

# Using the frameworks to understand literacy progression in years 9 and 10 at Birkenhead College

## About the college

Birkenhead College is a co-educational secondary school located on Auckland's North Shore. It has approximately 670 students from years 9 to 13. The school values inclusiveness, and its mission is to "provide education of the highest quality for all students".

## A focus on literacy

In the past two years, the college has had a school-wide focus on improving literacy outcomes, with an emphasis on the use of digital tools to enhance literacy learning. The college has supported teachers to use a range of evidence to inform collaborative inquiries. They have also been introduced to the guidelines for effective adolescent literacy teaching that evolved from the national secondary literacy project.

The inquiry into how secondary teachers could engage with the Learning Progression Frameworks (LPFs) aligned well to this work, and the school saw it as an opportunity to deepen teachers' understanding of literacy progression in years 9 and 10.

## Introducing the LPFs

Four teachers agreed to take part in the LPFs inquiry: the head of science, a social sciences teacher, an English teacher, and the teacher of a critical thinking class. All were passionate about literacy. They were surprised to hear that, according to a 2015 OECD study, about half of New Zealand adults lack the literacy or numeracy skills they need to take a full part in today's information- and technology-rich society. This confirmed their keenness to learn how the LPFs could improve their teaching practice and help deepen their understanding of literacy progression in their subject areas.

First of all, the group was introduced to the big ideas and structure of the frameworks. Some of the teachers felt overwhelmed by the amount of detail and literacy-related "jargon" in the LPFs. To reduce this overload and help them see the relevance of the frameworks to their own subject areas, the facilitator encouraged them to focus on the aspects of reading and writing that dealt with the purpose of each reading and writing task in the classroom. For example, a reading purpose might be *Acquiring and using information and ideas in informational texts*, and a writing purpose might be *Creating texts to influence others*. Although these are familiar concepts for most English teachers, they are likely to be new to some teachers of other subject areas, such as science. One teacher commented, "In our junior classes, we've tended to focus on conceptual and factual understanding. I can see now that we need to pay more attention to literacy skills and knowledge – and focus on purposeful reading and writing."

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## Exploring the reading and writing aspects

As the teachers began to dig deeper into some of the aspects, they enjoyed learning about the progression between the signposts. Subject-specific illustrations provide examples of the level of literacy required at each signpost, and these helped the teachers understand what their students should be aiming for.

For example, one writing aspect is *Creating texts to communicate current knowledge and understanding*. At the top end of this aspect,

students need to demonstrate sophisticated knowledge of a range of writing techniques to show what they know, and they should be able to create complex texts to meet a range of purposes.

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Looking at a variety of examples demonstrating this level of complexity across different subject areas helped the group understand what was required. For some teachers, this affirmed that some of their students were already achieving at this top level. As the group worked back down the levels, there were many “aha” moments as they recognised the levels that other students were working at.

As the group explored the reading framework, the teacher-student conversations included in the illustrations helped the teachers to consider the kinds of questions they could ask to help them identify their students’ current reading knowledge and skills. The illustrations also gave the teachers ideas about the kinds of reading tasks they should plan for in their teaching and learning programmes.

Some of the group still felt that the LPFs were very complex and challenging and struggled to see how they could fit in with their current programmes. But other teachers’ comments included:

“I can see that the LPFs align well with what we’re already doing.”

“I think the LPFs are very logical and straightforward. They’re helpful and clear, and I feel comfortable with using them for assessment.”