



Building on excellence: How to make a great schooling system even better

1 Introduction

A favoured theme of successive governments has been the need to improve the achievement of New Zealand students, especially those in the lowest 20 per cent of achievement. Attention is often drawn to an apparent wide disparity between the highest and the lowest achievers in New Zealand, and it is common for politicians to blame schools and teachers for that disparity. It is rare to hear politicians affirm New Zealand teachers for the excellent achievement of the majority of our students.

This paper challenges the validity of government claims about low achievement and inequity, and suggests that the government goal that all students be able to experience success at Level 2 NCEA, while a laudable aspiration, is not achievable in a low-trust environment where teachers and schools are facing cuts across a whole range of support services, in tandem with a burgeoning workload.

The paper then tackles the vital question of what is needed, and what is not needed, if secondary schools are to make significant improvements to levels of student achievement in New Zealand.

2 The demand for continuous improvement

‘Continuous improvement’ is an expectation that governments place upon schools. It is a popular mantra among business people, and when it comes to such things as the manufacture of cars it doesn’t seem unreasonable. Of course a consumer wants their new car to be safer, more fuel-efficient and have better features than the one they’re trading in.

When it comes to education, ‘continuous improvement’ may not be so achievable. Students have never been born equal in terms of intellectual ability or disposition to learn, nor are they brought up equal in terms of family capacity or disposition to support their learning. There are limits to the extent to which even the most capable teacher in a superbly run school can compensate for the inequalities between students. The ‘bell curve’ that typifies any graph of student achievement across the whole population will not simply disappear.

This is not an argument against teachers continuing to develop their skills throughout their careers, nor a reason not to search for more effective ways of enabling learning for all students, including for those who struggle the most. Schools need to be allowed to ‘cultivate the art of the possible’, and to ensure that students are encouraged to succeed in pathways that are appropriate for them, but not set expectations below what students are capable of achieving. This does not happen by blaming teachers for all of the ills in society that impact on students’ lives and therefore sometimes their learning.

3 Some realism required

3.1 Government's Level 2 NCEA goal

The government's National Standards policy, including the levels at which the Standards for Mathematics, Reading, and Writing are set, is predicated on the goal that all students should be able to achieve Level 2 NCEA, as a minimum 'worthwhile qualification' that will enable students to secure a Modern Apprenticeship, for example.

For the 2007 Year 11 cohort, however, 60 per cent of female students and 48 per cent of male students achieved Level 2 NCEA by the end of Year 12, with these figures rising to 66 per cent of female students and 56 per cent of male students by the end of Year 13.¹ This suggests that there is a considerable gap between current reality and the government aspiration. In Mathematics, it is predicted that only about 50 per cent of Year 8 students will achieve the National Standard. Can the other 50 per cent really be enabled to achieve Level 2 Mathematics in their next six years of schooling?

For 100 per cent of students to achieve Level 2 NCEA, considerably more support would need to be provided to schools so that they could all offer a very broad senior curriculum, including access to a wide range of ITO standards. It is ironic that the valuable work ITOs currently do for schools is not funded by government.

Demanding that all secondary schools aim to have 100 per cent of their students achieving Level 2 NCEA by the end of Year 13 is courting disaster and asking for perverse consequences, especially when the goal is set without providing coherent and comprehensive support systems for schools, including specialised services for those students with high levels of behavioural or social needs. We know what the effects of such number-driven objectives have been in other schooling systems.

3.2 Effect on credibility

Furthermore, how credible would NCEA Level 2 be as a qualification if 100 per cent of students achieved it? While PPTA has always worked towards a qualification that provided maximum accessibility and motivation for students (see below), gaining a qualification that everyone achieved would come to seem like no achievement at all. It would also lead to further 'qualifications inflation',² where Level 3 became the goal for all students. NCEA might also face further politically motivated 'credibility' issues of the kind that have historically led to increased levels of monitoring and compliance, such as the demand for 10 per cent of work samples to be moderated, a level well above that statistically required.

It is also a concern to PPTA that the inevitable drop in the proportion of students achieving NCEA Level 1 in 2011, as a result of the removal of lower level unit standards through the curriculum alignment process (see below), may be blamed on teachers if agencies fail to forewarn the public and critics of what will be an inevitable 'blip' in results. Excellent communications by the agencies to head off such an interpretation of the results are urgently required.

¹ NZQA (2010). *Annual report on NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship data and statistics (2009)*. Wellington: NZQA.

² Lee, Howard (2002). *The NCEA – Coming soon to a school near you? Some historical and contemporary observations on secondary school assessment*. Paper to PPTA Annual Conference, 24–26 September 2002.

4 A manufactured crisis

4.1 The 'tail'

PPTA's position paper on National Standards argues that they are a response to a 'manufactured crisis'.³ The 'evidence' generally used to claim that New Zealand's schooling system shows wide disparity between our highest and lowest achieving students is data from PISA, an international assessment system for 15 year olds in OECD countries that New Zealand students have been participating in since its inception in 2000. A phrase commonly heard is that 'New Zealand has a long tail of underachievement', with a gap between the highest and lowest performing students that is greater than the OECD average.

But how serious a problem is this? In PISA 2006, for example, New Zealand's proportion of students at Level 1 or below in all of the areas assessed (Science, Maths, and Reading) was far less than the OECD average proportion at that level: in Science, 13.7 per cent compared with 19.3 per cent for the OECD; in Maths, 14 per cent compared with 21.3 per cent; and in Reading, 14.6 per cent compared with 20.1 per cent.⁴

New Zealand's best students do far better than the OECD average across all three areas, and our overall performance regularly puts New Zealand in the top grouping of countries.⁵

The data on variance within schools does not necessarily indicate significant variation in teacher capability, as some politicians would have people believe. While it is true that New Zealand shows within-school variance above the OECD average,⁶ this could just as easily be because New Zealand has a highly comprehensive school system, with only a tiny proportion of students in special schools. New Zealand's schools are also socio-economically diverse. Just because a school has a decile 8 rating, for example, it does not mean that there will not be significant numbers of students from much lower socio-economic backgrounds.⁷

Furthermore, PISA does not analyse student results within a school by class grouping; such an analysis would in any case be highly flawed in a secondary school context, because each student has about six different teachers each year.

4.2 The value of PISA data

There are also problems with PISA data. While the PISA administrators try hard to ensure that all countries sample the same range of students, there have been incidents where countries have been caught out trying to shape their sample to make their results look better. (The United Kingdom's sample was rejected in 2003 for this reason.) Not all of this 'sample shaping' will be identified, especially when it takes place at individual schools. New Zealand schools are thought to be pretty meticulous about including a full sample, but we cannot be sure this happens everywhere.

³ <http://www.ppta.org.nz/index.php/-issues-in-education/national-standards>

⁴ http://www.oecd.org/document/2/0,3343,en_32252351_32236191_39718850_1_1_1_1,00.html

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Socio-economic status is clearly a factor in achievement, as indicated, for example, by NCEA data when it is broken down by school decile, or by PISA data on between-school variance when analysed by socio-economic status.

Additionally, PISA assessments cannot accurately reflect the whole curriculum of a participating country, nor even the full breadth of the areas focused on (reading literacy, mathematical literacy, and scientific literacy), let alone the more generic areas of our curriculum such as the Key Competencies or the Values.

There is interesting research being conducted by the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) into the destinations of Australian students who are low achievers according to PISA data. Some of these students do succeed, and the key variables for this appear to be average or high socio-economic family circumstances, enjoyment of learning, seeing schoolwork as useful in the future, experience of positive teacher-student relationships, being keen to secure an apprenticeship, and gender. Clearly, there is a lot more to achievement than a PISA result.

5 What helps to improve student achievement?

Despite all of the above, there is no question that New Zealand secondary teachers would like to be able to assist their students to do even better than they already do.

The McKinsey Report, a wide-ranging comparative study of school systems that looks at what typifies the highest-performing school systems (using PISA data), argues that three things matter the most:

- getting the right people to become teachers;
- developing them into effective instructors [sic];
- ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction [sic] for every child.⁸

The report's recommendations are entirely consistent with PPTA's advocacy for secondary education, and strongly reflected in the 2010 STCA claim:

- improved remuneration that will attract and keep high-quality teachers;
- professional support for teachers, for example guidelines on and access to high-quality professional learning and development, subject-specific support, and professional mentoring;
- employment conditions that support teachers in their work, for example equity of access to laptops, and limits on class sizes.

The McKinsey Report does not discuss curriculum or assessment, but other evidence suggests that New Zealand's curriculum and school qualifications system also contribute significantly to the success of New Zealand's educational performance.

5.1 Getting the right people to become teachers

The McKinsey Report argues that *'The quality of a school system rests on the quality of its teachers'*.⁹ It argues that top-performing school systems have better approaches to selecting people into teacher education than lower-performing systems, such as stringent selection procedures that look for strong literacy and numeracy, strong interpersonal and communications skills, willingness to learn, and

⁸ McKinsey & Company (2007). *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top*. Retrieved from: http://www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Reports/SSO/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf

⁹ Ibid. p.19.

motivation to teach.¹⁰ They also control entry into teacher education so that only those who will make good teachers get in, thus raising the status of initial teacher education (ITE) and teaching. In Finland, often rated the highest-performing system on PISA data, only about 10 per cent of applicants are accepted into teacher education.¹¹

Once in teaching positions, teachers' starting salaries need to be in line with the starting salaries of other graduates entering jobs in the private sector. Top-performing school systems also ensure that teaching has high status.¹²

In New Zealand, tertiary funding has incentivised ITE providers to put 'bums on seats'. A tendency to litigiousness by students who have to pay substantial sums for their teaching qualifications has served as a disincentive to fail students who don't measure up. Practising teachers have been shut out of their previous role in helping to select students, and funding cuts have created a barrier to quality partnerships between schools and teacher educators.

New Zealand teachers' starting salaries are US\$11,764 below the OECD average starting salary at lower secondary level, and US\$12,947 below at upper secondary level. This disparity is only partly redressed with experience: after 15 years, New Zealand teachers are still US\$4,780 below the OECD average for lower secondary level and US\$7,569 at upper secondary level. In comparison, Australian teachers earn well above the OECD average.¹³

5.2 Developing them into effective teachers

The McKinsey Report says that top-performing school systems recognise that they need to spend and spend and spend on teacher professional learning and development. Singapore, for example, provides every teacher with 100 hours of professional development each year.¹⁴ Four key approaches typify high-performing school systems:

- building practical skills during the initial teacher education, for example by increasing and enhancing teaching practice as a component of the course;
- coaching and mentoring in schools that focuses on one-on-one coaching in the classroom;
- selecting and developing effective instructional leaders;
- enabling teachers to learn from each other, for example through joint planning, observing each others' lessons, and peer coaching.¹⁵

It is worth noting the strong synergies between this report's recommendations and the findings of the Ministry of Education's Best Evidence Synthesis project, especially in the Teacher Professional Learning BES¹⁶ and in the School Leadership BES.¹⁷ It

¹⁰ McKinsey & Company (2007). p.20.

¹¹ Flynn, S. (2010). How the Finns got it so right, *Irish Times*, Tuesday May 11, 2010.

¹² McKinsey & Company (2007). p.20.

¹³ OECD (2009). *Education at a Glance*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2009pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid. p.27.

¹⁵ Ibid p.28.

¹⁶ Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H. & Fung, I. (2007). *Teacher professional learning and development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

is ironic that the New Zealand government has available to it very strong evidence of what is needed to help teachers become the best practitioners they possibly can be, and yet the union struggles to achieve any substantial gains in secondary teachers' access to the learning and leadership support that is required.

PPTA is currently trialling in pilot schools a Toolkit on professional learning and development, and this will be available for use by branches from term 1, 2011. It will enable them to evaluate professional learning available to them at school level, and to seek improvements. Improved policies and provision at school level, however, do not make up for inadequate funding of professional learning and development across the whole system.

5.3 Ensuring that every child has access to the best possible teaching

McKinsey argues that '*A combination of monitoring and effective intervention is essential in ensuring that good instruction is delivered across the system*'.¹⁸ This refers to careful collection of data about every student's achievement (but not necessarily publication of this data, which they suggest can actually prevent lower-achieving schools from improving), self-review, and access to high-quality services for students who are shown to need extra help.¹⁹

Sadly, New Zealand has failed to deliver high-quality services for its more needy students. Special Education 2000 and subsequent developments of that policy continue to leave significant gaps in support for students with special needs. Services such as psychologists, social workers, and mental health supports, to support schools where students have significant behavioural issues, are never sufficient to meet needs, and there are regional disparities. Alternative education is grossly under-funded, leaving most centres unable to provide teachers trained and qualified to meet students' learning needs.

5.4 A curriculum that professionalises teachers

In a report to the Queensland Studies Authority proposing a set of principles to guide the development of a syllabus framework, Luke, Weir, and Woods argue that '*High quality/high equity education systems are characterised by a balance of 'informed prescription' and 'informed professionalism*'.²⁰ They define 'informed prescription' as entailing an 'economical syllabus'. 'Informed professionalism' means that teachers have autonomy to interpret that syllabus to fit their local context, and have access to opportunities to plan locally and high-quality professional support for that task.²¹

Finnish teachers have considerable autonomy over curriculum. '*While the Finnish National Board of Education provides set overall objectives, local municipalities and schools are free to tailor the national curriculum to their own needs*'.²²

¹⁷ Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., Lloyd, C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

¹⁸ McKinsey & Company (2007). p.38.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.38.

²⁰ Luke, A., Weir, K. & Woods, A. (2008). *Development of a set of principles to guide a P-12 syllabus framework: A report to the Queensland Studies Authority, Queensland, Australia*. Brisbane: Queensland Studies Authority. p.1.

²¹ Ibid. p.2.

²² Flynn (2010).

New Zealand's current curriculum is highly regarded internationally, largely because it is an 'economical syllabus' that 'maps out essential knowledges, competences, skills, processes and experiences'.²³ Sadly, it has not been supported by the provision of high-quality professional support that Luke et al see as the necessary accompaniment to 'informed prescription'. For secondary teachers, unless their union had stepped in and co-ordinated subject-specific professional development across the country through 2009's Curriculum Support Days, there would have been only very general professional learning, largely delivered in the form of online materials, available to support their introduction of the New Zealand Curriculum.

5.5 A school qualifications system that provides valid pathways for all students

The first half of the 1990s saw extreme conflict develop between secondary teachers and the new New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), with regard to plans for a new qualifications system for secondary students to replace the old structure of School Certificate, Sixth Form Certificate, and Bursary. NZQA wanted schools to adopt a unit standards approach, entirely internally assessed, across all subjects. Teachers wanted change, but there was no consensus that NZQA's model was the right change.

It was PPTA that provided the circuit-breaker when it established its expert panel, the Qualifications Framework Inquiry, which reported in July 1997.²⁴ The ideas in this report showed the way to the development of the NCEA, a qualification which, while registered on the Framework, includes both internal and external assessment and offers three levels of achievement rather than a pass/fail unit standards model. PPTA has largely supported the qualification, on the grounds that it is an equitable qualification that motivates and provides opportunities for success for the fullest possible range of students.

At the same time, PPTA has been deeply disappointed by the failure of government to adequately resource such an important part of the schooling system, or to address the excessive workload it has engendered. This is grossly irresponsible on government's part. Inadequate resourcing of the NCEA and of secondary schools in general continues to stand in the way of the qualification's full possibilities being able to be realised for every student:

- Staffing levels limit the range of courses that can be provided.
- Inflexibilities at the interface between secondary and tertiary limit pathways.
- Public scrutiny of schools through league tables incentivises poor decisions about assessment issues.
- Excessive assessment loads take time away from quality teaching.

5.5.1 Impacts of the Standards Review

Currently secondary teachers face a huge increase in workload as a result of the introduction of a new curriculum and the consequent need to revise curriculum-

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Allen, P., Crooks, T., Hearn S. & Irwin, K. (1997). *Te Tiro Hou: Report of the Qualifications Framework Inquiry*. Wellington: NZPPTA.

referenced achievement standards. The decision was made by government, for good educational reasons but with little thought to the impact on secondary teacher workloads, to expand this curriculum alignment project into one that addressed a number of other NCEA issues: duplication, credit parity, new literacy and numeracy requirements, course endorsement, and revision of university entrance requirements. All but 21 out of 244 Level 1 achievement standards (8.6 per cent) are either being significantly changed or are completely new, a pattern likely to be repeated at Levels 2 and 3 as the review proceeds. Many unit standards previously widely used in Year 11 courses will simply disappear.

That the government doesn't appreciate the impact of all this on secondary teachers is clear from the Minister's continued refusal to grant Teacher Only Days to schools for 2010 and the next two years. Recommendation 2 calls on the Executive to continue to reiterate this demand, and to develop a plan to take this time as industrial action, should the demand be unsuccessful.

The decision under the Standards Review to reduce to three the maximum number of achievement standards able to be assessed in an exam was technically sound. However, it is likely to result in an increase in internal assessment unless schools choose to offer fewer credits in their courses. The NZQA guideline that one credit on the Framework should represent 10 hours of teaching, assessment, and independent learning time has been largely ignored by schools when they make decisions about how many credits courses should offer. The fact that, originally, there were 24 credits' worth of achievement standards offered in each subject/level added to the confusion. The translation of many former unit standards into achievement standards, under the Standards Review, may add to the problem, in that some subjects now have even more than 24 credits per level available.

5.5.2 Making assessment manageable

A realistic number of credits to offer would be 13–18 per course, based on an assumption of about four hours per week contact time over about 33 weeks, plus some homework time. Credit numbers above that impose excessive workload and assessment demands, both on students and on teachers. Reduction in the number of credits offered per course is the most effective way of addressing student and teacher assessment overload. It is also a very effective way of improving student achievement, because it frees up time for quality learning activities instead of focusing most of the time on assessment. The introduction of course endorsement in 2011, combined with existing provision for certificate endorsement, is further encouragement to teachers to offer fewer credits but encourage students to achieve at higher levels. 'Do less better' should become the mantra in schools.

The new NZQA rules on further assessment opportunities, which set a maximum of one further opportunity per standard and only where manageable, should also help teachers to control assessment workload.

Recommendation 3 strongly advises all PPTA members, from 2011, to limit the number of credits offered in their courses to a maximum of 18. Given that most subjects will have about 12 credits of external assessment available, this should lead to many courses offering only two internally assessed standards.

This is a guideline, not an instruction, because PPTA recognises the range of exceptional situations that will exist. For this reason, Recommendation 4 establishes a PPTA Taskforce, chaired by the President, whose brief would be to come up with a

range of options for addressing assessment workload in addition to the 18-credit guideline. Because the matter is urgent, this Taskforce is asked to report to Executive before the end of Term 4 2010, and the President is empowered to establish the Taskforce to ensure that it can be set up quickly and includes appropriate expertise.

In the NCEA assessment workshops conducted across the country by PPTA in 2008, it was clear that a major barrier to teachers reducing the assessment loads in their courses was pressure from school leadership and a perception of community expectations about credits. While NZQA and Ministry of Education officials have frequently expressed a wish to see schools reducing assessment loads, they have never provided unequivocal advice on this, justifying their approach as 'respecting self-managing schools'. Recommendation 5 calls on the Ministry and NZQA to get off the fence and lead schools on the matter.

Workload increases as a result of the Standards Review, while undeniably evident across all subjects, appear to be impacting worse on certain subjects. Recommendation 6 demands that the Ministry and NZQA conduct an audit, subject by subject, to identify where the pressure points are, and to remediate these.

5.5.3 Principal's Nominee workload

The role of Principal's Nominee in schools has grown exponentially, and Recommendation 7 demands that NZQA commission a job-sizing study of the role, with a view to identifying what additional support is required to enable all Principal's Nominees to do the job effectively. While members might wish the timeframe for this study to be shorter than by June 2011, it is important that the work be done thoroughly and include direct engagement with Principal's Nominees in their schools, something that would be better done during term 1, 2011 than during the peak time for Principal's Nominees, term 4, 2010.

5.5.4 Ongoing resourcing of assessment

A qualifications system such as the NCEA, which relies heavily on teachers as assessors, needs to be supported with high-quality resources for that assessment work. Accurate assessment is a technically demanding task and most teachers have not had the training (and nor do they have the time) to develop assessment tasks from scratch. The intention to provide two new quality-assured assessment tasks for every revised standard, along with six annotated exemplars of student work, two for each grade boundary, is a good start. However, the government needs to fund the ongoing production of these resources, because the same resource cannot be used year after year in schools. Along with this, teachers need easy access to these resources and good communications about what is available. They do not have the time to trawl through websites trying to find what they need or to keep up with changes.

Tardy delivery of promised assistance means that schools are left to manage in the absence of support because their work has to proceed regardless. Examples include examiners' reports that regularly fail to appear until close to the next set of exams, final versions of standards being available only two months before the teaching year begins, and late publication of school benchmark indicators. Students and teachers suffer because of poor time management by the agencies.

PPTA has longstanding policy about NCEA resourcing, and will continue to advocate for what is required at every opportunity.

5.5.5 External moderation

Teacher assessors also require an external moderation system that is not onerous but which provides them with the professional guidance they need. Schools should be given more of a say in decisions about which standards are to be moderated each year, so that they can ensure that the standards on which they need guidance are not missed from the process. It is also a huge irritant to teachers when NZQA demands, for moderation, standards that are expiring or which the school has decided to no longer use. NZQA's last-minute demand this year for extra samples for moderation because of their own miscalculation was absolutely unacceptable. PPTA has made its views on this very plain: this must never happen again.

6 What doesn't help to improve student achievement?

In addition to the concerns noted above, there are other barriers erected by government that stand in the way of secondary teachers being able to assist students to make further improvements in achievement. Approaches to educational reform that are driven by political imperatives, rather than by what the evidence shows to be best for education, will fail to achieve lasting improvements: *'Political pressures are one main reason that worthwhile changes in education do not last or, even worse, why wrong changes are made in the first place'*.²⁵ Examples of politically-driven policy approaches that do not help to improve achievement are discussed below.

6.1 Emphasis on compliance rather than on professionalisation of teachers

Schools face excessive compliance demands that are all about proving that the school is doing a good job rather than trusting teachers' professionalism. These include:

- multiple forms of documentation for the different government agencies (NZQA, ERO, and the Ministry of Education);
- roll audits and roll returns;
- attendance audits;
- planning and reporting processes;
- excessive external moderation demands;
- maintaining paper trails for discipline matters and for contact with families and external agencies.

Any teacher would have examples to add to this list.

The timeframes for these are always at the convenience of the external agencies rather than the school, and schools are strongly criticised when they fail to meet these timeframes. The fact that the external agencies frequently fail to meet their own published timeframes does not seem to mean that they extend any mercy to schools that run over time.

6.2 'Name and shame' approaches

Policies that involve naming and shaming schools, such as publication of league tables generated from National Standards or NCEA results, or publication of ERO

²⁵ Levin, B. (2008). *How to change 5000 schools*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.



reviews and MNA reports,²⁶ are known to be ineffective in helping them to improve. Such approaches are more likely to lead to downward spirals of decline in schools, especially in a context where students and their parents have a considerable degree of choice about what school to attend.

Furthermore, the data on which league tables and other 'name and shame' approaches are based often fails to convey the subtlety of each school's approach to student achievement. As an example, basing a league table on the number of credits achieved by students would fail to account for schools that decided, rather than encouraging students to aim for quantity, to encourage students to aim for quality of achievement in terms of more Merits and Excellences, or in terms of gaining the more challenging standards.

Under Tomorrow's Schools, a system that is more devolved than almost any other system in the world, schools are largely left to be the authors of their own fortune or misfortune, and support is provided only when things reach a crisis. There is an inherent contradiction in that, on the one hand, government rhetoric encourages schools and teachers to be innovative in response to student need, and on the other hand government's low-trust emphasis on compliance encourages schools to be risk-averse and focus on a narrow set of outcomes for fear of being negatively identified.

The more effective approach is to provide excellent support of all kinds to all schools, and then to target extra support to schools that show early signs of struggling, before they enter a spiral of decline.

6.3 Failure to adequately or appropriately fund education

Inadequate funding is not a way to improve student achievement. It is a huge credit to New Zealand teachers that a system that is poorly funded compared with other OECD countries manages to perform so well on international comparisons. At secondary level, New Zealand spends almost US\$2,000 less per student than the OECD average, and the annual per-student expenditure on educational institutions at all levels is the lowest among the countries we usually compare ourselves with (Australia, United Kingdom, United States, and Ireland).²⁷

But even if funding is adequate, the key is to spend it in the right places.²⁸ Ministry of Education research through the Best Evidence Synthesis programme²⁹ suggests that money needs to be directed to high-quality professional learning and development for teachers and educational leaders. For secondary teachers, this professional learning and development must include subject-specific support. The one recent initiative to deliver this better for secondary teachers, the Senior Subject Advisers pilot in 2007, was cancelled after only one year despite a Ministry-commissioned evaluation being highly positive about the scheme.³⁰

²⁶ Managing National Assessment reports – NZQA's reports on schools' assessment systems.

²⁷ OECD (2009). *Education at a Glance*.

²⁸ McKinsey & Company (2007). p.10.

²⁹ <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/themes/BES>

³⁰ Taylor, M., Kinsella, P., Yates, A., McKenzie L. & Meyer, L. (2007). *Evaluation of the Senior Subject Adviser Pilot Initiative 2007*. Wellington: Jessie Hetherington Centre, Victoria University of Wellington.

6.4 Failure to adequately staff schools

PPTA has argued for many years that it is essential to quality teaching that schools are equitably staffed so that:

- class sizes ensure that every student can have an adequate share of the teacher's time;
- teachers have sufficient time out of the classroom to prepare, assess, collaborate, reflect, and communicate with families and other agencies;
- there is high-quality provision of pastoral care and intervention when behavioural concerns surface.

None of these requirements has been met:

- Class sizes are, in many cases, still well above the optimum, and PPTA is making no progress on this in the STCA negotiations this year. The government has only just withdrawn a threat to remove \$50m worth of staffing from the schooling system, and shows no enthusiasm for increasing secondary staffing. Staffing formulae fail to take into account the enormous high-stakes assessment load carried by secondary teachers in the senior school.
- Teachers have been able to implement the NCEA only because of the addition of 1800 extra teachers from the Staffing Review Group, and the extra two hours per week non-contact time that this was able to create for secondary teachers. It is unlikely, given assessment demands, that the increased non-contact time has been able to be used for other purposes, such as pastoral responsibilities, collaboration about new approaches to curriculum, or professional learning.
- While the government eventually (in 2009) released its much-touted Behaviour Action Plan, this has very little to offer secondary schools. Alternative education, which currently provides a pathway for students for whom mainstream secondary schooling is no longer a viable option, has been under threat of abolition until very recently. PPTA's 2009 Annual Conference paper, '80, 15, 5 per cent: What we know, what they need...', identified glaring gaps in services for the approximately 20 per cent of students with behaviours that interfere with their learning. Minimal progress has been made on filling these gaps.

6.5 Poor change management

A recurring theme in PPTA papers over the decades has been poor management of educational change by successive governments. It is arguable that change management has become worse rather than better over time. The pace of expected change has certainly accelerated. The extent of change in the senior secondary school that is faced by secondary teachers right now is mind-boggling: nearly all standards are being changed in some way and many have simply disappeared, there are new literacy and numeracy requirements, course endorsement is being introduced, university entrance requirements are being reviewed, the 'front end' of the new curriculum needs to be accounted for in teaching programmes, there are new policies in the secondary-tertiary interface area, and many schools are engaging with a new approach to managing behaviour.



All of this has proceeded in an ad hoc fashion. No one appears to have developed an overall change management plan, identifying how all these changes would impact on schools, how they interrelate, what is needed to support schools through the change, what would be adequate timeframes, and so on. Instead, change is layered on change, and no one seems to take the final responsibility for pressing the start button only when all the necessary conditions are in place. The assumption is that schools will absorb the extra load somehow, and it is clear to PPTA that schools do not have the capacity to do so.

PPTA has longstanding policy that no educational change should occur without a proper plan for change management in place. PPTA representatives will continue to use the Leaders' Forum and other networks to insist that any proposal for educational change must meet the following requirements:

- engagement of the sector around the objectives of the change;
- consultation with the sector about process and sequencing of the change;
- adequate and timely resourcing;
- provision of high-quality professional learning support;
- high-quality and timely communications;
- provision of nationally mandated teacher release days within the school term, to provide extra time for collaboration around new learning;
- time for school level implementation.

7 Conclusions

New Zealand secondary teachers should be congratulated for the overall high levels of success of our secondary schools, despite relatively poor resourcing by government.

It is grossly unfair for politicians to devise goals for schools, such as success for all at Level 2 NCEA, that are not adequately supported by the system.

If the government does genuinely want to enable teachers to make further improvements, the evidence is clear about where the work needs to be done: making secondary teaching a profession that is attractive to graduates, providing really good initial teacher education and ongoing professional learning, ensuring that the system delivers for all students whatever their particular needs, and supporting teachers to make the best use of our world-leading curriculum and qualifications system.

Recommendations

1. That the report be received.
2. That PPTA members call on the Executive:
 - i. to demand from the government two days before May 2011 for teachers to work on curriculum and qualification changes; and
 - ii. to work on a plan for members to take this time as industrial action if necessary.



3. That PPTA members be strongly advised to limit, as from 2011, the number of credits offered in any course they teach to a maximum of 18.
4. That PPTA urgently establish a Taskforce, set up and chaired by the President, to further investigate workload issues around NCEA assessment, and to report to Executive before the end of term 4, 2010 on a range of options for addressing NCEA assessment workload.
5. That PPTA call on the Ministry of Education and NZQA to provide leadership to schools by strongly advising that students be offered no more than 18 credits per course.
6. That PPTA demand that the Ministry of Education and NZQA:
 - i. complete a subject-by-subject audit of assessment changes as a result of the Standards Review, including timelines, new requirements, resources, and other supports available; and
 - ii. based on that audit, draw up a plan to provide increased support to subject areas identified as having been adversely affected by assessment changes.
7. That PPTA demand that NZQA commission, in consultation with PPTA, a job-sizing study of the role of Principal's Nominee, to be completed by the end of June 2011.

