

Apr 2009



# Newsletter

Special points of interest:

## • National Standards

- ◆ The amendment
- ◆ Beware of emotive responses
- ◆ What the Minister has said
- ◆ National testing
- ◆ League tables
- ◆ A call for rational & critical debate

## National Standards

Kia ora tatou, talofa lava, malo e lelei, greetings. Welcome back!

In early Dec 2008, an amendment to the Education Act, allowed that the "Minister may from time to time, by notice in the *Gazette*, publish...***national standards***, which are standards, in regard to matters such as literacy and numeracy, that are applicable to all students of a particular age or in a particular year of schooling." (<http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2008/0108/latest/whole.html#DLM1765426>). The law change amendment also requires that Boards will have to set priorities in their Charters for achievement of their students against the national standards.

Prior to the 2008 election, when the National Party mooted the idea of national standards, the terms 'national testing' and 'league tables' were soon being bandied about. These two terms were, and continue to be, used highly emotively. The problem with emotive language is that it tends to inflame a situation and those closest to it, often clouding judgment rather than allowing calm and rational thinking and debate to occur.

As educated professionals, we should all be taking a deep breath, and looking closely and *critically* at what has been proposed under the banner of 'national testing' in order to ask searching questions of the policy change. It may fair then to examine some of what has, and has not, been said.

Addressing the Ninth National Numeracy Conference on 17<sup>th</sup> Feb, Min. Tolley stipulated that the government does "not want to see "teaching to one narrow test" ...[nor will there]... be one national

exam that all students sit on the same day at the same time" (<http://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/nationalstandardsandnumeracy>).

If she tells the truth, then why should it be alleged that national standards equates to a single national test and the likelihood of 'teaching to the test'? It also does not follow that there has to be national testing like the NCEA - primary students are not being measured for accreditation against standards for a national certificate.

Finally, as the New Zealand education system is standards-based, why is there not already national testing at primary level?

To raise the possibility of national testing is mischievous and creates a red herring. However, perhaps the Minister is disingenuous or naïve. If so, she fails to see the obvious. That is where the educated profession comes in. It is important that Min. Tolley be held to her word, and more importantly, that the Ministry of Education be left in no doubt that most primary schools, teachers and Principals do not want a narrow test-based regime.

League tables were raised by Trevor Mallard in Parliament, suggesting that if schools were required to keep assessment information, then under the Official Information Act, journalists would be able to retrieve and collate this information to create league tables to show comparative school performance ([http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/PB/Debates/Debates/20081212\\_0001572-Education-National-Standards-Amendment-Bill.htm](http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/PB/Debates/Debates/20081212_0001572-Education-National-Standards-Amendment-Bill.htm)). Mrs Tolley

denied this possibility in Dec 2008 (<http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/757837>), although later said that she could not prevent the media from creating league tables. (<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national-education/2319002/Govt-to-fast-track-school-league-tables>).

Having the media compile league tables will be unhelpful, especially to those schools that work with the greatest challenges in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. The solution to this problem advocated by the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), to legislate against making this assessment information public, sounds appealing, but it is a 'silver bullet' that is inappropriate in a liberal democracy that relies on a free flow of information.

Once again, the rational voice of teachers, Principals and Trustees must be heard on this issue. The Ministry must be charged with establishing a method of obtaining and retaining the data it requires without it being in a form that is readily amenable to use by ill-informed outsiders.

Schools should critically self-review current assessment regimes to ascertain what these are measuring and their rationale. Secondly, consider what purpose assessment data serves. Third, existing reports should be read with the eyes of a parent who has limited understanding of what takes place in a school. They should be structured from the point of view of those who currently find reports least helpful. Finally, the results of rational debate across a school and its community must be carried to the MOE consultations, coming to your area soon.





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**Term 1**

**Business Activity**

Term 1 was a richly fulfilling and very busy one, with on-going work in these areas:

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- Teacher Only Days on the NZC
- On-going NZC implementation work
- Friend of the School (ERO Review)
- BOT consultation on NZC

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**Term 1**

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Whangarei Intermediate School  
Holy Family School, Porirua  
St Pius X School  
Park Estate School  
St Mary's School, Avondale  
Whau Valley School, Whangarei  
Kaikohe Christian School  
Wesley College  
Elim Christian College

**Upcoming Professional Learning**

**BT/PRT Workshops**

**Venues:**

**Option 1: James Cook High School, Dr Pickering Ave, Manurewa**

**Dates:** 04/05/09

10/06/09

**Option 2: St Dominic's College, 29 Rathgar Rd, Henderson**

**Dates:** 06/05/09

09/06/09

**Time:** 9 am - 12.30 pm

**Email or 'phone to receive a registration sheet or more info.**

**Congratulations to Holy Family School, Porirua, on its excellent confirmed ERO report!**

