

Conclusions for writing performance

Mean writing scores for Year four

The PILNA 2021 writing results show that Cook Islands' students had a mean score of 492. With a mean score of 492 the students are performing slightly better than the region (484) and Small Island States (481).

Mean writing scores for year six

The writing results for year six students in Cook Islands showed an average score of 504.

Gender

When the year four writing result is disaggregated by gender, the girls' mean score is 503 and the boys are 21 points behind with a mean score of 482.

When the year six writing result is disaggregated by gender, the girls' mean score is 516 and the boys are 22 points behind with a mean score of 494.

School authority

Year four students in government schools showed higher mean scores (495) than did students in non-government schools (485).

Year six students in non-government schools had higher mean scores (517) than did students in government schools (499).

School locality

Year four students in urban schools have an average score of 494, compared to 486 for students in non-urban schools.

Year six students in urban schools have an average score of 512, compared to 476 for students in non-urban schools.

Coding:

For the PILNA writing assessment at year four and 6, students were required to write a story based on either of the two prompts provided. The prompts were provided to encourage ideas and engagement in the process. The criteria for the narrative task encompass the two main features of writing – content and language elements – as can be seen in the writing rubric. Six writing skills are assessed in PILNA: 'Quality of ideas', 'Structure and organisation', 'Grammar and syntax', 'Vocabulary', 'Spelling', and 'Punctuation'.

Coding data allow for an interpretation of how students have performed. A code is assigned for each criterion according to how well the student has performed. A Code 0 is assigned when there is insufficient evidence to assess.

Year four coding

Quality of ideas (Codes 1–8): This criterion measures the quality of the students' ideas and how well those ideas have been developed to produce an entertaining story. The largest proportion (30%) of year four students in Cook Islands received Code 3, indicating an awareness of writing a story but did not produce a clear storyline with relevant narrative features, such as a sense of character or plot. Almost 7% of students at year four received a Code 0, meaning they did not provide sufficient evidence to assess their work, writing only a few words or random words or words copied from the prompt.

Structure and organisation (Codes 1–5): This measures the students' ability to shape a story, or to produce a coherent story, with ideas that relate to each other and are logically sequenced. The largest proportion of year four students in Cook Islands received Code 3, which shows that they had an awareness of story structure by including some story elements, but there was an overall lack of coherence or sequence, such as gaps in logic or irrelevant detail in their writing. Around 7% of year four students received Code 0, which shows that there was insufficient evidence to assess their writing skills.

Grammar and syntax (Codes 1–4): This measures the students' ability to produce a range of sentence structures with accuracy. Around 39% of year four students in Cook Islands received Code 2, indicating that they had written simple or repetitive sentences that had intrusive grammatical errors.

Vocabulary (Codes 1–4): This measures the variety of their vocabulary in telling the story. The highest proportion at year four received Code 2. This shows that they had used a small range of vocabulary in their stories which allowed them to express only simple ideas.

Spelling (Codes 1–2): This measures the students' ability to spell both basic and more difficult words. Almost 75% of year four students in Cook Islands received Code 1 in spelling, indicating that they were able to spell basic words correctly in their writing test but made errors in spelling difficult words.

Punctuation (Codes 1–3): This measures the range and precision of punctuation used in telling the story. Around 60% of year four students in Cook Islands received Code 1 for this, indicating that they used commas and full stops correctly in their stories, but their writing lacked variety in punctuation.

Year six coding

Quality of ideas (Codes 1–8): This criterion measures the quality of the students' ideas and how well those ideas have been developed to produce an entertaining story. The largest proportion (26%) of year six students in Cook Islands had Code 4, which indicates that they had a basic ability in story writing, using some of the narrative features, such as plot and character, but still highly undeveloped. Another 20% of students at year six received a Code 6, indicating that they had identified main events, characters and a setting, clearly incorporating the prompt, although it may not be sustained.

Structure and organisation (Codes 1–5): This measures the students' ability to shape a story, or to produce a coherent story with ideas that relate to each other and are logically sequenced. The largest proportion of year six students in Cook Islands received Code 3, which shows that they had an awareness of story structure by including some story elements, but there was an overall lack of coherence or sequence, such as gaps in logic or irrelevant detail.

Grammar and syntax (Codes 1–4): This measures the students' ability to produce a range of sentence structures with accuracy. The highest proportion (37%) received Code 3, meaning that they had written a variety of sentence structures but with some errors in grammar conventions.

Vocabulary (Codes 1–4): This measures the variety of their vocabulary in telling the story. The highest proportion at year six received Code 2, which shows that they had used a small range of vocabulary in their stories which allowed them to express only simple ideas.

Spelling (Codes 1–2): This measures the students' ability to spell both basic and more difficult words. More than half of the year six students in Cook Islands received Code 1 in spelling, indicating that they were able to spell basic words correctly in their writing test, but made errors in spelling difficult words. Around 36% of the year six students received Code 2, the highest of the codes allocated for this criterion, showing that they could spell simple and difficult words in their stories but with minor errors.

Punctuation (Codes 1–3): This measures the range and precision of punctuation used in telling the story. Around 46% of year six students in Cook Islands received Code 1 in this criterion, indicating that students used commas and full stops correctly in their stories but lacked variety. Around 40% of year six students received Code 2, showing that they had confidently used a variety of punctuation marks in their stories but had made some minor errors in usage.

Trends

Although there was a drop in the performance of the Year four students in writing from 2015 to 2018, this increased in 2021, but fell short of the 2015 scores. The year six mean scores dropped from 2015 to 2018 with a further decline in 2021.