



**Te Tāhuhu o
te Mātauranga**
Ministry of Education

Phonics Checks results

Term 1, Term 2 and Term 3, 2025



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Executive Summary

Phonics Checks are short reading assessments carried out at 20-weeks and 40-weeks into students' first year of school to measure how well they can use phonics—the relationship between letters and sounds—to decode words.

The Phonics Checks were introduced in primary schools in Term 1, 2025 as part of a suite of literacy initiatives designed to lift student achievement. The assessments provide a consistent understanding of student phonics learning against the teaching sequence of the English learning area of refreshed *The New Zealand Curriculum*, also introduced at the start of 2025.

The Phonics Check is designed to serve two main purposes: Firstly, for screening, to identify when individual students require targeted literacy support, and secondly, for monitoring, to track how effectively the education system supports the development of critical phonics abilities across the diversity of student groups and school settings in New Zealand.

This report presents an interim view of phonics learning progress and achievement across 2025. It draws on 11,508 student results submitted by schools to the Ministry of Education's Secure Data Portal in Term 1, Term 2 and Term 3.

Across this time, results show gains in student achievement at both timepoints, with significant increases of students reaching or exceeding curriculum expectations at 20-weeks. The data also show overall upward redistribution of achievement, with significant reductions in the proportion of students showing a need for targeted literacy support.

The Terms 1 to 3 results demonstrate that students of all ethnicities and all school EQI groups are making relatively even achievement gains, suggesting structured literacy approaches are having an impact across the board, with all groups benefitting from explicit phonics teaching.

While the Phonics Checks are optional this year, requirements for schools to use them are planned to be introduced from the start of 2026. Insights from the Phonics Checks will continue to inform policy development and the allocation of resources to support ongoing improvements to literacy teaching and learning.

Introduction

Phonics Checks were introduced in Term 1 2025 to assess which grapheme-phoneme correspondences students know and how well they blend sounds together to read words. Teachers carry out the checks with students individually at 20 weeks and 40 weeks of schooling, or roughly six months and a year after a student has started school. Students are asked to read aloud from a list of 40 words, made up of both real words and pseudo words (i.e., made up words).

Teachers use the results of the Phonics Check to identify students' phonics strengths and needs. The scores indicate how students are progressing against curriculum expectations and correspond to achievement levels (see Table 1) that point to an appropriate teaching response. The achievement expectations below show how well students are developing their phonics knowledge, ranging from those who need support to those exceeding curriculum expectations.

Table 1. Phonics Checks achievement levels

		20-weeks (Score range out of 40)	40-Weeks (score range out of 40)
At or Above expectation	Exceeding	13-40	31-40
	Proficient	9-12	24-30
Below expectation	Progressing towards	6-8	16-23
	Needs support	0-5	0-15

Phonics Checks identify students who may need additional support to progress as expected. They also provide useful information for monitoring how well the education system is supporting literacy in the early years.

This report offers an overview of student achievement results in the first three terms of 2025. From 2026 onwards, Phonics Checks results will be reported annually rather than by term to offer insights into year-on-year trends and cohort progress.

Data Sets and Results

This report represents 11,508 student results that schools chose to upload to the Ministry of Education's Secure Data Portal (SDP) from Terms 1 to 3, 2025 (see Table 2). At the end of each Term, the Ministry provided a school-level report back to schools, which included a summary of achievement, demographic analyses and item-level results.

The data sets increased in size each term while remaining broadly representative of national proportions of ethnicity, gender and school EQI groupings, with a slight skew towards European students and schools in the EQI groups of *Moderate* and *Fewer* barriers (see Annex 1).

Table 2. Number of schools & students who submitted results per term for 2025

Timepoint	Participants		
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
20-weeks	1,371	1,594	4,090
40-weeks	1,185	1,043	2,225
Total student results	2,556	2,637	6,315
Total of Schools	194 11% of schools	248 14% of schools	458 25% of schools

Findings

The Term 3 results show significant gains in student achievement across both 20-week and 40-week checks, pointing to improvement in teaching and learning over the first three terms of 2025.

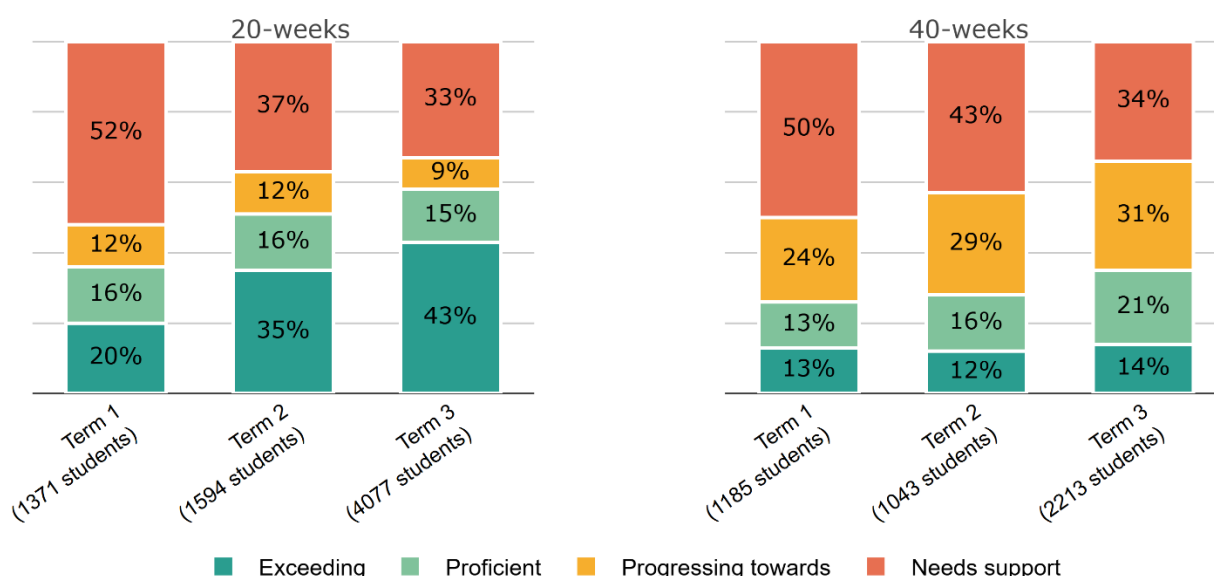
The percentage of students achieving at or above expectation has increased at both timepoints across all three terms in 2025 (see Table 3 and Figure 1).

The Term 3 results also show overall upward redistribution between achievement levels, including a significant reduction of students in the lowest achievement level of *needs support*, and increases in the proportion of students *exceeding* expectations.

The results of the first cohort of students to complete both their 20-week and 40-week check in 2025 show many students who needed support at 20 weeks made accelerated progress by 40 weeks (see Figure 2).

Table 3. Distribution of results by curriculum expectation per term for 2025

Timepoint	At or Above expectation		
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
20-weeks	36%	51%	58%
40-weeks	26%	28%	35%

Figure 1. 20-Weeks and 40-weeks distribution of national achievement in terms 1, 2 & 3, 2025

Phonics Check 20-Week Results 2025

- In Term 3, 58% students achieved at or above curriculum expectation. This is a significant increase from the previous terms.
- The percentage of students *exceeding* expectations doubled between Term 1 (20%) and Term 3 (43%).
- The percentage of students in the *needs support* category significantly reduced between Term 1 (52%) and Term 3 (33%).

Phonics Check 40-Week Results 2025

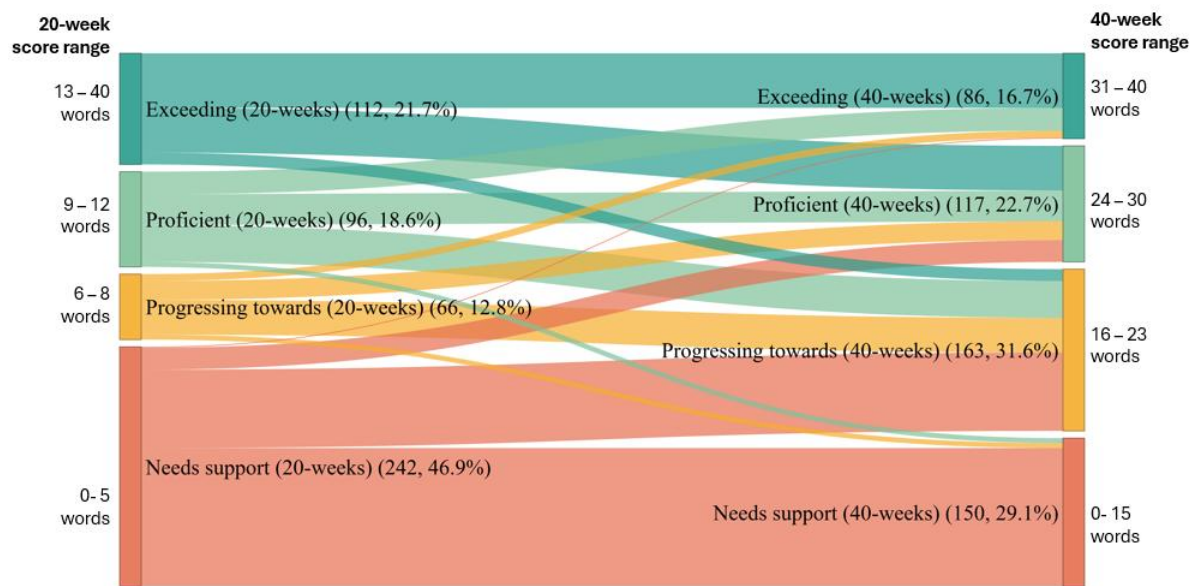
- In Term 3, 35% students achieved at or above curriculum expectation, showing an increase of achievement from the previous terms.
- The percentage of students in the *needs support* category significantly reduced between Term 1 (50%) and Term 3 (34%). This upward redistribution of achievement within levels shows marked improvement to teaching and learning.
- The 40-week sample has a slight skew towards schools with an EQI group of moderate and fewer barriers and more European students. This may contribute to some of the gains observed in the Term 3 sample, but further analysis is required to confirm this.

Cohort progress between 20 weeks and 40 weeks

The data from Term 3 provided the results from 516 students who carried out both the 20-week check in Term 1 and 40-week check in Term 3 (see Figure 2). Our analysis shows:

- Overall, the percentage of students reaching or exceeding expectations at both timepoints remains stable.
- However, a significant number of students made accelerated progress after 20 weeks, with 37% of students in the *needs support* achievement level moving up one or more levels by 40 weeks. This accelerated rate of progress is especially important for students starting from a low baseline.
- Overall, the cohort results at 40-weeks show greater achievement compared to the national 40-weeks results, suggesting teachers of this cohort are responding to the 20-week results to improve phonics teaching and learning.
- Note, the students who were *proficient* or *exceeding* at 20 weeks but moved down an achievement category at 40 weeks still progressed in their learning, just not at a pace fast enough to maintain their 20-week achievement level.

Figure 2. Cohort progress between 20-weeks and 40-weeks



Results by Ethnicity and EQI

Differences in Phonics Check results across student ethnicities and school EQI groups reflect known patterns in educational achievement linked to demographic factors. This data contributes to our monitoring of the impact of literacy initiatives and strengthens our ability to target supports to where evidence shows it is most needed. The results across all ethnicities and EQI groups show an upward trend of improvement between Term 1 and Term 3 (see Annex 4 and 5), indicating that all groups are benefitting from the focus on implementing structured literacy approaches.

Implementation

Use of the Phonics Checks is optional in 2025, with Ministry reports indicating that by Term 2 72% of schools had started implementing the checks to support their structured literacy practices. Materials and data upload processes are manual this year. Schools can opt to upload their results through a Secure Data Portal (SDP) to receive termly summary reports to inform teaching practice and track their progress over time.

Conclusion

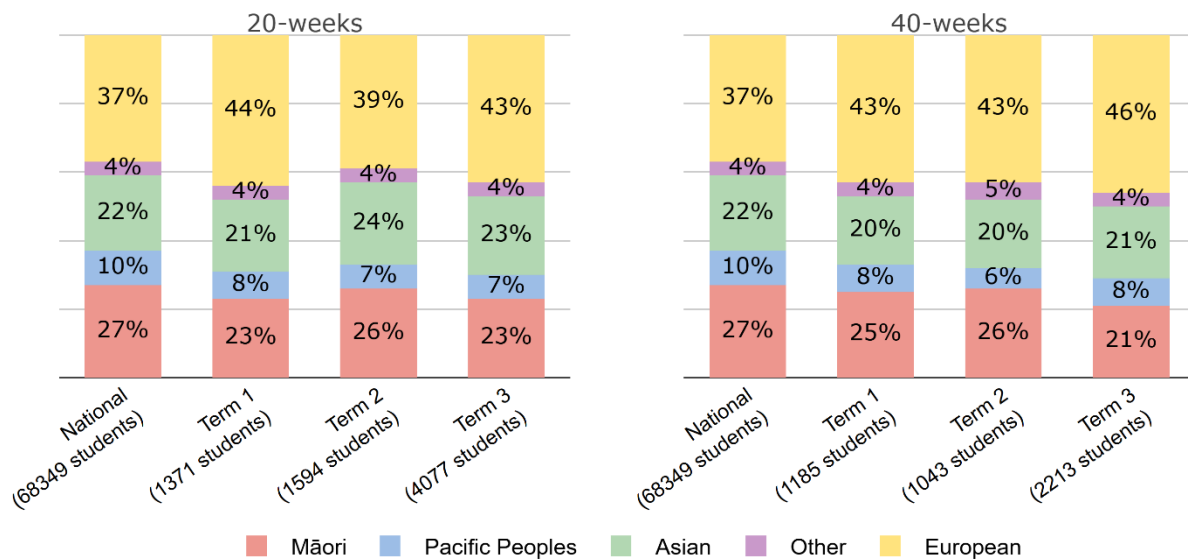
The Phonics Checks results from terms 1-3 2025 show term by term increases in student achievement. Overall, the Phonics Checks results demonstrate an upward trend in student achievement, particularly the reduction of those needing support and the increase in those exceeding expectations, indicating improvements to universal classroom teaching and the effectiveness of the curriculum initiatives introduced this year.

The Phonics Checks are planned to be a mandatory nationally-consistent measure from 2026 and play an important role in monitoring system-level progress of early reading. Insights from the checks will continue to inform the allocation of resources to support ongoing improvements to literacy teaching and learning, and shape effective education policy to deliver equitable and excellent outcomes.

Annex 1: National representation of Phonics Checks results in Term 1, Term 2 & Term 3 2025

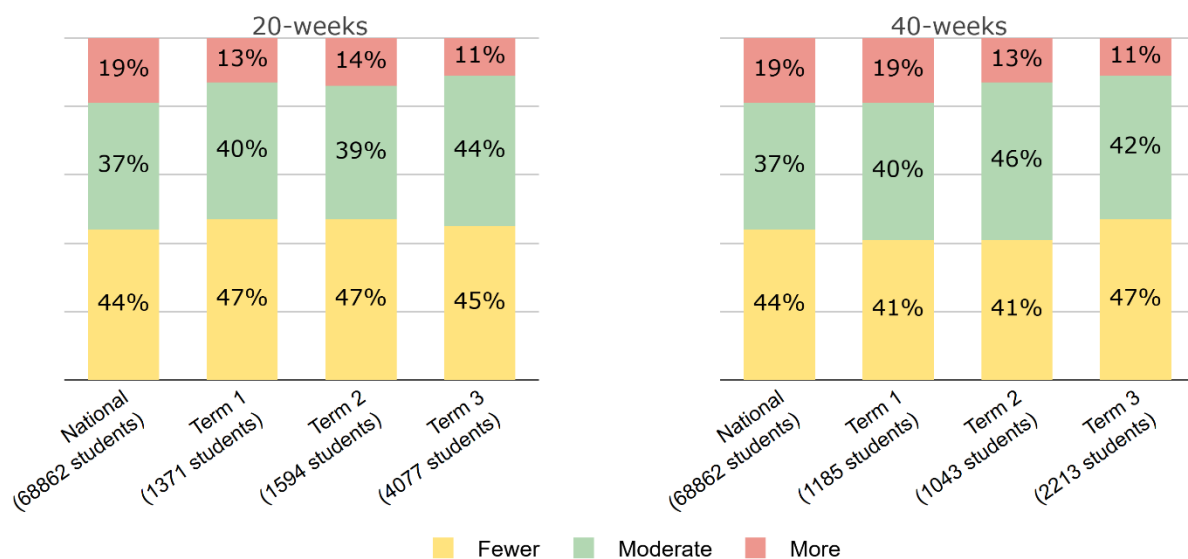
Annex 1 Figure A. Distribution of Ethnic groups at 20-weeks and 40-weeks

The sample of Phonics Checks data across all terms is broadly representative of national student ethnicity distribution, with a small skew towards European students.



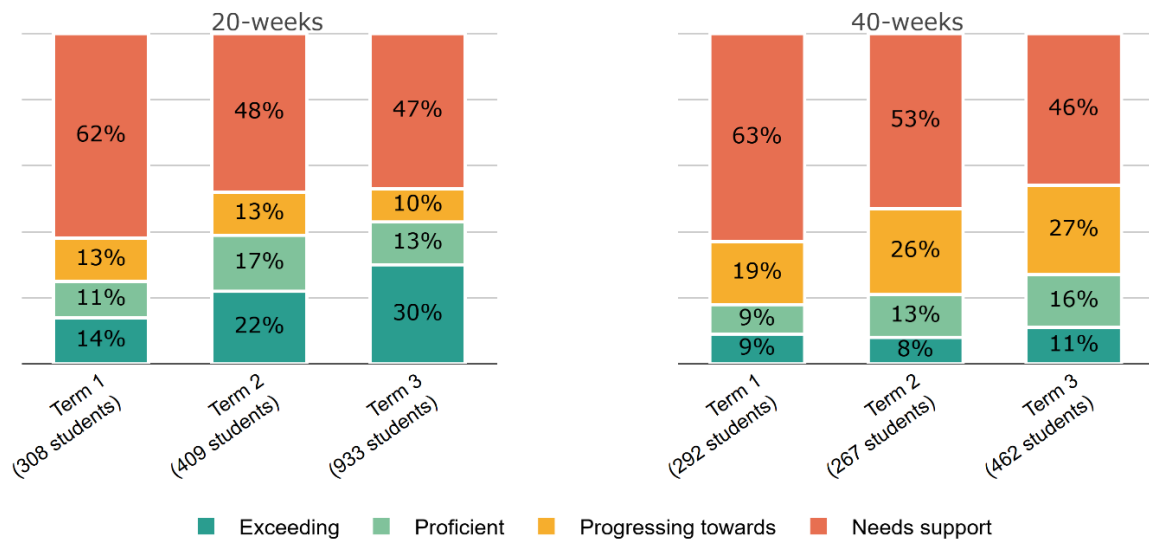
Annex 1 Figure 2. EQI distribution for 20-weeks and 40-weeks in Term 1, Term 2 & Term 3 2025

The sample of Phonics Checks data across all terms is broadly representative of the national distribution of EQI groups, or *Fewer*, *Moderate* and *More* barriers, with a small skew toward schools with *Moderate* and *Fewer* barriers.

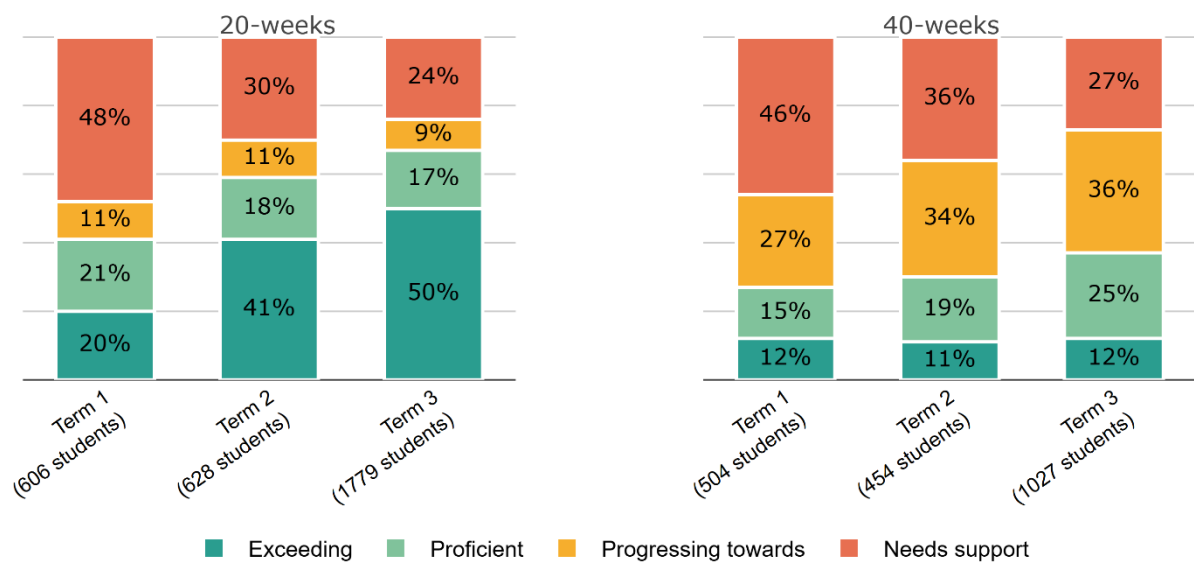


Annex 2: Distribution of Achievement by Student Ethnicity

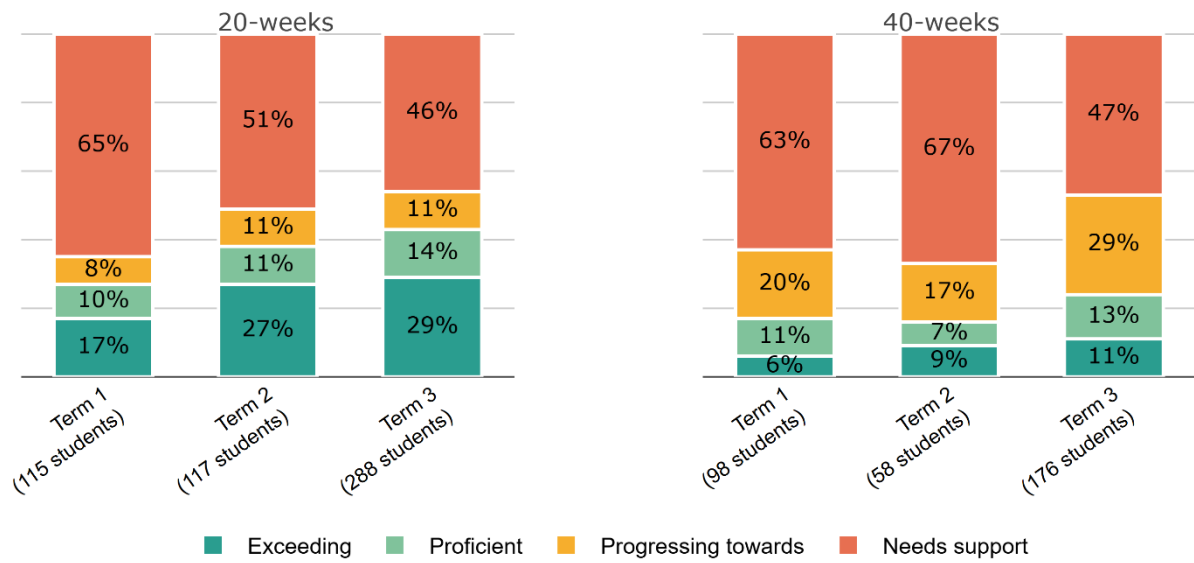
Annex 2 Figure A. Distribution of Māori at 20-weeks and 40-weeks in Term 1, Term 2 & Term 3 2025



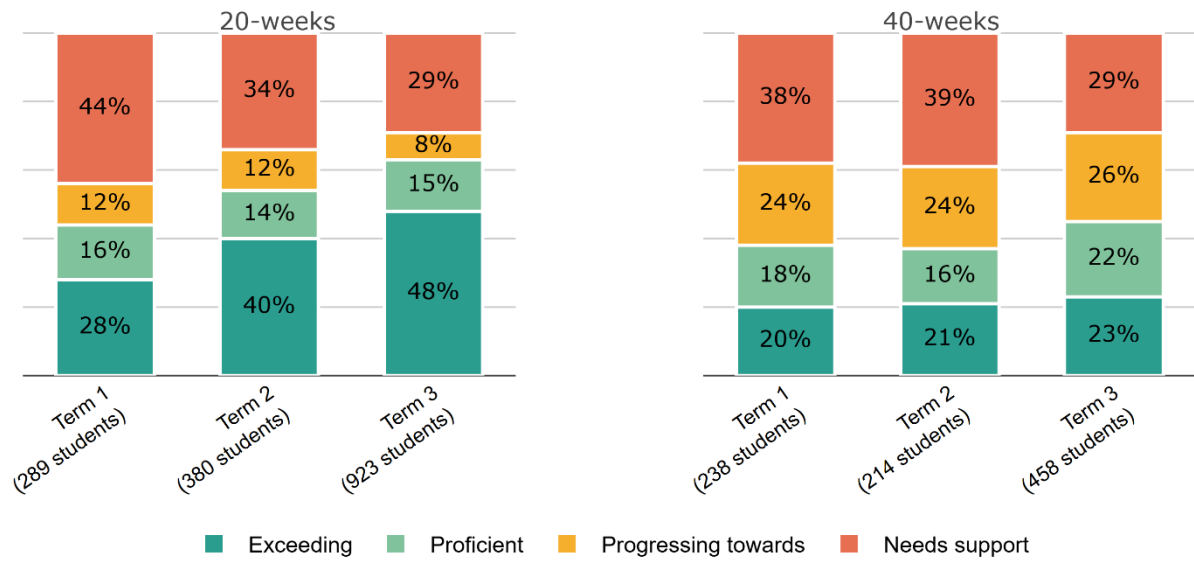
Annex 2 Figure B. Distribution of European at 20-weeks and 40-weeks in Term 1, Term 2 & Term 3 2025



Annex 2 Figure C. Distribution of Pacific at 20-weeks and 40-weeks in Term 1, Term 2 & Term 3 2025

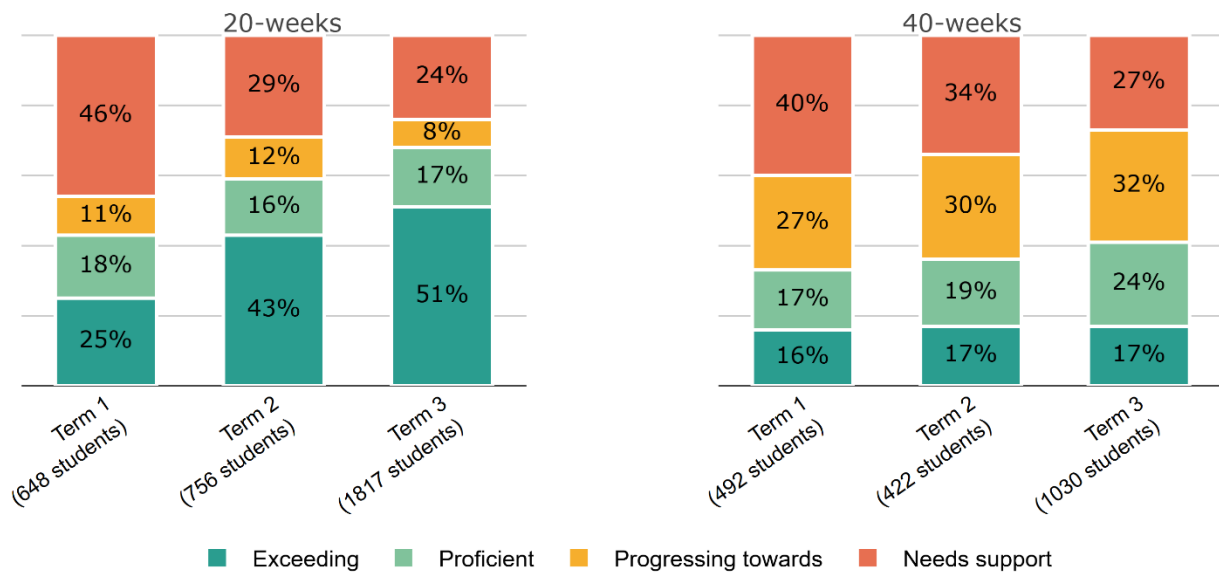


Annex 2 Figure D. Distribution of Asian at 20-weeks and 40-weeks in Term 1, Term 2 & Term 3 2025

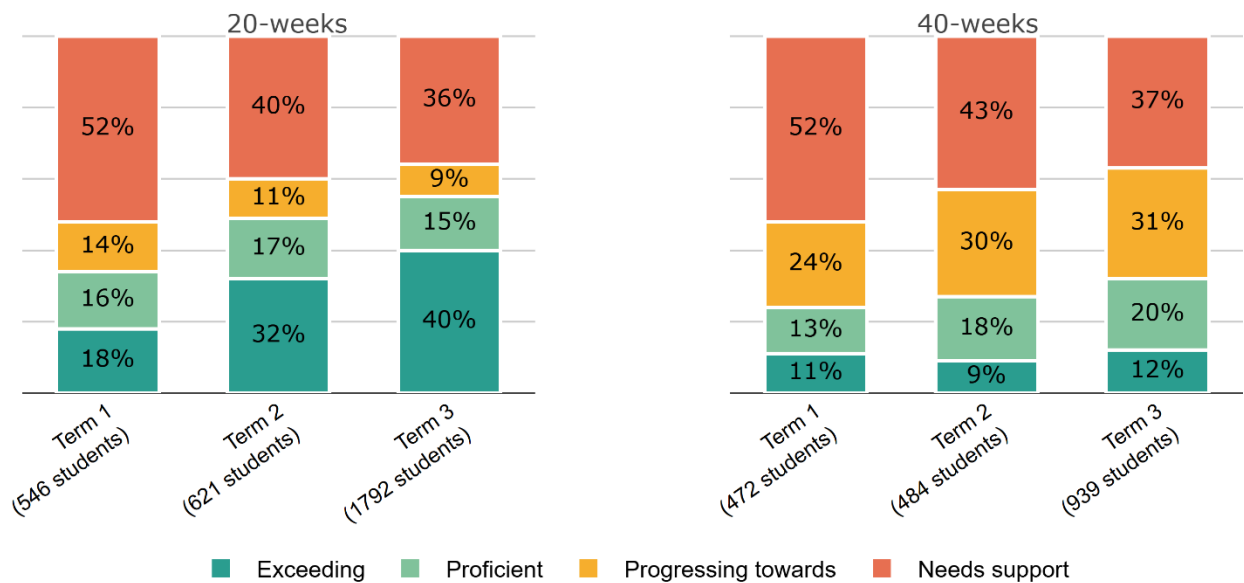


Annex 3: Distribution of Achievement by EQI Groups

Annex 3 Figure A. EQI distribution (Fewer) for 20-weeks and 40-weeks in Term 1, Term 2 & Term 3 2025



Annex 3 Figure B. EQI distribution (Moderate) for 20-weeks and 40-weeks in Term 1, Term 2 & Term 3 2025



Annex 3 Figure C. EQI distribution (More) for 20-weeks and 40-weeks in Term 1, Term 2 & Term 3 2025

