MANAGING YOUR SCHOOL

a LeadSpace "just in time" guide for first-time principals

12. Leading Your School's Learning Environment: Curriculum Design and Review

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OVERVIEW

This "just in time" guide offers suggestions for leadership actions principals can take as they work with their schools to review and confirm their curriculum.

The checklists link The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) with sets of actions suggested by experienced school principals and the Pedagogy section of the document *Kiwi Leadership for Principals* (KLP 2008) to confirm a range processes that support leading learning.

Use these checklists or parts of them in any sequence to speed up your reflection on your actions about school-wide curriculum processes.

1. WHERE ARE YOU UP TO IN YOUR SCHOOL?

Principal's action	Quality checks	
Read the The school curriculum: design and review section (NZC, pp. 37–39) to the end of "Future focus". Using the checklist, reflect on how your design and review process works. As you progress, return to the checklist regularly. "Successful schools are organised around learning. Their principals are knowledgeable about effective pedagogy and about what works for all students in their particular contexts." (Pedagogy, KLP, p. 19)	Our curriculum design and review process: • is continuous and cyclical • involves decisions recognising that the national curriculum is being applied to address the needs, interests, and circumstances of our students and community • applies a sound understanding of the curriculum's intent • applies a sound understanding of our community's values and expectations • clarifies priorities for student learning • clarifies how these priorities will be met • clarifies how student progress will be assessed • clarifies how the quality of teaching and learning will be assessed • draws on existing good practice • maximises use of local resources and opportunities.	

Make the Three-step Development Markers chart an in-school record of progress. The [School curriculum design and review planning chart](#) has been sent to your school in document and poster format. (It is part of the design and review support package.)	• Use the review questions as the basis for checking your progress (note they are based on pp. 37–39 in the New Zealand Curriculum statement). • Return to this chart and mark your progress as it occurs.	
Ministry of Education requirements – [The Education Act and the curriculum](#) and [Requirements for boards of trustees](#). (NZC, pp. 43–44).	• Confirm you have a global picture of how your school curriculum is connected into the New Zealand wide system. • Have a copy of the requirements for the board available and discussed regularly.	

2. PRINCIPAL, STAFF, AND COMMUNITY: GETTING READY TO TALK ABOUT THE CURRICULUM

This checklist provides a quick way to review how the communication about curriculum operates in your school. It assumes such dialogue is a continuous process.

Principal's action	Quality checks	
Do you have the means for successful dialogue about curriculum? "… involve the whole school community in setting clear goals for teaching and learning." ([Pedagogy](#), KLP, p. 19)	• Have we got a common language and common understanding of what we mean when we discuss the curriculum and its delivery? Teachers? Students? Parents?	
Reflect on teachers' professional development. "… create opportunities for professional learning communities to flourish throughout the school so that teachers can work collaboratively and share evidence-based practice with each other" ([Pedagogy](#), KLP, p. 19)	• Do we regularly share classroom processes? Individually? As staff? • Are professional goals for individuals aligned with the school's goals? • Do we, as a team of teachers, have spontaneous discussions about how teaching and learning works? Assessment? Achievement? • Do I, on occasions, initiate consideration of new aspects to teacher learning about curriculum delivery? • Do we blend a mix of respected theory, sound practice, and new possibilities into our teacher development? • Do I actively participate in staff development? • Do we, over time, turn conversation into new action in the classroom?	

	• Do we provide time to allow teachers to learn before they have to act on curriculum matters? • Do we align resources for teaching to fit the needs arising from professional development?	
Are you able to address any gaps you have identified? "…Powerful pedagogical practices include principals participating and promoting professional learning, and principals leading professional learning in the school to create successful learning outcomes, and principals, senior/middle leaders and teachers working together to solve pedagogical problems, obtain appropriate resources, and plan and monitor the curriculum and the quality of teaching." (Pedagogy, KLP, pp. 19–20).		

Encourage staff to read the curriculum statement – to help confirm a common global picture of the curriculum.	• Read these sections of the New Zealand Curriculum:
	  o Vision, Principles, Key competencies, Values (pp. 8–13)
	  o Effective pedagogy (pp. 34–36)
	  o Learning areas (pp. 16–32)
	• Provide ample opportunity to share understandings of them.
	• Actively discourage study of the achievement objectives until the broad pattern of the school curriculum is confirmed.	

Integrate curriculum learning into teachers' professional development permanently. "… create opportunities for professional learning communities to flourish throughout the school … so that teachers can work collaboratively and share evidence-based practice with each other"	• Both individual and group professional development goals should contribute to the school's curriculum growth needs.	

To see what others have done, visit the School stories page of *The New Zealand Curriculum Online* website.

3. APPLYING THE DESIGN AND REVIEW PROCESS IN YOUR SCHOOL

a. Confirm what your school's curriculum will be like

Remember to use the Three-Step Development Markers.

This all takes time so look ahead and give everyone time to learn their way into the new curriculum. Make sure you retain and reuse the valuable and suitable things already in your school's curriculum.

Principal's actions	Quality checks	

Communication and publicity:
  – involving parents
  – involving teachers
  – involving students.
 	
"… demonstrate the interpersonal skills needed for building strong relationships with key stakeholder groups such as trustees, parents, whānau and local businesses" (Partnerships and networks, KLP, p. 20)
	• Provide a variety of ways for the school community to share curriculum information.
	• Inform the community – especially about the big picture sections (vision, principles, values and key competencies), and the importance of localising and personalising the curriculum. (Parents don't like surveys any more than we do – so keep it short and important: what is special for our community?)
	• Ask for and collect feedback – especially on values held dear in your community.
	• Summarise feedback and raise curriculum questions and viewpoints.	

Arrive at the key values for your community.	• Arrive at your list of school values after involving a wide circle of people and making sure that teachers have worked at fully understanding which values and why they are important.	
Match the key competencies with the key values listed. (Start to develop a template.) "… have direct, hands-on involvement with curriculum design and implementation" (Pedagogy, KLP, p.18)	• Look for the best fit and match competencies with values (in order to avoid trying to do everything all the time and ending up feeling as overloaded as before). • Begin to unpack the competencies and their in-depth application to meet the needs of your learners.	
Take a long-term view and work out a curriculum delivery pattern – this can be a cycle over a number of years.	• Confirm structures like themes, and arrangement of learning and teaching. • Confirm how big picture goals related to sustainability and globalisation are to be attacked.	

(Develop a template that matches – values, key competencies, principles, learning areas themes/structures …)	- Confirm how, in broad terms, student needs will be met through their years at the school – cognitive and ICT expectations, addressing special needs, and interests … - Re-work this several times then remember to revisit it every year to adjust its direction and interrelationships.	
Work out how you will apply and exploit the interrelationships between learning areas.	Consider and apply integration and/or shared responsibilities regarding learning areas and key competencies.	
Give your structure the chance to apply a future-focused approach.	Consider how sustainability, globalisation, enterprise, and citizenship all need a place.	

b. Work on the application of achievement objectives and specific learning areas to meet local and individual needs

Principal's action	Quality checks	
Read the Effective pedagogy section (NZC, pp. 34–36). Give pedagogy high status and carefully work out the goals and expectations related to classroom delivery. "… build a professional learning community that supports and challenges their professional practice" (Pedagogy, KLP, p.18)	- Teachers can understand and apply the seven approaches that give all the best chance to succeed. - Inquiry learning is understood and applied well. - The place of ICT in the pedagogy is confirmed and arranged.	
Use the essence statements to confirm the roles of the learning areas across different levels. (NZC, pp. 16–33) "… encourage innovative teacher practice linked to student learning needs" (Pedagogy, KLP, p. 18)	Once the broad arrangement of learning is in place then draw on the achievement objectives to flesh out the specifics of what the learning will involve.	
Ensure assessment tools work for your learners and teachers. (NZC, pp. 39–40) demonstrate understanding of, and support all teachers to use assessment for improving student learning; (Pedagogy, KLP, p. 19)	Our assessment tools: - assist and strengthen the successful growth of learning - provide powerful feedback on the teaching processes - consistently deliver sufficient, but not excessive, data for effective feedback and decision making.	
Establish how you will ensure the transitions for individual pupils are	Have you built and maintained the bridges to other education levels – early childhood, intermediate, contributing, area or high	

smooth. (Learning pathways, School curriculum design and review, NZC, p. 41) "Ensure that teaching and learning programmes are informed by on-going self-review and evaluation processes using student achievement data" (Pedagogy, KLP, p. 19)	school, or tertiary? • Have you a system for sharing school curriculum patterns and expectations? Achievement data? • Does your curriculum support each student's progress through to the next level?	

CONCLUSION

This set of checklists gives focus to principals' leadership actions. They are linked to KLP so principals can enjoy seeing how often their daily leadership actions relate to the concept of being a leader of learning.

We appreciate and thank Linda Woon, Principal of Otonga Road School, Rotorua, for providing her expertise in helping to create and shape these checklists.

We recognise there are many different ways to approach curriculum review, but hope you can use and adapt our approach to fit your context.

See From the New Zealand Curriculum to school curriculum for online and in-depth support materials and explanation to assist your learning about curriculum.

FEEDBACK AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggested additions, questions, or comments on this guide should be emailed to leadership@tki.org.nz.