

Key Points for Principals and School Boards

Background

For over 50 years, Read NZ Te Pou Muramura (Read NZ) has run the Writers in Schools programme, which aims to inspire children and teenagers to develop a love of reading and writing by bringing a writer or illustrator into their classroom.

Point and Associates has evaluated the Writers in Schools programme drawing on feedback from students, authors and illustrators and school staff including teachers, librarians and principals.



Teachers say the idea that writing involves pushing through challenges is perhaps one of the most important messages of the programme, particularly for struggling students. This message of perseverance, editing, reviewing, “of writing and rewriting” is spilling into other areas of the curriculum.

School staff, and authors, believe the programme is exposing young people to stories and books from Aotearoa New Zealand, which is helping them to understand their history, culture, and support their identity.

Benefits for students

The vast majority of students surveyed responded positively to the visit, saying they enjoyed it and it made them want to read not only the author’s work but others’ stories too. Over two-thirds (68%) said the visit had helped to change the way they write or illustrate stories. Most (66%) said it inspired them to write or illustrate their own stories.

In particular, Māori and Pasifika students are seeing themselves in the stories, hearing positive and affirming cultural narratives. Students see the authors and illustrators as important role models, particularly children and young people who enjoy creative pursuits, or who face challenges in their lives. This mirrors the results from international studies

which show that Writers in Schools programmes can particularly impact students from diverse backgrounds, often under-represented in books and illustrations.

Also of particular interest has been the positive impact on reluctant readers and those with special educational needs.

While the impact on reading and writing results in New Zealand has not yet been measured, in the United Kingdom and Australia, Writers in Schools programmes have been associated with improvements in reading levels, test results and national examination scores.

What helps the programme succeed?

A range of factors needs to be in place for Writers in Schools to be successful. School staff and the authors and illustrators say the engagement of school leadership, and especially the principal, is a key success factor. Having authors and illustrators who can relate to the culture and identity of the students and who can connect with them is also crucial. Additionally, preparing students before the visit and ongoing reinforcement of new approaches to writing is vital; where the ideas were integrated into classroom teaching after the visit, teachers have noted improvements in achievement.

“At our school, the principal’s engagement, being supportive of the programme, is really the key ... the classroom teachers already knew that I valued what (the author/illustrator) was bringing so they embraced it.” Principal

Following the visits there are queues at many of the school libraries, wait lists on books, and teachers are noticing a difference in the techniques students are using to tell their stories.

The impact

Overall, the Writers in Schools programme is highly successful. This evaluation has found strong evidence that the programme is supporting the conditions which underpin storytelling, writing and reading for pleasure, and wellbeing. The visits support student development across the curriculum, but particularly for literacy and creativity strands, and also help to build on teachers’ abilities to deliver this learning.



Get involved

You can support Writers in Schools by

- Signing up to visit schools as a guest author/illustrator
- Becoming a Read NZ member
- Helping spread the word in person or online

Visit read-nz.org to learn more