

Summary

This report is the second of two reports which describe the findings from the IEA's¹ second cycle of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2005/2006 (or PIRLS-05/06)² from a New Zealand perspective. The first report *Reading literacy in New Zealand*,³ presented an overview of the international findings relevant to New Zealand and was released to coincide with the announcement by the IEA of the PIRLS results in November 2007.⁴ The focus of this second report is on national-level results.

PIRLS examines the reading literacy achievement of middle-primary school students every five years, and involves New Zealand's Year 5 students. In 2005/2006 New Zealand and 39 other countries took part in PIRLS; five Canadian provinces also took part as benchmarking participants. Just over 6300 Year 5 students from approximately 240 schools took part in the study. New Zealand, along with 26 other countries, had also taken part in the first study in 2001 (hereafter referred to as PIRLS-01) enabling comparisons to be made across the two cycles.

An overview of Year 5 students' reading literacy achievement⁵

- The mean reading literacy score for New Zealand Year 5 students (532) in 2005/2006 was significantly higher than the international PIRLS scale mean (500).⁶
- The range of reading literacy performance was relatively wide for all ethnic groupings.
- There were both high- and low-achieving students in all ethnic groupings; however, the mean scores for Pākehā/European (552) and Asian (550) students were significantly higher than the mean scores for Māori (483) and Pasifika (479) students.
 - Asian and Pākehā/European girls had the strongest average performance.
 - Māori and Pasifika boys were found to have the weakest average performance.
- Among New Zealand Year 5 students there was a relatively large group who demonstrated that they were good readers as shown by the relatively large proportion reaching the PIRLS higher reading benchmarks. Students from all ethnic groupings were represented at this level.
 - Asian and Pākehā/European girls had the largest proportions reaching the higher benchmarks.
- Relative to other higher-performing countries there was a notable-sized group of New Zealand Year 5 students who did not reach the PIRLS lower international benchmarks.
 - Māori boys, Pasifika boys, Pasifika girls, and Year 5 students in lower decile schools had a greater likelihood of being in this group with weaker reading comprehension skills than other Year 5 students.
- Although Year 5 girls and boys achieved relatively well internationally, New Zealand had one of the largest gender differences in achievement favouring girls to be observed internationally.
 - Significant achievement differences favouring Year 5 girls were observed between girls and boys in the Asian, Māori, and Pākehā/European groups, but not between Pasifika girls and boys.

Any change between 2001 and 2005/2006?

- There was no significant change in New Zealand Year 5 students' mean achievement in reading from 2001 to 2005/2006.
- New Zealand's relative standing compared with the other 2001 trend countries had dropped slightly in 2005/2006.
 - This was largely the effect of the marked increases in the mean scores recorded for Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Russian Federation, and Singapore, these being the three countries that had similar performance to New Zealand in 2001.
- There was no significant change in the mean reading literacy achievement of any of the four ethnic groupings from 2001 to 2005/2006.

¹ International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

² Internationally this cycle is referred to as PIRLS 2006. In this report it is referred to as PIRLS-05/06 to acknowledge the timing the study was administered in Southern Hemisphere countries.

³ Chamberlain, 2007b. See the references for details.

⁴ Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007. See the references for details.

⁵ The results reflect the achievement of *all* Year 5 students; achievement by the language of instruction is not examined in this report.

⁶ Statistically significant at the 5 percent level. For details, see the Technical Notes at the end of this report.

- There was no significant change in either Year 5 girls' or boys' reading literacy achievement from 2001 to 2005/2006. Moreover, the size of the difference between girls' and boys' average performance also remained unchanged from 2001 to 2005/2006.
- While there were no significant changes in the mean performance in either of the two reading purposes, Year 5 students were found to have a slight but significant advantage on informational reading than on literary reading. The opposite was observed in 2001.
 - This finding was observed for girls, boys, and students in all ethnic groupings.

Students' reading attitudes and home context

- Year 5 students were relatively positive about reading, although they tended to be more reticent with their views in 2005/2006 than in 2001.
- The shifts in student attitudes were significant for Year 5 boys, Māori students, and Pākehā/European girls.
- Boys were more likely than girls to never read for fun outside of school; these boys were most likely to be Māori and Pasifika boys.
- Year 5 students tended to be less confident about their reading ability compared with many of their international counterparts.
 - Moreover, their views were more moderate in 2005/2006 than in 2001.
 - This negative shift between assessment cycles was significant for both Year 5 boys and girls, and Māori, Pākehā/European, and Pasifika students, but not for Asian students.
- Children's early childhood experiences, including the number of years they attended an early childhood facility, were positively related to their reading literacy achievement when in Year 5. The relationship was stronger for boys than it was for girls.
- Year 5 students who regularly spoke the language of the PIRLS assessment generally had higher reading literacy achievement than Year 5 students who sometimes or rarely did; they were also more likely to achieve at or above the PIRLS lower benchmarks.
- Positive values on socio-economic indicators such as household income, financial well being, and the number of books in the home were associated with higher reading literacy achievement.

Schools and school climate

- The urban/rural locality of a school did not appear to be related to students' reading literacy achievement.
- There were high-achieving and low-achieving students in all three school decile-band categories, although the range was greater in lower decile schools than in either mid-range or higher decile schools.
- The average performance of Year 5 students who attended lower decile schools (485) was generally weaker than the average performance of students who attended either mid-range (538) or higher decile (560) schools.
- There was no change from 2001 to 2005/2006 in the achievement of students in any of the school decile band categories.
- Internationally, the average number of hours New Zealand school principals estimated they spent on school-related activities was high. This observation held across the locality of schools and the school decile bands.
- Although the majority of New Zealand principals reported that resource shortages or inadequacies had mostly no impact on reading instruction, principals of both lower and higher decile schools were more likely to report that shortages/inadequacies were impacting on their schools in 2005/2006 than their counterparts in 2001.
- In 2005/2006, principals of lower decile schools tended to be less positive about the climate for learning in their schools and more likely to have concerns about negative student behaviours in their schools than their counterparts in mid-range and higher decile schools.
- The views of Year 5 students in lower decile schools about negative student behaviours to some extent mirrored those of the school principals of these schools.
- A little under one in five New Zealand Year 5 students did not like being at school, about the same as the international average.
 - Year 5 boys were more likely than girls to feel this way about school.
 - Pākehā/European boys were more likely to have this view (nearly 30% of the group) than any other group of Year 5 students.