



Waipapa
Taumata Rau
University
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Growing Up
in New Zealand

Data factsheet: learning and development

2026



Making Aotearoa a better place to call home

Introduction to Growing Up in New Zealand

Growing Up in New Zealand is a contemporary longitudinal study of New Zealand children and their families, launched on 1 February 2008. The overarching objective of the study is to generate policy-relevant evidence to optimise children's developmental trajectories in multiple areas, including health, education and social and cognitive functioning.¹ *Growing Up in New Zealand* has enrolled approximately 18,000 participants (6,822 mothers, 4,401 partners and 6,853 children). Data was first collected during the mothers' last trimester of pregnancy, and subsequent major data collection waves occurred at 9 months, 2 years, 4.5 years, 8 years, 12 years and 15 years.

Policy priority: learning and development

- The ways in which young people navigate secondary school to shape their pathways toward tertiary education and future employment are a key national priority.² The Statement for National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) outlines the Government's strategic direction for education, with priorities including high aspirations for every learner/ākonga, reducing barriers to education and ensuring that every learner/ākonga gains foundational literacy and numeracy skills.³ Early learning can also affect children's later cognitive development, and the Government's priorities for early learning are outlined in the Early Learning Action Plan 2019-2029.⁴
- *Growing Up in New Zealand* can provide robust contemporary evidence on a range of topics related to learning and development. The 15-year data collection wave included data collection about the young people from the young people themselves and their primary caregiver.
- The table on the following page provides an overview of learning and development constructs that *Growing Up in New Zealand* has collected at each data collection wave, with some examples of items from our questionnaires.

¹ Morton SMB, Ramke J, Kinloch J, Grant CC, Atatoa Carr P, Leeson H et al. Growing Up in New Zealand cohort alignment with all New Zealand births. *Aust N Z J Public Health*. 2015 Feb;39(1):82-87.

² Ministry of Social Development. The Child and Youth Strategy 2024-27 [Internet]. Wellington: New Zealand Government; 2024. Available from: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/child-wellbeing-and-poverty-reduction/child-youth-strategy/index.html>

³ The Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) & Tertiary Education Strategy (TES). Wellington: Ministry of Education; 2020. 1-5.

⁴ He taonga te tamaiti – every child a taonga. Early learning action plan 2019-2029. Wellington: Ministry of Education; 2019. 1-46.

How can Growing Up in New Zealand contribute to the Government's policy priorities?

Policy area	Measured construct	Data collection wave							Example measures	
		AN	9M	2Y	4.5Y	8Y	12Y	15Y*		
Improving school engagement	School attendance									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for not physically attending school • Whether they look forward to school • Whether they can deal with setbacks at school • Academic achievement in relation to curriculum expectations • Level of competency when using digital technology in classroom
	Mindsets – educational expectations and aspirations									
	Student engagement/satisfaction									
	Academic resilience									
	Parental expectations									
	Literacy, numeracy, academic performance									
	Digital competencies									
Learning environments	School selection									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of te reo Māori in the classroom • Intentional use of identity resources • Descriptions of the physical classroom environment • Size of classes • How far in school or higher education the teacher expects the child will go • Student-teacher relationship scale
	Classroom/school environment									
	Language and identity									
	Teacher demographics									
	Class climate									
	Peer relationships									
	Teacher expectations									
	Student-teacher relationship									

Policy area	Measured construct	Data collection wave							Example measures
		AN	9M	2Y	4.5Y	8Y	12Y	15Y*	
Supporting all learners	Disability and learning support	■				■	■	■	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whether they have a disability, learning support need, gifted and/or talented ability
	Gifted learner support					■	■	■	
Early learning services	Availability of childcare in the community	■	■						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What type of care does your child have for the most hours per week? What is the main reason that your child is in a regular childcare arrangement?
	Type of childcare		■	■	■				
	Hours spent in childcare		■	■					
	Childcare attendance/engagement		■	■	■				
Cognitive development	Pre-linguistic communication		■						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication and Symbolic Behaviour Scales DIBELS letter naming fluency task Adapted Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test NIH Toolbox Cognition Battery
	Reading/phonological awareness				■	■			
	Verbal communication		■	■	■	■	■		
	Memory (episodic and working)					■	■		
	Processing speed					■			

* Note: The 15Y DCW was a checkpoint (primarily to engage/retain the cohort) not a full Data collection wave

Constructs related to learning and development

Growing Up in New Zealand also collects data on factors related to learning and development.

Domain	Constructs related to learning and development
Culture and identity	Experiences of discrimination, community participation, languages exposed to, te reo language comprehension and use
Family and whānau	Family relationships, family structure, parent-child interactions, special adult relationships, child peer relationships, parenting
Health and wellbeing	Activity and exercise, access and use of support, mental health and social services, infant/child health status, disability (physical or intellectual), risky behaviour, diet and nutrition, parental health
Psychological and cognitive development	Conduct and behaviour, social competence, mental health, motivation and emotion, social competence, social and emotional adjustment
Societal context	Exposure to TV and other media, household socioeconomic status, material wellbeing, material hardship, household amenities, household crowding, parental education, parental occupation

Using Growing Up in New Zealand data

1. Growing Up in New Zealand has four main objectives:

- To map the developmental trajectories for a cohort of New Zealand children as a group and within Māori, Pacific and Asian subgroups in particular, across multiple levels of influence (political, social, cultural, intergenerational, familial and individual) for outcomes in key social, developmental and health domains across the lifecourse.
- To provide a description of cross-sectional outcomes (in several domains) at key points in the lifecourse of the developing child to enable subgroup-specific analyses and comparisons with international populations.
- To focus on factors and trajectories, across multiple levels of influence, that confer resilience and optimise development, rather than focusing solely on risk factors for poor outcomes.
- To identify critical or sensitive periods in development, and levels of influence, that will allow the development of policy directed at optimising the development of every child born in New Zealand.

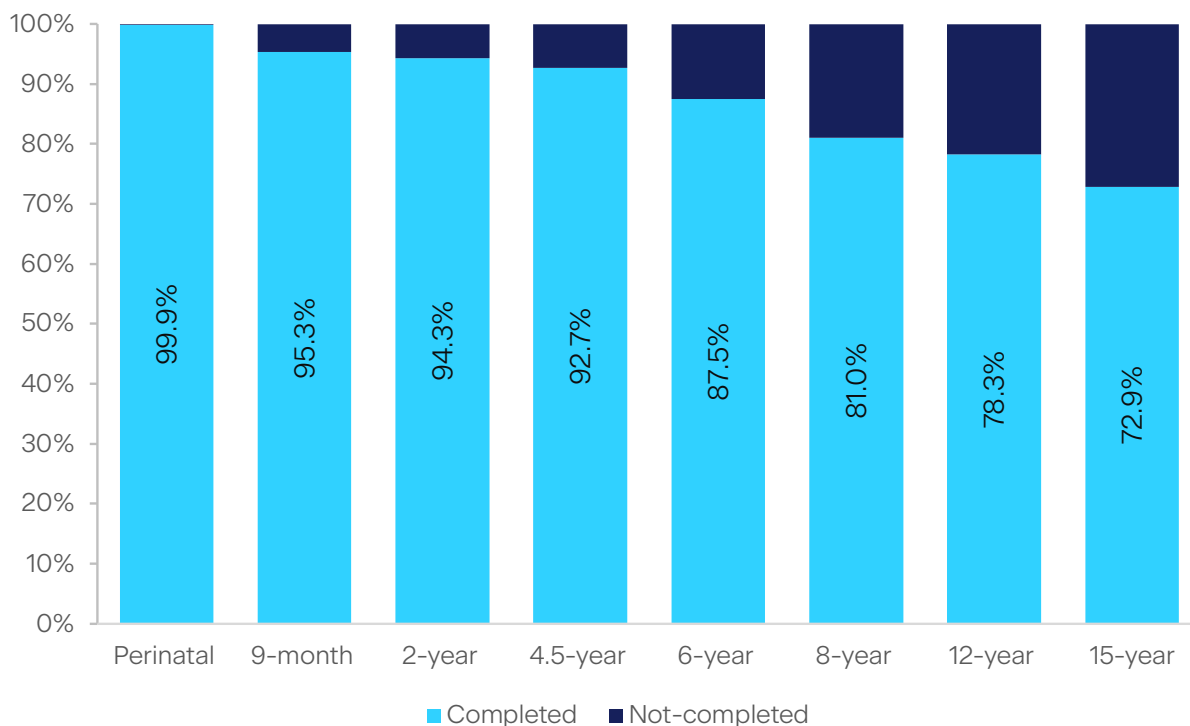


Figure 1. Longitudinal completion rate over time as a proportion of eligible cohort for each data collection wave

2. Growing Up in New Zealand has several unique features that make it an important resource for policy development.

- It is the first population-based longitudinal study in New Zealand to begin data collection from before birth, which accounts for the importance of the antenatal period for children's developmental pathways.
- The cohort is unique in terms of its size and diversity to provide evidence across multiple domains of influence on development for New Zealand children. It includes significant numbers of Māori, Pacific and Asian children, which makes analyses within these ethnic groups possible.
- Information is gathered from mothers and their partners from the earliest time point so that the evolving nature of the New Zealand family can be tracked alongside that of our growing children.
- The study has ongoing engagement with the policy sector to ensure the collected data links to areas of cross-sectoral policy focus for children and families.
- Data collected from *Growing Up in New Zealand* is intended to be used widely. Clear data access protocols govern the study to safeguard participants' ongoing involvement, privacy and confidentiality.
- Some learning and development constructs have been measured longitudinally, which can help identify critical periods during cognitive development.

3. Growing Up in New Zealand can provide evidence through:

- Fast track requests – simple cross-tabulations to answer a specific policy-relevant query
- Policy briefs – maximum four-page policy briefs on specific topics
- Bespoke, comprehensive reports for government agencies
- Collaborative projects between government agencies and *Growing Up in New Zealand* researchers

4. Datasets available

Datasets are currently available from antenatal to the 12-year data collection wave. Additionally, we have data available from smaller data collection waves at 6 weeks, 16 months, 23 months, 31 months, 45 months, 72 months, a specific COVID-19 survey at 10 years, and Extreme Weather Event (EWE) survey at 13 years. The 15-year data collection wave data will become available April 2026.

Further resources

A range of existing resources based on our research findings can be found on our website, including:

- [Policy briefs](#): smaller publications on a specific topic of interest to policymakers and government. growingup.co.nz/growing-policy-briefs
- [Reports](#): comprehensive reports based on data collected at key milestones. growingup.co.nz/growing-reports
- [Published articles](#): *Growing Up in New Zealand* researchers use the study data to investigate a wide range of topics around child and youth development. growingup.co.nz/published-articles

For more information, please email researchgrowingup@auckland.ac.nz or visit our website at growingup.co.nz

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