

National Standards

PPTA position paper

January 2010

Overview

The government's intent is to implement National Standards in New Zealand primary schools despite a lack of evidence to show the policy will achieve anything positive. This is a misguided approach to a manufactured "crisis" with disastrous effects on students and teachers.

The policy is driven by ideology. Research evidence shows that National Standards will not lead to improved outcomes for students. They will simply label individual students as failures, and may lead to league tables that wrongly label schools as failures. Many countries that have gone down this route in the past are now turning away from it. Refusing to recognise the weight of local and international evidence against such policies is most unwise.

The problems

1. **The policy is not educationally valid.** PPTA's Qualifications Framework Inquiry in 1997 established eight criteria for an educationally valid qualifications system and this policy fails on all these. In particular, the absence of trialling and the lack of a moderation system mean the policy will not be fair, nor is assessment against the Standards a productive use of teacher time.
2. **Implementation will impact negatively on the broader New Zealand Curriculum.** Teachers will feel pressure to focus only on reading, writing and maths instead of providing a broad and balanced curriculum to build children's knowledge, skills and competencies. This could lead to students coming into secondary schools with serious learning deficits in areas such as the sciences, social sciences, arts and technology.
3. **Repeatedly telling students that they are achieving "below" or "well below" the expected level, even when they are doing their very best to succeed, will de-motivate them,** leading to increased behaviour problems in primary and secondary schools. The emphasis should be on progress, not on achievement at a pre-ordained level or standard.
4. **Teacher morale will be negatively affected** when students make significant progress from where they started yet are labeled as achieving below the expected level. This will particularly affect teachers in lower decile schools.

5. **League tables are inevitable.** The government claims it does not intend league tables to result from collated results submitted by schools, but it has offered nothing to prevent this from happening. These are highly destructive, and lead to game playing and masking of problems to avoid being negatively labeled as a school.
6. **Innovative approaches to assessment will be lost,** and teachers will resort to standardised testing tools to help them make judgments against the Standards.
7. **Funding for professional development across the curriculum for primary has been slashed,** and School Support Services advisers are required to focus entirely on literacy and numeracy for primary teachers. This will reduce access to PD for secondary teachers too.
8. **Most parents don't want the Standards.** Government-funded research showed no strong demand. Parents wanted informative plain English reports on their own child's progress. That doesn't require this Standards policy.

For more information download [National Standards PPTA background paper](#)

PPTA represents the professional and industrial interests some 18,000 secondary teachers in state secondary, area, manual training and intermediate schools, as well as tutors in community education institutions, alternative education and activity centres, and principals in secondary and area schools. More than 95% of eligible teachers choose to belong to the Association.