

MANAGING NATIONAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery

October 2016

What this report is about

This report summarises NZQA's evaluation of how effectively Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery:

- 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
- manages and makes use of assessment-related data
- maintains the currency of assessment policy and procedures, and communicates them to staff, students and families.

The summary section provides a broad overview of the review's key findings. The remaining sections detail feedback for the school.

Why we review how schools are managing national assessment

The purpose of a managing national assessment review is:

- 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 2016* (Assessment Rules); and
- to confirm 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, in combination with the most recent Education Review Office report.

What this review includes

The review has three components:

- The annual external moderation of assessment materials and of teacher grade judgements for student work selected by the school's random-selection process.
- A check on specific aspects of assessment systems on an annual basis.
- A visit to review each school's assessment systems at least once every four years.

How we conducted this review

The School Relationship Manager visited the school and met with the Principal's Nominee, the Assistant Principal – Curriculum Leader, three students and five learning advisers (teachers).

The school also provided pre-review information and the following documents:

- *Assessment and the National Qualifications Framework Staff Handbook Update August 2015*
- *Assessment and the National Qualifications Framework Student / Parent Handbook Update November 2015*
- Course overviews for a range of subjects.

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

Background

Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery is a Year 1-13 school, formed by the merger of two schools in the aftermath of the Canterbury earthquakes. It remains displaced from its central city location. In August 2016, the Ministry of Education announced they have purchased land on which to build an inner city campus, the move to which is planned for 2019.

A designated character school, the student is central in directing his or her own learning. Students choose courses on the basis of readiness or interest. Courses vary in length. There are no compulsory courses or qualifications pathways. Students set their own qualification goals.

Students are at the centre of their learning and encouraged to be creative, innovative and take risks. They are supported in this by the school providing diverse and flexible learning pathways. The school believes that learning is a partnership with everyone being a learner and a teacher.

SUMMARY

Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery

13 October 2016

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 some issues and respond. Therefore, it is anticipated that the next Managing National Assessment review will be conducted within three years.

Areas of strength

Assessment at Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery is intentional. Their focus is on a programme of learning tailored to the individual, that may then be assessed for qualifications. School's self-review includes identifying approaches to best support this focus. The school has recently adopted a community of practice learning model to remove a siloed curriculum, with everyone being responsible for leading assessment policy and process. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this change on student achievement.

The school uses a range of best practice approaches to support student achievement including a focus on developing individual education plans with comprehensive monitoring and mentoring processes in place. Confident use of evidence gathering occurs across a range of contexts or forms. External providers are used to offer a greater range of options where required. The need for effective management of the authenticity of student work is well understood and practised, given that student work for assessment is ongoing and may occur offsite.

Internal moderation is embedded practice in most subject areas. The school's internal moderation monitoring process can identify where it is not and has responded appropriately, ensuring that results reported to NZQA are quality assured.

NCEA achievement goal setting is an important element for both students and the school. Data is used to both develop and inform. The school is considering how to broaden the range and type of information used to analyse student and school achievement.

Students feel well informed about their progress and well supported by the provision of assessment opportunities and practices to meet their qualifications goals.

Areas for development

A number of actions will support and strengthen the school's expectations for assessment quality. When responding to external moderation, the review of internal moderation practices will enhance the value of feedback, ensuring improved assessment quality. Clarifying with staff that verification for internal moderation should focus on student work at grade boundaries will provide greater confidence that teacher judgements are consistent with the standard.

Review of the policy for the timing of reporting results to students will support quality assurance practices through teachers not feeling pressured to rush the verification process, while allowing timely feedback to students.

In support of the school's aims that assessment is intentional and students are assessed when ready, this review concurred with the need to build staff understanding and confidence in their use of opportunities for further assessment and resubmission, and their management of late work and extensions.

This review also supported the students' view that their detailed knowledge of NCEA and the Qualifications Framework could be expanded so they would be better informed about the qualifications opportunities available to them. This would allow students to maximise the value of the progress information, and guidance and mentoring the school provides.

Next steps

Senior management undertakes to:

- examine internal moderation practices where external moderation identifies assessment issues
- review and clarify further assessment, resubmission, late work and extension practices with staff and students
- clarify that the verification process involves sufficient, purposeful selection of student work at grade boundaries to provide confidence that teacher judgements are consistent with the standard
- review the school's requirements for reporting results to students after an assessment
- provide more information about NCEA qualifications to students.

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30th November 2016

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FINDINGS OF THIS REVIEW

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

External review

Evidence was sought that external review recommendations and findings have been appropriately and effectively addressed. (CAAS Guidelines 3v)

Action Items from 24 October 2014 MNA Report As a newly consented school, the school was on a two-year review cycle. There were no action items in the 2014 report.

External moderation

The school's external moderation history indicates that assessment results reported to NZQA are not at the standard in some subjects. Work has not been available in others. In response to these issues, the school supported NZQA's plan to externally moderate an increased number of standards in 2015.

A pattern has been identified in three subject areas and it is agreed that for 2016, results in these subjects will not be reported to NZQA until they have been moderated by a subject specialist. The school noted they will not be offering these subjects in 2017. One other subject area was assessed as part of the Gateway programme and lacked the professional feedback from a specialist that would help to assure quality. This issue has been addressed.

External moderation feedback provides evidence of the efficacy of internal moderation. The school responds to feedback from external moderators to address any issues of assessment quality. Where the assessment material needs modifying or agreement with assessor decisions is not consistent with the standard, a written response from the learning adviser is required. Where external moderation identifies issues, the school's response should include close examination of that subject's internal moderation practices to establish that they are providing robust assurance.

Internal review

Evidence was sought that the school was effectively 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)

Goal setting, and regular, collaborative review and reflection help to support internal review practices at Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery school. The Principal's Nominee has recently focused on maintaining or improving existing assessment practice and ensuring it becomes well embedded by documenting some excellent exemplars of best assessment practice.

The following recent strategic and operational reviews undertaken were discussed during this Managing National Assessment visit.

Change made to organisational structure The school believes everyone is both a learner and teacher and has changed its organisational structure to a communities of learning model. Teachers are called learning advisors to reinforce this principle. Learning advisors facilitate learning and teaching; they support a group of students within a home base and are also responsible for ensuring the quality of assessment

programmes and practices within their subjects. They liaise directly with the Principal's Nominee on assessment for qualifications.

In 2015, Community Leaders were introduced, replacing subject managers. Several home bases form a community, which is overseen by the Community Leader who monitors student pastoral and learning needs. While monitoring of student achievement is included, the leader is not involved in the management of assessment. While all teachers commented on the knowledge and helpfulness of the Principal's Nominee, some noted that they found meeting their subject-specific needs difficult, given the lack of a subject manager. The impact of this will form part of next year's review of the structural changes made.

Refinements to internal moderation practices The timing of internal moderation is currently under review. Given that there are now no subject managers with responsibility for co-ordinating the internal moderation process, the school has found some instances where results have been reported to students prior to verification taking place. This is against school and NZQA policy. The school plans to set aside one in four staff meetings to provide a regular forum for internal moderation although this is not yet embedded. They report that to date two meetings have occurred.

The Principal's Nominee has developed an online tracking system to monitor internal moderation in response to finding the paper-based system cumbersome and difficult to maintain. It provides senior leadership with a useful overview of the standards being offered and information about their internal moderation status.

Entry policy and practices clarified The school believes that assessment should be intentional, and supports students who want to participate in learning but do not intend to be assessed for qualifications. As a result, in the past, students were not entered in a standard until they submitted a completed assessment, resulting in a lack of transparency about whether the student's chosen assessment pathway was supporting their qualifications goal. To allow better tracking of whether a student has sufficient entries to potentially achieve a qualification, the school now enters them when they start the course.

The policy around banking credits for students in Year 9 and 10 has also been reviewed in response to feedback from caregivers who did not want to pay the fee where their child was not participating in external assessment or had achieved only a small number of credits in internal assessment. All results are now banked until the student is in Year 11, unless there is a specific parental request otherwise.

Agreed action

NZQA and senior management agree on the following action to improve the school's response to external review and its self-review of assessment systems and practice. Senior management undertakes to:

- examine internal moderation practices where external moderation identifies assessment issues.

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

(CAAS Guidelines 2.5v-vii, 2.6, 3)

Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery has effective processes and procedures for:

- managing requests for extensions of deadlines for assignments
- providing standard-specific evidence where a derived grade application is made
- making applications for special assessment conditions where students have appropriately identified needs
- meeting the requirements of the Privacy Act 1993.

Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery has effective processes and procedures for meeting the needs of their students by:

- developing a learning plan tailored to the needs of an individual student that includes assessment for qualifications where relevant
- encouraging the use of one piece of student evidence to assess more than one standard
- supporting the gathering of evidence in a range of forms including visual, oral and written
- providing subject-specific mentoring
- strong links to external providers and/or off site assessment to offer a greater range of standards to help students meet their qualifications goals.

Authenticity processes effective The school's special character supports students to work off site and at their own pace. This means that management of authenticity is particularly important when assessing. Where assessment includes the gathering of evidence over time and outside of the classroom, students are required to regularly share their work with learning advisers. This is usually carried out electronically. The expectation of ongoing checking is embedded practice and allows for continual monitoring of the development of student work. Instances of authenticity concerns are investigated, and where substantiated, a not achieved grade is reported.

Extension and late work expectations reviewed One challenge arising from students being on individualised assessment plans is supporting them to stay on track towards their qualifications goals. To take the pressure off learning advisers in managing this, and to build a culture of students getting work in on time, the school has reviewed its policy and procedures on late work. Students are expected to request an extension where submission of work is delayed and the Principal's Nominee has developed a coversheet for this purpose. This change is not yet embedded as students described learning advisers allowing work to be handed in late and not really enforcing due dates.

Review of assessment practices ongoing The school expects assessment to take place when the student is ready. This best practice is a particular challenge at Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery, given their individualised approach to student assessment.

In response to identifying a lack of clarity around further assessment, resubmission and appeals, the Principal's Nominee has included a range of informative

hypothetical scenarios in the staff handbook to assist them in making decisions. He described the next step being for staff to review these scenarios and use them confidently when making decisions.

The Principal's Nominee's view correlates with the students' description of learning advisers providing further assessment opportunities because they were assessed before they were ready, or were not engaged in the assessment process to start with. The provision of further assessment opportunities seems to be more commonly practiced than other schools which is especially significant given the workload for staff and students in assessing a standard for a second time.

Resubmission can reduce the need for further assessment. While everyone described resubmission as useful where a student has made an error or omission they are capable of finding themselves, in some instances learning advisers are not using it. This supports the need for the school to conduct further work with staff on this topic.

Agreed action

NZQA and senior management agree on the following action to improve the management of assessment for national qualifications. Senior management undertakes to:

- review and clarify further assessment, resubmission, late work and extension practices with staff and students.

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

(CAAS Guidelines 2.6, 3)

Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery has effective processes and procedures for:

- managing internal moderation by teachers:
 - critiquing assessment materials for all standards before an assessment is used
 - verifying selected pieces of student work
 - using a subject specialist from another school for verification where a Learning Advisor is a sole teacher
 - documenting compliance with the process using an *internal moderation cover sheet*, which is prepopulated from the monitoring tracking sheet, and filed electronically
 - being required to file student evidence
 - being provided with good advice on making sound assessment decisions, including accessing professional development, and attending Best Practice workshops and subject association meetings, to ensure up-to-date knowledge in assessment of standards
 - being monitored by the Principal's Nominee who checks every result reported to NZQA has undergone quality assurance.
- external moderation as:
 - student samples are selected randomly to NZQA guidelines.

Verification sample needs clarification The school's documented expectations for internal moderation comply fully with NZQA requirements, as did the practice of the staff interviewed. Moreover, some described the process as being professionally important, not only for the assurance it gives but also their professional enrichment. This is best practice.

Sampling of student work for verification should be purposeful. That is, it should provide staff with feedback that gives them confidence in the grades they report by focusing on judgments they are not certain about. This may be work at grade boundaries or particular grade levels not commonly encountered. There is a need to clarify this with some staff so that they no longer select eight randomly selected samples for verification.

Storage policy reviewed The school now keeps work for three years where they bank results for students who achieve credits before Year 11. Prior to this, school policy required student work to be kept for one year. The change was in response to a situation where work for a student assessed in Year 9 was no longer available for external moderation after the results were reported in Year 11.

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:

- clarify that the verification process involves sufficient, purposeful selection of student work at grade boundaries to provide confidence that teacher judgements are consistent with the standard.

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

(CAAS Guidelines 2.6, 2.7, 3)

Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery effectively:

- **manages assessment-related data by:**
 - requiring staff to report results to NZQA only after the completion of internal moderation
 - regular submission to NZQA of entries and results
 - encouraging students to access their NZQA learner login to view their qualifications and results
 - ensuring most entries made have a result reported against them.
- **uses assessment-related data to:**
 - track student intentions against their achievements to identify those who are at risk of not meeting their academic goals and adjust programmes or tailor support
 - track student progress towards meeting literacy and numeracy requirements for NCEA Level 1
 - report on achievement against previous years to the Board of Trustees each month so that they can review progress towards goals set
 - review the success of standards used to assess student pathways.

Individualised approach key to student success Students value the school's individualisation of their learning and assessment. The school recognises that two elements of this individualised approach are crucial to student success: the development and monitoring of well-conceived learning plans tailored to the student's aspirations, strengths and needs, and the provision of on-going mentoring that supports the student's learning and assessment week to week.

The monitoring process relies on students telling their Learning Adviser when they are not engaged with an assessment so that the school can then respond. They plan fine tuning, to better manage the students at risk of not achieving including those who do not engage with their Learning Adviser or the process.

Regular reporting to Board of Trustees The school recognises two challenges in analysing achievement. One is aligning whole school NCEA achievement goals with student goals. Student goals may not be qualifications-focussed so the school's monthly report to the Board of achievement against NCEA targets captures only part of the picture. The second challenge is considering how to capture and use the reflections of learning advisers on students and course success as NCEA results are only part of the picture. However, the school finds the Principal's Nominee's monthly report to the Board of Trustees provides useful oversight of those at risk of not achieving.

Review results reporting to students The school noted that their policy requiring learning advisers to return student work within three weeks of assessment can create tension when meeting internal moderation requirements, especially where verification is external to the school. The school should consider reporting results to students provisionally and subject to confirmation after verification is completed, as this would

allow students to receive immediate feedback without the potential for reporting of results that are not quality assured.

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:

- review the school's requirements for reporting of results to students after an assessment.

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

(CAAS Guidelines 2.4i(f), 2.4v, 2.6, 2.7ii, 3)

Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery has effective processes and procedures for:

- review of advice and guidance in the staff handbook by the Principal's Nominee
- better communicating course and results information by the development of a Learning Management system that students and parents can access.

Students request more information about NCEA qualifications Students would like to know more about some aspects of NCEA to better set and monitor progress towards qualifications. The three students met for this review each had a qualifications goal and knew the number of credits and type of grades achieved precisely, providing evidence of the effectiveness of communication. However, they were not clear about the detail of meeting qualifications requirements or other qualifications opportunities available to them. They suggested that being provided with detailed information about how they complete NCEA qualifications at the start of the year would have been useful for developing their understanding and informing their goal setting.

Communities of practice model requires effective communication Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery is still embedding the communities of practice model which supports groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do to interact regularly to learn how to do it better. To maintain effective assessment practices and systems, schools using the communities of practice model need to:

- monitor practice to identify the needs and understandings of the community and individuals within it
- link the Principal's Nominee knowledge of assessment practice to these needs and understandings
- provide subject specialist support as noted previously.

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:

- provide more information about NCEA qualifications to students.