Aspect to be updated or modified</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>SEA overall</b>	
Include additional literacy aspects (eg, alphabet, letter and word identification)	12.7
Less time consuming to administer	5.6
Kit more user-friendly	3.7
General comments	2.0
<b>Tell Me</b>	
Scoring standards	13.0
Some parts are too complex/difficult	8.5
Update and modify language (eg, review texts)	8.5
Less time-consuming to administer	5.9
Simpler and easier to administer	5.1
Not as good as, include or replace with more accurate test (eg, JOST)	3.4
<b>Checkout</b>	
Include additional aspects (eg, colour, shape and other maths concepts)	12.4
ENP issues (eg, link or replace with ENP, link with other learning programme)	6.5
General comments	5.9
<b>Concepts about Print</b>	
General comments	6.8

*Note that percentages in the table are a proportion of the number of comments made (N=354).  
Some respondents made more than one category of comment.*

### **Final Comments made by New Entrant Teachers**

The final part of the questionnaire invited teachers to add further comments about any aspect of SEA if they wished. Table 26 shows that 12 percent of the 234 teachers who provided final comment took the opportunity to give positive feedback, describing SEA as useful, valuable or excellent or, more specifically, that it was useful for the early identification of children's needs and abilities. For example:

*I find that collating results on a class basis gives me a good idea for suitable groupings for maths, reading and language. Also gives me ideas for which concepts to cover as a whole class etc.*

As well, the Checkout component in particular attracted positive comment, for example, that it was a useful tool and that children loved this component:

*Children love playing the checkout game! Lots of children ask if they can play it again!*

Like respondents to the school-level questionnaire, some teachers reiterated their concerns about the time involved in administering SEA. As one teacher put it:

*I do like SEA and use results obtained from it. However I do find it time consuming – especially due to the fact that it is unable to be done all in one sitting.*

As might be expected given the results discussed earlier, a number of teachers reiterated issues such as obtaining release time in order to administer the assessments, and that it was difficult or not appropriate to administer SEA in a class setting.

*SEA is too comprehensive to be administered during class time. [There are] lots of interruptions from other five-year-olds. It requires release time to accomplish and schools are not always in a position to do this.*

Lastly, a variety of 'one-off' comments were made, ranging from positive comments about the SEA video and manual to the view that the administration of SEA was bound by school policy.

**TABLE 26:**  
**Further comments about SEA offered by teachers**

<b>Comments</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>SEA overall</b>	
Positive comments	12.4
Release time issues	8.5
Needs to be less time consuming	6.8
It is difficult to administer in a classroom situation	5.1
It is not as good as other tools	4.3
It does not provide any further information that can be obtained using other methods	4.3
I supplement with additional aspects	3.8
Professional development and support needed	3.0
General comments	7.3
<b>Tell Me</b>	
Scoring standards (eg, needs to be more accurate, less subjective)	4.3
Needs to be less time consuming	4.3
General comments	4.7
<b>Checkout</b>	
Children enjoy this component	8.5
It is useful	5.6
General comments	3.8
<b>Concepts about Print</b>	
It is useful	4.7
It is too difficult for some children	3.0

*Note that percentages in the table are a proportion of the number of comments made (N=234). Some respondents made more than one category of comment.*

## Summary of the Individual Teacher Results from Section 2

Completed teacher questionnaires were returned by 64 percent of new entrant teachers. Of the teachers who responded, 69 percent (N=394) were using SEA in 2001. In saying that, however, not all teachers were using all three SEA components when they assessed children.

The majority of teachers using SEA in 2001 'always' used Concepts about Print (86%) and Checkout (80%) when they assessed a child while less than half of teachers (46%) said they 'always' used Tell Me. Well over a third (38%) of teachers never used Tell Me and 12 percent used it just some of the time.

A similar pattern was evident in relation to the tasks used within each component. That is, whereas the majority of teachers used all of the tasks within Checkout (82%) and Concepts about Print (76%) each time they administered these components, once again, only just under half of teachers (47%) indicated that they used all Tell Me tasks every time.

Asked to explain why they did not use Tell Me, teachers most often commented that this component was very time-consuming (39%), difficult to administer (23%), and did not add much to what they already knew about a child from using other forms of assessment (25%). Smaller numbers of teachers felt that it was not helpful for planning a programme of learning for a child (16%), and that it was too difficult for some new entrants to complete (14%). As well, some teachers said they did not feel confident about using this component (11%) or said that they just did not like it (11%).

Data also showed that where a teacher identified a need for further guidance and support with aspects of administering SEA or with using the results, they most often specified Tell Me as the component they wanted more support with. In particular, nearly a third of teachers (30%) said they required assistance with the scoring standards of Tell Me and around a quarter (24%) with interpreting the scores. Respondents also indicated a need for further training in how to use the assessment information (20%) and administer the component (15%). By contrast, only a small number of teachers indicated that assistance was required for Checkout (less than 14%) and Concepts about Print (less than 9%).

Around two-thirds of all participating teachers thought that SEA needed to be updated or modified. Not surprisingly, suggestions most often focused on how Tell Me rather than the other two components could be improved, teachers labelling the component as judgmental, subjective, limited in value, or not providing an accurate reflection of oral language capability.

Although a significant number of teachers were using SEA in 2001, the majority (87%) indicated that they supplemented SEA with other forms of assessment. Only a small number (12%) of teachers indicated that SEA was the only assessment tool they used. Almost half (47%) of teachers who used other assessment tools as well as SEA, said they did so because they wanted to assess a wider range of new entrants' knowledge and skills. A third also mentioned that they used other methods to complement SEA results, and 28 percent that they felt other assessment tools were more closely linked to their programme planning.

When the 178 teachers who were not using SEA in 2001 were asked their reasons for not using this form of assessment, the most frequent reason given was that they preferred alternative assessment methods (67% of those who had used SEA previously and 73% of those who had never used SEA). Finding SEA too time-consuming to administer was another reason commonly mentioned by teachers (67% of those who had used SEA previously and 40% of those who had never used this form of assessment).

In terms of when and where teachers administered SEA, the majority of teachers using SEA in 2001 (72%) said that they assessed children within four and eight weeks of their beginning school, the recommended time frame detailed in the *School Entry Assessment Guide for Teachers*. Assessments were most often administered at the same time as normal morning and afternoon class activities, rather than during special activity times, lunchtimes, or during intervals. At the time of the survey, teachers indicated that 90 percent of new entrant children had already been assessed, or were soon to be assessed, using SEA.

Overall, teachers appeared to be fairly positive about SEA, with respondents more likely to agree with a series of positive statements about SEA given in the questionnaire than they were to disagree. The statement 'SEA provides the teacher with a representative snapshot of a child's competence at a specific time' was supported by the majority of new entrant teachers (83%), with just under a quarter (22%) expressing 'strong' agreement with this statement. 'It helps teachers to set appropriate expectations for new entrants' (73%) and 'SEA information is helpful in early discussions and interviews with parents and caregivers about how well a child is getting on at school and what support they may need' (73%) were also statements which a large majority of teachers responded positively to.

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## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

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Although the school-level questionnaire (discussed in Section One) was designed to provide an overall school-perspective on the use of SEA and the questionnaire for individual new entrant teachers (Section Two) was intended to provide an up-to-date picture of the way in which teachers used SEA, there were several questions in common. Overall, the themes that emerged in the data obtained through each questionnaire were very similar.<sup>15</sup>

Both schools as a whole and individual new entrant teachers generally appeared reasonably positive about SEA. For example, when asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each of various positive statements about the assessment tool, the majority of both groups agreed with the statements:

- ‘SEA helps teachers to set appropriate expectations for new entrants’;
- ‘SEA information is helpful in early discussions and interviews with parents and caregivers about how well a child is getting on at school and what support they may need’; and
- ‘SEA provides the teacher with a representative snapshot of a child’s competence at a specific time’.

However, half of schools and two-thirds of teachers also thought that SEA needed to be modified or updated. This was especially the case in relation to the Tell Me component. The scoring standards of this component were of utmost concern to both groups of respondents. A significant number of teachers also indicated that they required further assistance with the scoring standards of Tell Me and with interpreting the scores. It is not surprising, then, that Tell Me was said to be ‘always’ used when they assessed a child by just 46 percent of new entrant teachers using SEA in 2001.

Generally, teachers appeared to be positive about using Concepts about Print, making few negative comments about this component and offering few suggestions as to how it could or should be updated or modified. Di Davies, in a Ministry of Education (2001) report on SEA<sup>16</sup>, noted that most teachers would already be familiar with Concepts about Print as it is part of the six-year-net<sup>17</sup> survey of children’s progress in their first two years of school. Having prior knowledge of and / or experience of using it may help explain why teachers in the present study reported encountering fewer problems with this component than with Checkout or Tell Me.

The present results are similar to the results of a small, exploratory study undertaken by Helen Dixon and Ruth Williams of the Auckland College of Education<sup>18</sup> into how schools were implementing SEA. For example, as in this study, Dixon and Williams found that not all of the schools they surveyed used all of the SEA components, and if they did use all three, they often did not use all of the tasks within a particular component. The researchers also found that all but two of the schools (80%) in their study were using other forms of assessment as well as SEA, a finding again similar to data discussed in this report — for example, that 87 percent of teachers using SEA in 2001 reported supplementing SEA with other assessment tools.

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<sup>15</sup> It should also be noted here, however, that the similarity between ‘schools’ and ‘teachers’ may often have been because the same person completed both the school-level questionnaire and a teacher questionnaire.

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<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Education. (2001). *School Entry Assessment June 1997-December 2000*. Wellington.

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<sup>17</sup> See footnote 1 for more details about the six-year-net.

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<sup>18</sup> Dixon, H. and Williams, R. (2000). ‘School Entry Assessment Implementation Issue’. in set 1, 2000. Wellington: NZCER.

While Dixon and Williams reported that teachers in their study found Concepts about Print and Checkout reasonably straightforward to administer, teachers considered Tell Me difficult to both administer and score and that the information gained was difficult to use in planning for a child's needs. In addition, Dixon and Williams found that over half of the teachers they surveyed questioned the reliability of the scoring of Tell Me and commented that it could lead to inconsistencies in assessments within schools and between schools. Like the teachers in the present survey, a number of teachers surveyed by Dixon and Williams questioned the level of difficulty of some of the Tell Mebooks and said that they were therefore selective about the ones they used. Similarly, ACER, in their recent evaluation of the technical and methodological aspects of SEA<sup>19</sup>, commented in their report that:

*'The choice of books in the Tell Me component of the SEA interferes with the reliability of the test as the allocation of books to students is not random and the books have different levels of difficulty.'*

ACER recommended that only one book be used for the Tell Me component.

ACER also recommended that additional literacy and numeracy skills needed to be included in the SEA assessments, a finding reiterated by the schools and teachers in the present study.

In conclusion, although SEA was being used in over half of New Zealand primary schools at the time of the study (August 2001), it is evident from the research findings detailed in this report and the data documented in prior evaluations of SEA, that there are aspects of the assessment kit that teachers are unhappy with. This is particularly the case for the Tell Me component, which, amongst other things, teachers considered to be too time-consuming and too difficult to administer.

The results of this study and the evaluation carried out by ACER suggest that a review of SEA was timely and that if greater numbers of teachers and schools are to be encouraged to use SEA, then aspects of this assessment tool will need to be revised.

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<sup>19</sup> Details about the evaluation report from ACER are given in footnote 4 of this report.

## Some Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings presented in this report, the following recommendations are made:

- That as the Concepts about Print component of SEA appears to be generally well regarded by teachers, only minor modifications are likely to be required, such as making the books on which tasks are centred more attractive to children.
- That although the Checkout component is frequently administered by teachers who use SEA, modifications to ensure its ongoing usefulness should be considered. For example, some teachers felt it needed to be expanded to include additional mathematical concepts or that it needed to be linked to or even replaced by the Early Numeracy Project (ENP).
- That consideration be given to an in-depth revision of Tell Me. This component is used considerably less often by teachers than the other components of SEA and is regarded as both overly time-consuming and difficult to administer. Issues around how it is scored have also been raised.
- That in order to encourage more schools to send in summary data to the Ministry, clearer guidelines need to be developed and distributed to schools on when, why, and how to send in their SEA data. The extent of data received is important in order to improve the Ministry's ability to produce a representative, national picture of the sorts of knowledge and skills new entrant children begin school with.
- That ongoing professional development be provided for teachers in the use of SEA to not only promote the use of SEA in schools but also to ensure consistency between teachers and schools in the administration and scoring of SEA.
- That professional development include a specific focus to ensure that teachers are able to effectively interpret and use SEA data, including feedback from the Ministry on how their new entrants compare with other new entrants throughout the country.
- That provision be made to provide teachers of new entrants with sufficient release time to enable them to adequately administer the assessment. This is seen to be critical, in view of the finding that SEA is considered to be time-consuming to administer.