

National Standards

Questions & Answers

Why does New Zealand need National Standards?

National Standards will give schools from Kaitia to Bluff a set of shared expectations about what pupils should be achieving as they move through primary school.

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.

What evidence is there that parents aren't getting good information about their child's progress?

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 community¹. In addition, 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 98% of pupils had positive comments about their achievement, effort and attitude².

How will this improve school reports?

This policy will ensure all parents receive information about how their child is doing compared to National Standards and national patterns of achievement.

At the moment, schools aren't required to report to parents on children's achievement relative to one nationally consistent set of standards.

¹ 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>

² Hattie, J., & Peddie, R. (2003). School reports: “Praising with faint damns”.

How does National Standards differ from the national curriculum?

National Standards will focus teachers on the bottom-line skills that every child should be mastering in reading, writing, and mathematics. The standards will be explicitly defined by benchmarks in tests. The curriculum is much broader.

How is this different from national testing?

We won't require schools to use one government-approved test. Instead, schools will choose from a range of tests and integrate those tests into their teaching.

How can you enforce National Standards across the country if you don't have one national test?

All schools will be required to choose tests that have been benchmarked against National Standards. Teachers will have clear guidelines about what children need to achieve in a test to reach the standard. They will be required to use tests to work out whether their pupils have reached the standard.

Isn't it already a government requirement to do testing?

Yes, but the guidelines aren't explicit about the kind of assessment schools should be doing. This means that, according to a recent report by ERO, many schools are not “collecting assessment information that made it easy to have reliable comparisons of achievement and progress over time and between teachers”³. The result is that, according to ERO, most primary schools are generally ineffective at using school-wide information to improve

³ See page 21 of ERO report “The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools”.

achievement⁴.

Unlike Labour, National will require schools to make assessment information available to parents.

Isn't it a bit tough to be testing children as young as five?

Schools are already required to assess progress from the day children start school, and they use dozens of different tests to do it. These tests are designed to suit the age of the children sitting them. For a list of some of the tests already being used by primary schools go to: http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/parents/at-school-primary_e.php

Can you give an example of the kind of assessment programme a school could use?

Yes. Glen Taylor School in Auckland, for example, uses an assessment programme that compares its pupils' progress with nationwide trends.

From Year 1-3 it sets targets based on results in PM reading tests, writing exemplars, and the NUMPA assessment. From Year 4-8 it uses the asTTle programme.

For example, in Year 4 reading, Glen Taylor knows the national norm in asTTle and they aim for their pupils to be achieving it by the end of Year 4.

What is asTTle?

Developed for the Ministry of Education by Professor John Hattie of Auckland University, asTTle stands for "Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning". It is a computer programme designed to help schools assess pupils' literacy and numeracy.

Teachers can use asTTle to create 40-minute paper-

and-pencil tests designed for individual students or groups of pupils. It is available free of charge to all schools and more than 95% of primary schools have a copy.

For more information about asTTle see: http://www.tki.org.nz/r/asttle/index_e.php.

What action will you take if children aren't meeting the standards?

The most important thing is that this policy will ensure we know who the struggling ones are. National will expect teachers, parents, and children themselves to take the main responsibility for working out what they need to do to meet the standard.

National will also expect school leaders to develop clear strategies for assisting children who aren't meeting the standards. In the worst cases, we'd expect the wider educational network, including the Ministry of Education and the local community, to step in.

Who will set National Standards, and how will you decide what counts as a pass and what doesn't?

That's where the education experts come in. The Minister of Education would take advice from a range of teachers, principals, and assessment experts to work out what level National Standards should be set at, and which tests would be approved.

Do any other countries have systems like this?

It is agreed all over the world that quality assessment underpins quality teaching and quality learning. It's also acknowledged that teachers who set clear achievement targets for their pupils get good results.

⁴ See page 31 of ERO report: "The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools". 45% were "partially effective with substantial weaknesses" and "12% were not effective".

Countries like the UK and the US have gone as far as to set universal national tests; we don't think that's necessary in New Zealand.

How is this policy different from National's 2005 election policy?

These ideas formed a large part of our education policy at the last election. We are bringing renewed emphasis to the policy of National Standards as a cornerstone of our education policy. We are being explicit about what this will mean for schools.

How much will the policy cost?

National believes the policy can be funded from existing budgets.