

Managing National Assessment Report

Murchison Area School

October 2021

What this report is about

This report summarises NZQA's review of how effectively Murchison Area School:

- has addressed issues identified through NZQA's Managing National Assessment review and through the school's own internal review
- manages assessment practice for national qualifications
- manages internal and external moderation
- makes use of and manages assessment-related data
- maintains the currency of assessment policy and procedures, and communicates them to staff, students and families.

The summary section evaluates the school's overall effectiveness and provides a broad overview of the review's key findings for all readers. The remaining sections provide detail of these findings for school managers.

Why we review how schools are managing national assessment

The purpose of a Managing National Assessment review is:

- to confirm, in combination with the most recent Education Review Office report, that schools are meeting the requirements of the *Consent to Assess Against Standards on the Directory of Assessment Standards Rules 2011* (CAAS) and its *Guidelines* (CAAS Guidelines) in order to maintain their consent to assess; and
- to help schools achieve valid, fair, accurate and consistent internal assessment according to the requirements of the *Assessment (including Examination) Rules for Schools with Consent to Assess 2021* (Assessment Rules).

What are possible outcomes

Outcomes may include NZQA:

- requiring action from the school where an issue is identified that significantly impacts on the school meeting the requirements of their *Consent to Assess*
- agreeing action with the school where an issue has been identified that could become significant if not addressed
- making suggestions for the school to consider to enhance good assessment practice.

What this review includes

The review has three components:

- The annual external moderation of the school's internal assessment.
- A check on specific aspects of assessment systems on an annual basis.
- A check on the school's assessment systems at least once every four years.

How we conducted this review

The review includes examination of documentation from a range of sources and interviewing key stakeholders.

Prior to the visit the school provided the following documents:

- information on their actions and self-review since the last Managing National Assessment report
- *Teacher's NCEA Handbook 2021* (Staff Handbook)
- *Student and Whānau NCEA Handbook 2021* (Student Handbook)
- a sample of course outlines for Years 11, 12 and 13.

Two School Relationship Managers met with:

- the Principal's Nominee
- Teacher(s) in Charge of:
 - Science
 - Physical Education/Outdoor Education
 - English
- Two students.

There was a report-back session with the Principal and Principal's Nominee at the end of the review visit to highlight good practice and areas for improvement, with suggested strategies, next steps and to agree on any action required.

SUMMARY

Murchison Area School

28 October 2021

Consent to assess confirmed

This review found that the school is meeting the requirements of the *Consent to Assess Against Standards on the Directory of Assessment Standards Rules 2011*. No significant issues with the school's management of national assessment were found. The school's own review mechanisms allow them to identify and respond to most issues. Therefore, it is anticipated that the next Managing National Assessment review will be conducted within three years.

What the school is doing well

All programmes of teaching and assessment are a mix of subjects taught by the school and by external providers. The small number of senior students at Murchison Area School means that teachers know their students extremely well and can be very responsive to student need and future pathways when considering assessment opportunities.

The school focuses on providing the best possible transition pathways for their students. Flexible learning programmes that emphasise assessing students when they are ready and provide authentic assessment opportunities in a local context, are key to the school's practice. This approach is endorsed by an inclusive, close-knit community. Students feel highly supported and report that the culture of the school is overwhelmingly positive.

Murchison Area School builds relationships with outside providers to offer the best possible range of assessment opportunities for their students. This supports the school's flexible approach to assessment. For example, it allows a number of students to accelerate their progress towards qualifications by completing assessment towards multiple levels of qualification in a calendar year.

Senior Management have processes in place to ensure that the school is reporting credible assessment results. These processes ensure consistent assessment and moderation practice across Learning Areas that meets NZQA's requirements. Teachers make use of grade verifiers from a range of schools, and digitised moderation processes allow the Principal's Nominee to monitor the process and reconcile results with moderation before they are submitted to NZQA.

The Principal and Deputy Principal lead the monitoring and tracking of student achievement. They have regular conversations with students and communicate closely with whānau. This helps students feel supported in their progress towards the qualification and ensures they are kept up to date on progress towards their qualification.

Many of the systems relating to assessment practice and delivery of the qualification have been updated by the Principal's Nominee to ensure credible and consistent school-wide assessment and moderation practice. This reflects an improvement in the school's self-review mechanisms as well as their openness to respond to external review to inform ongoing change.

Areas for improvement

All entries submitted to NZQA should have a result reported to allow the accurate recording of student achievement. The Principal's Nominee needs to ensure that every entry has a result where there has been an adequate assessment opportunity, or is withdrawn prior to the final data file submission.

Moderation of assessment is generally robust. The school should formalise their response to external moderation by documenting action plans and including a process to reflect on outcomes so that the review loop can be closed. To help manage workloads, Senior Management should work with teachers to develop better understanding around purposeful selection of samples for internal moderation.

Unexpected Event Grades and Derived Grades need to be quality assured before they are submitted to NZQA. Senior Management need to make sure that there is a process in place to either verify or justify practice examination results before they are reported to NZQA.

Agreed action

The school agreed that a number of actions will improve the quality of their assessment systems. These are:

- ensure action plans in response to external moderation are documented and include a process to review the completion of agreed actions.
- ensure there is a process for selecting samples of student work for external moderation, that meets NZQA's requirements.
- develop a process to make sure all entries are reported to NZQA with a grade where there has been an adequate assessment opportunity offered.
- ensure all Unexpected Event Grades are subject to quality assurance before submitting them to NZQA.

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29 November 2021

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FINDINGS OF THIS REVIEW

How effectively has the school responded to external and internal review?

External review

Evidence for external review actions having been appropriately and effectively addressed. (CAAS Guidelines 2.6iv, 3iv-3v)

Action Items from 23 July 2018 Managing National Assessment Report There were five agreed actions from the last MNA, all of which have been actioned or partially addressed as below.

The school has put in place a process to review external moderation outcomes and complete an action plan. The next step is to strengthen this process by documenting the plan and including a step to review the effectiveness of any actions taken, thereby closing the review loop.

Students requiring special assessment conditions are identified as early as Year 9, based on data collected in the junior school. Where possible, students are provided with these conditions from Year 9 onward to ensure that their assessment needs are met as early as possible. The school has an active Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator who keeps records of students requiring special assessment conditions and ensures they are provided.

The Principal's Nominee has put in place a process that allows him to monitor that moderation is completed for all standards where results are reported. Moderation processes are consistent across all learning areas, and ensure credible results are submitted to NZQA.

The school's assessment documentation has been updated and is generally fit for purpose. Staff and students are given a copy of the respective handbooks, which are updated at the start of each year.

The school has developed a process to randomly select student work for external moderation where there are more than eight samples. The process falls short of being truly random, however, due to random selection not being required from 2022 the school needs to ensure that they clearly understand the [new selection criteria](#).

Response to external moderation outcomes The school has reviewed external moderation procedures following a recent increase in inconsistent outcomes between teachers and the national standard identified by NZQA external moderators. Senior Management have instituted a practice of following up all external moderation reports with a conversation between the Principal's Nominee and the teacher of that learning area. These conversations identify the issues raised and what support needs to be provided to ensure the teacher can rectify any issues. This process can be further strengthened by documenting any actions planned to address issues and the outcomes. In this way, management can close the review loop to be sure follow-up action is taking place and is successfully completed.

Internal review

Evidence for the school using its self-review and evaluation processes to identify areas for on-going improvement in assessment practice and procedures, which are then actioned. (CAAS Guidelines 3iv)

The school is developing its capacity to undertake meaningful review and take ownership of improving the school's assessment and moderation processes. Following the last review, changes in key personnel meant leadership of internal review was lacking. Senior Management took steps to address this, including the appointment of a new Principal's Nominee. Teachers interviewed appreciate the more proactive management of assessment the change in leadership has allowed.

In response to internal review, the Principal's Nominee has made the internal moderation processes of the school more robust. After grade verification, all assessment material is now stored digitally on a shared drive which allows the Principal's Nominee to check internal moderation processes before submitting results to NZQA. Through this check, management can be assured that expectations of quality assurance are being met and results reported are credible.

Updating of Staff and Student NCEA Handbooks since the last review has helped to ensure consistency of assessment practice across the school. Staff have a clear understanding of all the steps required for quality assurance and put this into practice consistently across the different learning areas.

Flexibility of course structure means that students can embark on highly personalised courses of learning School leadership encourages the development of teaching and NCEA assessment programmes that meet the needs of all students. Staff know their students well and use that knowledge as well as input from students and whānau to review learning programmes. These reviews are supported by achievement data and professional conversations at regular senior syndicate meetings to ensure students have the opportunity to meet their goals.

Agreed action

NZQA and senior management agree on the following action to improve the school's response to external review Senior management undertakes to:

- ensure action plans in response to external moderation are documented and include a process to review the completion of agreed actions for effectiveness.

How effectively does the school's assessment practice meet the needs of its students?

Evidence for assessment practice meeting student needs. (CAAS Guidelines 2.5v-vii, 2.6i & ii and Assessment (including Examination) Rules for Schools with Consent to Assess 2021 5.1 – 5.7)

Murchison Area School has effective processes and procedures for meeting the assessment needs of their students by:

- operating a flexible course structure which allows students to structure individualised programmes of study
- school-wide emphasis on assessing students when they are ready
- ensuring assessment practice is consistent across learning areas
- clear and robust strategies for ensuring authenticity of student work
- offering multi-level courses where appropriate
- engaging with a range of external providers to supplement courses offered in school and broaden available student pathways
- using school-based evidence to support applications for students who are eligible for special assessment conditions and providing appropriate support.

Murchison Area School has effective processes and procedures for:

- ensuring consistent practice for managing missed and late work across learning areas
- ensuring consistent practice for managing appeals of assessment decisions across learning areas
- tracking student achievement data to ensure students are kept up to date and supported on progress towards their qualification
- ensuring derived grades are gathered and submitted to NZQA
- meeting the requirements of the *Privacy Act 2020*.

Range of external providers ensure students have access to best possible range of achievement pathways The school actively builds relationships with external providers that allow them to offer students a greater number of pathways to assessment. Students report that these pathways create career and further training opportunities that they might not otherwise have. These relationships are ably managed by a distance learning co-ordinator who holds all memoranda of understanding and tracks and enters student results as they are submitted to the school by the external providers.

Improvements to Appeals and Breaches Policies The school operates clear policies to deal with appeals of assessment decisions and breaches of conditions of assessment. The policies should be updated to reflect principles of natural justice; particularly, having one person investigate the issue and a second person making the final decision. This avoids potential conflicts of interest, and gives all parties confidence that the process being followed is fair.

For consideration

To extend good practice in meeting student needs and supporting assessment practice, the school is encouraged to consider:

- ensuring the principles of natural justice are reflected in the school's appeals and breaches policies.

How effectively does the school's internal and external moderation assure assessment quality?

Evidence for internal and external moderation ensuring assessment quality. (CAAS Guidelines 2.6iii & vi, and Assessment (including Examination) Rules for Schools with Consent to Assess 2021 6.4b)

Murchison Area School has effective processes and procedures for managing internal moderation by:

- ensuring assessment tasks reflect the standard by having amended or new tasks critiqued prior to use
- using clarification documents, benchmark exemplars and documented discussions on grade judgements to inform assessment decisions
- using appropriate subject specialists from inside or outside the school to verify assessor grade judgements for a sample of student work
- requiring teachers to document quality assurance processes physically or digitally on an *Internal Moderation Cover Sheet* prior to reporting results to NZQA
- following the internal moderation processes of the standard setting bodies.

Murchison Area School has effective processes and procedures for managing external moderation by:

- ensuring samples of student work are adequately stored.
- valuing moderator's feedback for professional learning to inform changes to assessments and assessor's judgements.

Selection of samples for External Moderation The school must make sure that they understand NZQA's requirements for the selection of samples for external moderation. This should be reflected in their assessment documentation. In the last MNA review it was identified that the school did not have a random selection policy that met NZQA's requirements at the time. From 2022, as NZQA no longer requires selection to be random, the school will need to revise its selection policy to remain current and compliant.

Focus on reducing workload by considering grade verification requirements for sufficiency The school should consider providing staff with further guidance on sufficient grade verification by the strategic selection of student work. Due to small class sizes Learning Areas currently assure the quality of grades awarded by including most, if not all, student work when verifying assessor judgements. Strategic selection has the potential to reduce verifier workload, without compromising the quality of the assurance process. There is no fixed, or predetermined, number of pieces of student work that must be verified. The sample size will be determined by factors such as assessor experience, feedback from external moderation, the availability of good quality grade boundary exemplars, and number of students assessed.

Agreed action

NZQA and senior management agree on the following action to improve the school's internal and external moderation to assure assessment quality. Senior management undertakes to:

- ensure there is a process for selecting samples of student work for external moderation, that meets NZQA's requirements.

How effectively does the school manage and make use of assessment-related data?

Evidence for data management and use supporting student achievement outcomes. (CAAS Guidelines 2.6v, 2.7i-iii)

Murchison Area School effectively uses assessment-related data to support achievement outcomes for students by:

- using data to inform course design which meets students' qualifications pathway needs
- meeting regularly across Learning Areas to discuss students at risk of not meeting their overall qualification goals, and co-creating interventions
- analysing achievement data and using it to facilitate meaningful learning conversations with students.
- using data gathered in the junior school to inform access to Special Assessment Conditions, and put them in place as early as Year 9 to allow students to become comfortable with them.
- knowing their students educational needs, interests and future career goals, and using this knowledge to underpin assessment decisions

Murchison Area School reports accurate achievement data by:

- having the Principal's Nominee check entries and result data before submitting to NZQA
- submitting data to NZQA regularly, and in a timely manner
- resolving any issues highlighted in the *Key Indicators* or submission error messages
- having adequate processes to ensure that students are entered for all standards they plan to complete in a year
- ensuring results data is subject to an acceptable quality assurance process
- submitting data to NZQA in a timely manner

Strengthening Learning Areas reports to Board of Trustees While all learning areas are required to report to the board, the school could consider strengthening this practice by ensuring consistency in the reporting of attainment data. This would mean that there is transparency across Learning Areas and lay the groundwork for ongoing professional conversations about student achievement across different levels of the school.

Accurate results reporting Over the last three years, a high percentage of entries into standards have been reported to NZQA without a result. The school should have a process to ensure that all student entries to NZQA have a grade reported if an adequate assessment opportunity has been provided. When an assessment opportunity is not offered, the entry should be removed. This will provide clarity for students and their whānau about their progress towards qualifications.

Ensure that Unexpected Event Grades are quality assured The school should ensure that evidence gathered to provide Derived and Unexpected Event Grades is subject to a quality assurance process before it is submitted to NZQA. This step is

required to meet NZQA's requirements for credible assessment. The school collects derived and unexpected event grades through school practice exams which are usually held during term three. These exams provide standard specific evidence should students be unable to sit exams for unforeseen reasons. In most subjects, verification of student results is difficult as there is only one subject specialist within the school. In this case, the school should consider a [justification process](#) for these results. This would involve having another teacher who is experienced with standards-based assessment review the reasons for giving a grade, and critique the process the marking teacher has followed.

Agreed action

NZQA and senior management agree on the following action to improve the management and use of assessment-related data. Senior management undertakes to:

- develop a process to make sure all entries are reported to NZQA with a grade where there has been an adequate assessment opportunity
- ensure all Unexpected Event Grades and Derived Grades are subject to quality assurance before submitting them to NZQA.

For consideration

To extend good practice in external review and self-review of assessment, the school is encouraged to consider:

- strengthening teacher understanding of how to complete the annual report to the Board of Trustees, to develop more consistency around attainment data.

How effectively does the school's communication inform staff, and students and their families about assessment?

Evidence for school communication promoting understanding of assessment. (CAAS Guidelines 2.4i(f), 2.4v, 2.6vii, 2.7ii(b))

Murchison Area School has effective processes and procedures for:

- ensuring students are provided with assessment information for all courses that they undertake
- reviewing staff and student handbooks to ensure that they are largely fit for purpose, to support understanding and consistency of assessment policy across the school
- having a clear induction process for staff members new to the school
- reporting on students' goals and progress towards qualifications, including through the KAMAR student portal, fortnightly reports and three-way educational conferences.

Murchison Area School assists common understanding of assessment practice by:

- using secondary syndicate meetings to clarify changes of assessment procedures or expectations, and facilitating discussion on assessment best practice
- supporting professional learning opportunities, and collaborating with external subject specialists
- assisting and encouraging students to understand what they need to achieve in order to gain a qualification.

Students well informed about NCEA and school assessment practice

Communications to students about assessment and support processes are effective. When interviewed, they clearly articulated the school assessment practices, NZQA procedures, and what is needed to gain a qualification. They understood school processes such as resubmission, authenticity requirements, the right to appeal, moderation and derived grades. Students appreciated the Principal's Nominee's knowledge and willingness to answer questions and acknowledged the support of the staff enabling them to demonstrate their best work.

No action required

No issues with the way in which the school maintained the currency of assessment policy and procedures, and communicated them to staff, students and families were identified during this review.