

# Education Policy: Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy

## INTRODUCTION

One out of five New Zealand children leaves school without the qualifications and skills they need to succeed. Those children are New Zealand's future, and National is determined to improve their prospects.

We will tackle children's learning problems early by launching a Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy.

National's Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy will help ensure that children get the basic skills they need to do well at school, to prepare for the workforce, and to climb the ladder of opportunity.

The Crusade starts with 10 critical steps. We will provide an additional \$47 million a year of funding for these. These initiatives will be funded from within the allocation for new spending of \$1.75 billion outlined in National's fiscal policy.

## NATIONAL'S FIRST 10 STEPS

National will:

1. Set National Standards in literacy and numeracy.
2. Require every primary and intermediate school pupil to be assessed regularly against National Standards.
3. Require primary and intermediate schools to report to parents in plain English about how their child is doing compared to National Standards and compared to other children their age.
4. Provide targeted funding to assist primary and intermediate schools to give an extra hand to those pupils who are not meeting National Standards.
5. Refocus the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office on supporting schools in the Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy.
6. Provide extra support to underperforming schools to ensure their pupils are on track to achieve National Standards.
7. Get tough on truancy by prosecuting parents of persistent truants and giving schools extra resources to crack down on truants.
8. Give schools extra help to deal with disruptive pupils.
9. Support teaching excellence by reviewing teacher training, encouraging schools to co-operate to expand successful teaching methods, celebrating the success of top-performing teachers, and supporting reductions in pupil-to-teacher ratios in new-entrant classes.
10. Improve special education services by increasing Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS) funding for pupils with the highest special education needs, expanding special education schools, and encouraging satellite special education schools.

## NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS

### Clear National Standards

National will set National Standards in reading, writing, and numeracy. The standards will describe all the things children should be able to do by a particular age or time spent at primary or intermediate school. They will be defined by benchmarks over a range of tests.

National Standards will give schools from Kaitaia to Bluff a set of shared expectations about what pupils should be achieving as they move through primary and intermediate school. They will focus teachers on bottom-line skills that every child should be mastering in reading, writing, and mathematics.

### Effective Assessment

National will require primary and intermediate schools to use assessment programmes that compare the progress of their pupils with other pupils across the country. Schools will choose from a range of tests, and there won't be national exams.

Teachers will use National Standards to clearly identify those at risk of missing out on basic skills and becoming a permanent part of the "tail" of underachievement.

### Upfront Reporting in Plain English

National will give parents the right to see all assessment information, and to get regular reports about their child's progress towards National Standards. These reports will give parents information in plain English about how their child is doing compared to National Standards and compared to other children their age.

Parents will receive this information in school reports and parent-teacher interviews. They will have a right to see any assessment information collected about their child.

At the moment, schools aren't required to report to parents on children's achievement relative to one nationally consistent set of standards. This means parents often feel left in the dark about the actual achievement of their child.

An Education Review Office (ERO) report published in 2007 found that 49% of primary schools were generally ineffective at reporting achievement information to parents and their community.<sup>1</sup> John Hattie of Auckland University has found that schools tend to over-inflate pupil performance in school reports. Of reports from 156 different schools, he found that 98% of pupils had positive comments about their achievement, effort, and attitude.<sup>2</sup>

School reports shouldn't read like real estate ads. National knows parents want to know how their child is really doing so they can help them improve.

We will expect schools to identify the specific areas of literacy and numeracy where their child is having trouble – for example, silent reading, vocabulary, or multiplication. Schools will be expected to make it clear what they are doing to help the child meet the standards, what the parents should be doing to help, and what the child should be concentrating on.

<sup>1</sup> See page 36 of ERO report: "The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools", 39% were "partially effective with substantial weaknesses" and 10% were "not effective". The report notes on page 7 that schools with these ratings ('primarily effective with substantial weaknesses' and not 'effective') were considered to be generally ineffective in the area reported on in the question.  
<http://ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/AssmntInfoScHlsMarch07>

<sup>2</sup> Hattie, J., & Peddie, R. (2003). School reports: "Praising with faint damns".

## Targeted Funding

National will provide extra resources to help schools lift the literacy and numeracy skills of pupils who aren't meeting National Standards.

We will allocate \$18 million a year of additional funding to enable primary and intermediate schools to give extra help to pupils who are struggling to meet National Standards. We will work with schools and teachers to develop the fairest and least bureaucratic way of distributing these funds.

Schools will have the option of using this targeted funding as they see fit. They might, for example:

- Expand their Reading Recovery programme.
- Provide professional development to teachers to help them teach children with dyslexia or other specific learning difficulties that may hamper progress towards National Standards.
- Fund remedial tuition at another school or provider.
- Work with other schools to hire a specialist literacy or numeracy teacher.

The ERO will, as part of its review process, examine how effectively schools are using this targeted funding.

Where the ERO has concerns, we will work with schools and parents to find alternative solutions. Those solutions could include a school working with another school that has expertise in literacy and numeracy, or giving parents the option to access specialist help for their child elsewhere.

## Case Study: Reading Recovery

In 2007, only 67% of state primary schools with six-year-old pupils offered Reading Recovery programmes.<sup>3</sup> The numbers are even worse for low-decile schools, which often have the greatest need for such programmes. Only 59% of schools in decile 1 to 3 have a Reading Recovery programme. By contrast, 71% of decile 8 to 10 schools have Reading Recovery.

National will:

- Set National Standards in literacy and numeracy.
- Require every primary and intermediate school pupil to be assessed regularly against those standards.
- Require primary and intermediate schools to report to parents in plain English about how their child is doing compared to National Standards and compared to other children their age.
- Provide targeted funding of \$18 million a year to primary and intermediate schools to help pupils who aren't meeting National Standards.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON NATIONAL STANDARDS

**READ** the National Standards [policy summary](#).

**WATCH** John Key's [Video Journal](#) on National Standards.

**READ** John Key's speech [Encouraging Success, Confronting Failure](#).

**READ** our [Questions and Answers](#) paper.

<sup>3</sup> Written Question 8145 (2008).

## FOCUSING ON THE FRONT LINE

### Refocus the Education Review Office and the Ministry of Education

National will refocus government education agencies – the Education Review Office (ERO) and the Ministry of Education (MinEd) – on supporting schools in the Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy.

We want to minimise the multiple demands and compliance requirements these agencies place on schools so that principals and teachers can focus their attention on providing pupils with the skills they need.

National will require the MinEd and the ERO to:

- Minimise the compliance demands placed on schools and support them to focus on the Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy.
- Set clear benchmarks for identifying primary and intermediate schools that are having problems with progressing their pupils towards National Standards and for identifying those secondary schools that are having problems progressing their pupils towards NCEA literacy and numeracy credits and qualifications.
- Identify schools that are performing consistently well and accordingly minimise the oversight they receive from government agencies, while, in turn, using their success as an example for other schools.
- Focus oversight on those primary and secondary schools that are having problems and ensure they are reviewed more regularly and provided with the additional advice and support they need to improve their literacy and numeracy programmes.

### Providing Extra Support to Underperforming Schools

National doesn't think parents or communities should have to put up with schools that are failing to deliver. We won't allow schools to drift along with increasing problems, unhappy teachers, failing leadership, and dissatisfied parents.

We will use an expanded range of intervention methods to assist schools that have been identified as below-standard by communities and government agencies.

National will:

- Work with parents and communities to restore confidence in schools and to improve the education those schools provide to their pupils.
- Require underperforming schools to work with successful neighbouring schools to improve aspects of their performance.
- Provide underperforming schools with the support they need to fix specific problems. This could include, for example, specialist help in the use of assessment, governance assistance at board level, or specific professional development opportunities for their teachers.

National will:

- Minimise the compliance demands placed on schools and support them to focus on the Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy.
- Focus government oversight on those primary and intermediate schools that are having problems progressing their pupils towards National Standards and those secondary schools that are having problems progressing their pupils towards NCEA literacy and numeracy credits and qualifications.
- Provide extra support to underperforming schools through an expanded range of interventions.

## TACKLING TRUANCY AND DISRUPTIVE PUPILS

### Truancy

Under Labour, truancy has increased by 41% since 2002.<sup>4</sup> On any given day there are around 30,000 pupils truant from school. That number rose by 6,000 between 2004 and 2006.<sup>5</sup>

National knows that pupils who don't go to school won't learn from school. Persistent truants are at serious risk of leaving school without the literacy and numeracy skills they need to succeed. They will be a focus of National's Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy.

Labour has given in to truancy. The Ministry of Education doesn't even know how many frontline District Truancy Officers there are.<sup>6</sup> Nor does it know how many prosecutions have been taken against parents of truant pupils.<sup>7</sup>

National will make it clear to the Ministry and to parents, schools, and communities that truancy is not to be tolerated.

#### Case Study: Truancy Problems

A high school principal tells National: "If we have a pupil who is truant, we have to contact parents twice before referring them to the District Truancy Officer. The officer in our area is in her 60s. She will visit the house but if there is nobody home, all she does is shove a card in the letter box. That's it. End of story! No wonder we can't get on top of truancy. Things have got so bad that we have decided to work locally with neighbouring schools and we've had to spend more money from our operations grant to do it."

National will:

- Strengthen the law to ensure that the Ministry of Education can successfully prosecute parents whose children are repeatedly truant and to increase fines for those parents.
- Help schools out by providing additional funding (\$4 million a year) to ensure they can fight truancy on the front line. This money could be used, for example, to free up a teacher for a couple of hours to work with frequent truants and identify the reasons behind their non-attendance, to work with other neighbouring schools to follow up on consistently truant kids, or to improve a school's systems for detecting truancy.

### Disruptive Pupils

Disruptive pupils are at risk of leaving school without the literacy and numeracy skills they need to succeed. They also threaten the progress of other children in their class.

National wants to ensure these pupils get the attention they need in order to achieve literacy and numeracy skills, while also making sure teachers can focus on the needs of other, less disruptive, pupils.

We will support teachers to manage disruptive pupils. We want to help support programmes that meet the needs of disruptive pupils while keeping them in a school setting. In the medium term we will reprioritise some of the funds currently tied up in the Ministry's contestable funding pools and use this to give individual schools the ability to tailor solutions that are best for their particular situations. National will work with schools and teachers to work out the best distribution model for this funding and other support measures that may be necessary.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education: Attendance and Absence in New Zealand Schools Surveys from 2002, 2004 and 2006. 2006 is the latest figure as the survey is held in even years (2008) and published in odd years (2009)

<sup>5</sup> Education Amendment Bill (No. 3) – Explanatory note page 23.

<sup>6</sup> WQ 5373 (2008).

<sup>7</sup> WQ 1436 (2008) and 6796 (2008).

In the immediate future we recognise that the Interim Response Fund is an effective tool in situations where schools have reached a crisis point. As an interim measure, National will double the amount of money going into the fund to \$4 million a year in 2009, to ensure that when the most difficult situations develop, resources are available for principals to deal with disruptive pupils without disadvantaging others.

National will:

- Get tough on truancy by:
  - Prosecuting parents of persistent truants.
  - Giving schools an extra \$4 million a year to crack down on truants.
- Help schools and teachers deal with disruptive pupils by:
  - Reprioritising funds in the Ministry's contestable funding pools to be used to run special programmes in schools to deal with disruptive pupils.
  - Providing increased resources for crisis situations. We will provide an additional \$2 million a year for the Interim Response Fund.

## PROMOTING EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

National knows that teachers will play an absolutely critical role in our Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy. We applaud the many fantastic teachers working in New Zealand schools and the efforts they put in for their pupils.

We will work hard to ensure all teachers have high aspirations for what they, their pupils, and their schools can achieve. We will support them to do their job by celebrating their successes and helping them when they have problems.

### Teacher Training

In order to promote excellence in teaching, we need to ensure that teachers are being trained well. With this in mind, National will review teacher training.

To address the recommendations of Parliament's Education and Science Select Committee<sup>8</sup>, we will set up an inter-sector group to review the quality of teacher training, including:

- Course entry requirements.
- Course content and length.
- The management of practical experience.

We will also work with the sector group to examine ways to attract and retain quality teachers. Where necessary, we will implement the recommendations arising from this review.

## A High-Trust Teaching Environment

National wants to encourage a high-trust flexible teaching environment with professional leadership at the school level from well-respected and well-supported principals and senior teachers.

We will encourage schools to share excellence by co-operating with other schools to expand innovative and successful learning approaches.

We will also celebrate excellence in teaching by expanding and better-supporting awards for top-performing teachers. We will provide an additional \$2 million a year for this initiative.

National will also support the current goal of reducing pupil-to-teacher ratios in new-entrant classes from 18:1 to 15:1, and we will maintain all budgeted funding for this initiative.

National will support excellence in teaching by:

- Reviewing teacher training.
- Encouraging schools to co-operate to expand successful teaching methods.
- Celebrating the success of top-performing teachers by expanding government support for awards by \$2 million a year.
- Reducing pupil-to-teacher ratios in new-entrant classes.

<sup>8</sup> Inquiry into making the schooling system work for every child (I.2A) (19 February 2008) (as reported by the Education and Science Committee).

## BOOSTING SPECIAL EDUCATION

As part of our Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy, National will bring renewed focus to the schooling of children with special education needs.

Under Labour, parents of children with special education needs have had their choices reduced by inadequate funding for frontline services and an ideological emphasis on mainstreaming. This is tough on families and it's tough on schools.

National will work hard to improve the resources and choices available to children with special education needs.

First, we will work to ensure more special education funding makes it into frontline services. Even Education Minister Chris Carter admits that the Special Education system is “fragmented, over-burdened by red tape and paperwork”, and that “not enough of the money earmarked for Special Education is actually getting to the school level and, more importantly, to the individual pupil with special needs.”<sup>9</sup>

Principals Federation President Paddy Ford has said that as much as 40% of Special Education resourcing is spent on bureaucracy and managing the system, rather than delivering services.<sup>10</sup>

Second, we will increase the amount of Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS) funding available for pupils with the highest special education needs. This will, in turn, relieve pressure on the funds available for children with more moderate special education needs.

Third, we will drop Labour's ideological emphasis on mainstreaming and work to support the choice of those families who wish to send their children to special schools. We will, over time, expand the options available to them by expanding

special schools and encouraging the development of more special school satellite classes.

National will:

- Work with interested groups to reduce the bureaucracy that drains resources from specialist care.
- Significantly increase ORRS funding by \$18 million a year for pupils with the highest special education needs.
- Support the choice of parents of pupils with special needs to send their children to special schools, by expanding special schools and encouraging the development of satellite classes developed by them. We will provide \$3 million a year in additional funding for this.

<sup>9</sup> Chris Carter, Speech to the Principals Federation Annual Conference on 5 July 2008 at Christchurch Town Hall. <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/speech+principals%e2%80%99+federation+annual+conference>

<sup>10</sup> Richard Thomson 'Radical Change possible for special ed' New Zealand Education Review, July 11 2008