

# kiwi kids' swim skills are sinking fast



## So you think we can swim?

In 2008, just one in five 10-year-olds can swim 200m – the benchmark Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) considers necessary to swim and survive in the water. Other lesser measurements of children's swimming skills are down on average by 10% on comparable data from 2001.

This is a disturbing trend – if our kids don't learn to swim, they grow to become at-risk adults. What could result in the near future is drowning rates returning to the appalling levels of the 1980s if learning to swim is not made a greater priority.

If this does come about, we can expect 150-180 fatalities from drowning each year – and New Zealand already has one of the worst drowning rates in the world.

Drowning rates could return to the appalling levels of the 1980s if learning to swim is not made a greater priority

The school curriculum no longer states objectives for Learn to Swim. Based on research conducted by Nielsen, it appears there is a significant variance in pupils' levels of achievement and many schools are unable to deliver effective programmes because of a lack of resources.

## THE COLD, HARD FACTS

In 2008, just one in five 10-year-olds can swim 200m – the benchmark for being able to swim and survive in the water.

Only 50% of Year 6 kids can swim 25m and just 37% can swim 50m.

25% of children are unable to get across 25m or manage to keep afloat and tread water.

Proficiency in each of these measurements is down on average by 10% from 2001.

This downward trend in children's swimming ability will result in New Zealand's drowning rates returning to the levels of the 1980s by 2020 if action is not taken.

By 2030 we can expect drowning rates of around 150-180 drownings per annum.

Schools are not able to deliver the level of swimming instruction provided in the past due to financial and infrastructure limitations.

School teachers believe the quality of children's swimming skills has steadily declined.

Almost 50% of teachers have not had any swimming/aquatics training in the past six years and many question their ability to teach swimming skills to the level required by the curriculum.

## Our kids' swimming skills

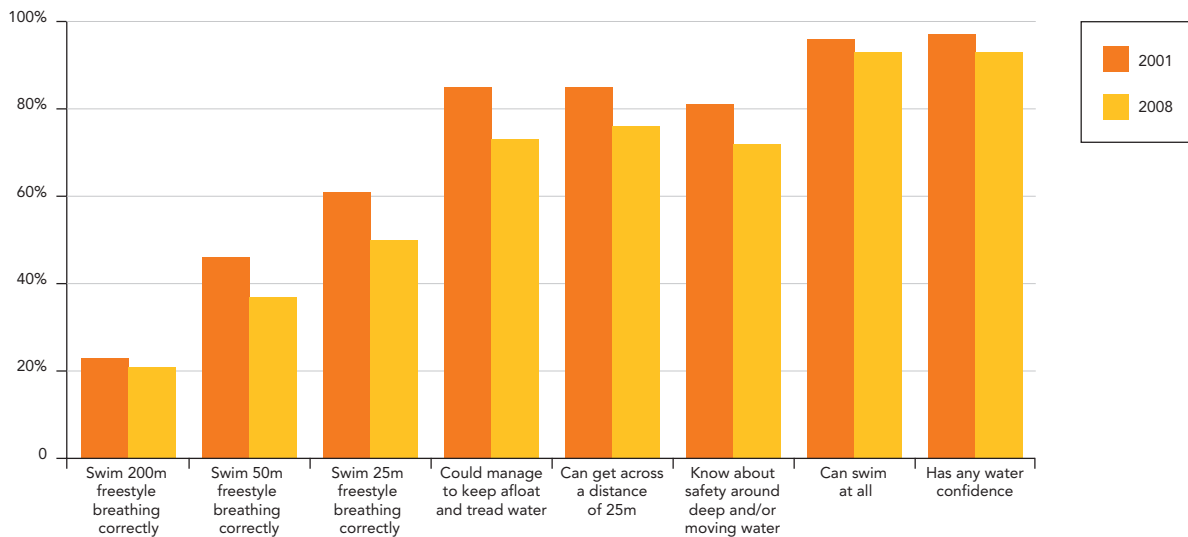
- Swimming skills are declining compared with 2001 and schools are finding it increasingly difficult to deliver water-based education. In each of the categories assessed – swimming either 25m or 50m, keeping afloat and treading water – there has been a decline in proficiency of between 9% and 12% compared with 2001.
- Most disturbingly, a quarter of Year 6 students were unable to perform the basic tasks of getting across 25m or managing to keep afloat and tread water.
- Just 21% in this age group can swim 200m – the benchmark WSNZ considers necessary to swim and survive in the water.
- Teachers also reported an evident decrease in swimming skills with one commenting: "I've taught for 25 years and the quality of children's swimming skills seems to have steadily declined" – there were numerous similar comments from teachers.

## Our schools' infrastructure and resources

- Schools reported that their facilities were generally inadequate for delivering all or any of the requirements of the curriculum.
- Of the schools surveyed, 80% had a swimming pool but it was often too small or shallow for Year 6, 7 and 8 students.
- Only 41% of schools used their own pool for teaching Year 8 pupils to swim.
- A common sentiment expressed was: "It is impossible to deliver on MOE swimming goals because of the costs involved and the minimal amount of funding provided... how can we teach Year 7 and 8s to swim 200m in a 14m pool?"
- Schools with their own pools were more likely to be able to deliver water-based education – 80% of schools with their own pool were able to



## Averages of Swimming and Aquatic Skills, 2001-2008, Year 6



deliver 20 or more lessons a year, while only 10% of schools without their own pool could achieve this due to the cost and time involved with using an external facility: "The cost of access to the pool area, and the cost of transport or cost to school time if we walked, have prohibited our pool use. We no longer teach swimming."

- Of the 20% of schools without pools, more than a third used to have one but it had been closed, largely for financial reasons.
- For some schools, the combination of these factors has resulted in water-based education being cut from their offering.

### Our schools and teachers

- It is clear that schools are giving less priority to swimming than they were in 2001.
- Schools with their own pools definitely place a greater priority on swimming than those without, with many schools without pools simply opting out of Learn to Swim programmes because of the costs involved.

- Also concerning is that almost 50% of teachers have not had any swimming/aquatics training in the past six years (up from a third of teachers in 2001), despite teachers expressing a willingness to take part in professional development.
- While most teachers are reasonably confident in their ability to identify those with a fear of water and encourage water safety in these students, many question their ability to teach swimming skills to the level required.

“It is impossible to deliver on MOE swimming goals because of the costs involved and the minimal amount of funding provided...”

– school principal



