

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Language Schools New Zealand

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 10 September 2014

Contents

Purpose of this Report.....	3
Introduction	3
1. TEO in context.....	3
2. Scope of external evaluation and review	4
3. Conduct of external evaluation and review.....	5
Summary of Results	6
Findings	8
Recommendations	15
Appendix	16

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Final Report

Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this external evaluation and review report is to provide a public statement about the Tertiary Education Organisation's (TEO) educational performance and capability in self-assessment. It forms part of the accountability process required by Government to inform investors, the public, students, prospective students, communities, employers, and other interested parties. It is also intended to be used by the TEO itself for quality improvement purposes.

Introduction

1. TEO in context

Name of TEO:	Language Schools New Zealand
Type:	Private training establishment
Location:	3rd Floor, O'Connell's Shopping Centre, 30 Camp St, Queenstown
Delivery sites:	One
First registered:	1 April 1995
Courses currently delivered:	General English programme (including a class preparing students for external English foreign language examinations)
Code of Practice signatory?:	Yes, since 1 April 1995
Number of students:	Domestic: nil International: around 40 equivalent full-time students
Number of staff:	10 full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	Approved to offer a full-time General English programme
Distinctive characteristics:	The students comprise a wide range of nationalities from Europe, Latin America and Asia. The PTE offers predominately short-term courses to students with working holiday or student visas.
Recent significant changes:	The Christchurch site closed in 2011 following the region's earthquakes. A new manager was

appointed in November 2013, although the previous manager stayed in the role until December 2013 and still works in a contract marketing role.

Previous quality assurance history: The previous external evaluation and review (EER) took place in February 2010 and concluded that NZQA was Highly Confident in the educational performance and Confident in the capability in self-assessment of the organisation.

Language School New Zealand is a member of the English New Zealand association of English language providers. An English New Zealand audit in 2012 found that the school met all the required standards and was commended in two areas: ongoing development of the oral teaching resources, and the prompt and open response to a range of suggestions from the English New Zealand auditors.

An NZQA compliance visit in November 2013 found the organisation met all requirements.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope of the EER included the following focus areas:

- Governance, management and strategy
- International students

These are mandatory focus areas for an English language school.

- General English

The General English programme was chosen as a focus area because most of the learners enrol on this programme and it is the core educational activity. The single examination preparation class, while important to the provider, was reviewed within this focus area. These were the same focus areas as for the previous EER.

3. Conduct of external evaluation and review

All external evaluation and reviews are conducted in accordance with NZQA's published policies and procedures. The methodology used is described fully in the web document Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct of External Evaluation and Review available at: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction>. The TEO has an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and any submissions received are fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

Two external evaluators were on the EER team, including an associate with considerable experience of working in an international language school, including as a director of studies. The EER team interviewed, over one and half days, the director, the director of studies, the homestay coordinator, the teaching staff, the marketing officer and students from a General and an Examination class, and some graduates from the latter class. The team also reviewed documentation, including the English New Zealand audit report, the provider's self-assessment report, the reflections of the director, quality management policies and procedures, teaching resources, and an informal email questionnaire sent to agents. The PTE's website, data management system and homestay management system were also examined.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Language Schools New Zealand**.

Language School New Zealand is a small language school that is meeting all of the key needs of its students. These students consistently achieve their main purpose of improving their 'lifestyle' English and/or passing their external English examinations.

- Students feel more confident and more able to participate in New Zealand life as a result of their studies. Overall, they highly value their learning and experiences at the school.
- These outcomes are based on effective contributing processes. The school systematically identifies the language and broader needs of the students, and provides a supportive 'family' environment.
- The cohesive teaching staff are qualified, professional and personable and led by a capable director of studies. The school has well-presented, fit-for-purpose premises that are centrally located. It is well resourced, with digital screens, iPads and internet connectivity. The school's agents interviewed are well satisfied with the services offered.
- The owner and management have developed an organisational culture where innovation is valued and encouraged. Leadership is responsive to change, such as using evolving technology in the classroom, for student support and in administration. The English New Zealand audit confirmed that the school met the quality standard and commended the PTE for its oral teaching resources and response to the formal suggestions from the auditors.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Language Schools New Zealand**.

Ongoing performance review and improvement are at the heart of Language School New Zealand. Thoughtful self-assessment is happening across the organisation. The impact of key activities is reviewed.

- Recent significant developments in educational delivery include updated textbooks and digital screens, along with tablet and internet connectivity in all classrooms. The impact is that students are more engaged in learning and there are signs of improved language progression.
- Ongoing quality improvement is reflected in various initiatives responding to a dynamic market. Examples include a business mentor engaged to review marketing, trialling of client management software to better meet the needs of agents, and discussions taking place with a potential new partner school.
- Tutors identified the need for updated texts, which have now been purchased. They have seen the benefits of new technology and proposed extended 'student advice' sessions which are being fully utilised.
- The director of studies regularly reviews teaching practice. Recent instances include trialling an online professional development initiative and investigating the research on how technology can support language progression.
- The homestay coordinator has developed and is implementing an inventive online homestay management and placement system for staff, homestays, prospective students and families.
- Reporting of self-assessment is one area, though not significant, that needs some attention. The PTE's 2014 self-assessment report described processes rather than how well the school is performing in key areas and the impact of various initiatives on educational performance. The 2013 report focused on agency compliance.
- Integrating existing self-assessment activities into a periodic whole-of-organisation self-assessment would add value to Language School New Zealand and meet external quality assurance expectations. This would enhance the self-assessment taking place, which has produced a wide range of improved processes and outcomes.

Findings¹

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

Most Language School New Zealand students enrol on short-term courses to learn 'lifestyle' English.² There are clear signs that all students are becoming more proficient in English language. The tangible evidence is shown in comparing the entry assessments, fortnightly testing, subsequent progression to more advanced classes, and exit assessment against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

A minority of students enrol on the more extended examination preparation class. More than 90 per cent of graduates over the past seven years have passed a formal external English language examination (International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE) or Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE)). This is viewed as exemplary, based on Cambridge results and from an industry perspective.

The language progression achievement of all students is formally and robustly assessed fortnightly. The results of these assessments are considered at staff meetings where decisions are made for students to remain in a class or move to a class more likely to improve their English proficiency. Students confirm that they receive regular and valued formal and informal feedback on their progress. The textbooks for the morning programme were recently replaced to enhance the students' learning and to better enable assessment against the CEFR.

Students demonstrate an improved knowledge and experience of local culture and participate more fully in New Zealand life. There are many instances of students organising weekend trips and independently travelling after leaving the school. Some students progress to employment and further studies. Their self-confidence and general well-being improves as a result of being more fluent in English. Students contribute to local community events and develop international, sometimes long-term, friendships.

¹ The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

² For more information on quality assuring English language schools, see: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/english-language-schools-quality-assurance/>

1.2 What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including learners?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The school is delivering significant value to its key stakeholders: students, graduates, agents, two other language school business partners, and English New Zealand. The students, as the most important stakeholders, give consistently very positive feedback, with very few negative comments. They highly value the results they achieve, the fun but professional school culture, the tutors and the supportive family environment, and the Queenstown experience.

Students appreciate their growing confidence, ability to participate in life, and the friendships they make. Indications of high value are: regular instances of students extending their studies; re-enrolling at a later date; and referrals and enrolments by friends and family members. Exit feedback rates the school as being of a high standard. The examination class students believe they are being very well prepared for their future work or study. Their single-word assessments include: 'tremendous', 'inspiring', 'educating', 'new discoveries'. The examination class graduates who were interviewed highly valued their overall educational experience and successfully passing their external examinations. Graduates interviewed by the evaluators all rated the school and their class as excellent.

The value of outcomes for other stakeholders is also strong. Language School New Zealand offers 'combo' deals with two other NZQA Category 1³ language schools, enabling students to study at each other's schools. This is, in part, an endorsement by peers keen to partner with similar quality providers. Feedback sighted from agents referring students for more than five years stated that they provided repeat business because of the consistently high standard of results produced. The school is currently trialling client relationship software to be more systematic in ensuring agents gain value and their needs are well met.

The school gains regular and good quality feedback on the value of the programmes. The owner proactively seeks to ensure value is delivered to key stakeholders. The students give formal feedback every six weeks and when they leave the school. The management, administration team and teaching staff actively monitor feedback and make changes to improve the value of the outcomes. For instance, the PTE has invested in new technology and updated language textbooks, which are seen as contributing to high-quality learning. There are currently no aggregate measures in place to rate the value of the outcomes produced by the school.

³ <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/pte-related-rules/pte-registration-rules-2013/3/>

1.3 How well do programmes and activities match the needs of learners and other stakeholders?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The school's programmes and activities meet well the needs of learners and other stakeholders. The students consistently achieve their key purpose of improving their 'lifestyle' English and/or passing their external English examinations. There is an induction and orientation process for new students, which the students, tutors homestay coordinator and management agree is effective.

The school has abundant teaching resources and uses the latest recognised texts. Tutors make improvements to the oral-focused lesson plans and resources before and after each lesson, which English New Zealand auditors commended. All classrooms now have wireless-enabled television screens and associated tablets. This approach is designed to meet the needs of young, technologically capable learners, enable a more visual and audio delivery, and provide access to electronic notes and internet resources. A review is planned of this initiative.

There is an effective 'speak-only-English' environment supported by a diverse cohort of students with no significant numbers of any one nationality. Most students stay after class to do self-directed study, particularly the examination class, the members of which are given tailored material and assistance by their tutor.

The organisation is student-centred. Weekly 'Job Club' sessions help students find work, while 'pathways' sessions help place students on education and training courses. Over 10 per cent of the 2013 students took up the 'combo' option to learn at other schools around New Zealand. A significant proportion of students take up the 'Study and Ski' package each year. Activities are organised or supported by the school. These include a weekly football game and 'pub' night and participation in a fundraising for a local school, and the students are kept informed of local events.

Students' needs are regularly reviewed. Staff review the class placement of the students each week and formally test students fortnightly. Entrance to the examination classes was revised after one or two students were unsuccessful. Subsequently, nearly all students have passed their examinations. The school atmosphere was vibrant during the EER site visit, and the students interviewed seemed happy. Exit interviews at the end of the course stated that needs were being well met.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The teaching taking place at Language School New Zealand is highly effective. The director of studies provides exemplary leadership and high-quality teaching due to 30 years of experience of teaching and managing a school, and a wide knowledge of other languages and cultures as well as strong interpersonal skills. This experience provides the teaching staff with strong support and individual tailoring of language instruction.

The tutors are a mix of nationalities and experience, and all hold relevant qualifications. They demonstrate a supportive team approach and a professional work ethic. Student feedback confirms that tutors are organised, supportive and well respected. The effectiveness of the teaching is indicated by students being well engaged in their learning, by the evidence for gains in language confidence and competence, and by the favourable English New Zealand audit report.

Self-assessment of teaching is robust, supporting improved practice. Students give feedback on the teaching and facilities every six weeks. Tutors recommended purchasing new textbooks and associated resources, and these were seen to have a positive impact on learning. The director of studies attends professional conference and training courses. Professional development is regular and ongoing, including training in using and applying the new technology and staff participating in valued online learning. Tutors have developed areas of teaching expertise. The director observes staff and annually appraises them, and there is also peer observation. The director is seeking to gain more value from the appraisal process. The tutors value the supportive and flexible work environment.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The students are well supported and guided at the school. Support and guidance is a core part of the everyday functioning of the school. The strong 'family' atmosphere is demonstrated by the lively central lounge/kitchen hub and the response to the February 2011 earthquake, where the Christchurch school staff and students were taken in by the Queenstown school. The feedback from students, agents and other stakeholders consistently states that the students are satisfied with the support received.

An effective and integrated support and guidance framework has been developed over time. The homestay coordinator, administration team, tutors and formal
Final Report

student counsellor (who is the director of studies) together provide a cohesive support network. The induction process is effective in settling new students into the school and local community. The coordinator manages a well-received professional homestay service. A student accommodation house is effectively managed by the school. The manager oversees the whole process and assists as required. Useful guidance is provided to students to select the external examination that best suits their goals, and to find work and to progress to further tertiary education.

Two recent support and guidance initiatives have had a positive impact. Tutors observed that the administrator was unable to meet student demand for support with visas and other issues. Management paid the tutors to provide two after-class 'student advice' sessions, which have been fully subscribed, and an additional session is being added. An innovative online homestay system has recently been implemented, which is a simpler way to meet the needs of students, homestay families and other stakeholders. An initial assessment is that this approach adds value.

1.6 How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The governance and management of this small language school is highly effective in supporting educational achievement. The owner has a clear purpose: to provide a high-quality language school in Queenstown that responds well to a dynamic market. The owner manages relations with the placement agents. The owner has, over an extended period, responded thoughtfully to major changes in the operating environment of Language School New Zealand. Various examples are mentioned in this report of adopting innovations to enhance performance. A current area of exploration is the potential benefits of social media.

One key objective achieved has been attracting and retaining high-quality staff. The capable director of studies has for more than 10 years helped ensure a high standard of educational delivery. A new, but experienced manager leads an effective team, including the homestay coordinator, the sales and marketing officer and administration team, and a strong teaching staff. The tutors report feeling valued, and appreciate the responsiveness of management and the professional development opportunities offered.

The tutors also value ongoing investment to better meet the needs of students. This investment includes purchasing new textbooks and relevant technology and providing student advice sessions. Other examples of innovation are the trialling of new client software to better manage agents and the online homestay system.

The 2012 English New Zealand audit judged that all the required membership standards were met and also gave two commendations. One was for making immediate changes in practices in response to the English New Zealand draft audit report.⁴ Other signs of a strong focus on quality were the owner's reflective report, a sound self-assessment report, engaging a business mentor to improve marketing, clear systems, policies and procedures, and 'combo' courses with other language schools.

A few self-assessment gaps, none of which are significant, have been identified. The 2014 self-assessment report was comprehensive, but mostly described self-assessment processes. It did not rate how well the school had performed against the NZQA key evaluation questions, what changes have been made, and the impact of changes on educational performance. Many of these areas are, however, being reviewed, as noted elsewhere in this report. The 2013 self-assessment report focused on external agency compliance. Language School New Zealand is a small school and formal reviews need to add value. A more internally focused self-assessment would deliver some added value to the school and meet the expectations of the two external quality assurance agencies. This process would build on the effective review and reflection already happening, which has produced a range of improved processes and outcomes.

⁴ The other commendation was for improvements to the oral-focused lesson plans and resources before and after each lesson. See Findings 1.3.

Focus Areas

This section reports significant findings in each focus area, not already covered in Part 1.

2.1 Focus area: Governance, management and strategy

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Good**.

2.2 Focus area: International students

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

2.3 Focus area: General English

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

Recommendations

NZQA recommends that Language Schools New Zealand:

- Explore how to rate the school and its activities, using a scale to enable some aggregate measures of quality, such as average rate for the teaching or homestay services.
- More systematically review the impact of major initiatives. The objectives would include: assessing the impact on better meeting needs; improving educational performance; identifying aspects that could be improved; identifying what has been learnt; building a more reflective culture. This review process, however, needs to be realistic for a small school with limited resources.
- Develop a periodic, overarching, internally focused self-assessment process that builds on current practice and also meets external quality assurance expectations.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

External evaluation and review is conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013, which are made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

Self-assessment and participation in external evaluation and review are requirements for maintaining accreditation to provide an approved programme for all TEOs other than universities. The requirements are set through the NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013, which are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review, in accordance with the External Evaluation and Review Rules (EER) 2013, as a condition of maintaining registration. The Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes and/or registration. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.

This report reflects the findings and conclusions of the external evaluation and review process, conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013.

The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in terms of the organisation's educational performance and capability in self-assessment.

External evaluation and review reports are one contributing piece of information in determining future funding decisions where the organisation is a funded TEO subject to an investment plan agreed with the Tertiary Education Commission.

External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website (www.nzqa.govt.nz).

The External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013 are available at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Our-role/Rules/EER-Rules.pdf>, while information about the conduct and methodology for external evaluation and review can be found at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>.

NZQA

Ph 0800 697 296

E qaadmin@nzqa.govt.nz

www.nzqa.govt.nz

Final Report