



2 November 2010
Right Hon Anne Tolley
Minister for Education
Parliament Freepost
Wellington

Dear Minister

Re: Board of Trustee concerns about National Standards

Titirangi Primary School Board of Trustees has, at its last three Board meetings, discussed concerns about the introduction of National Standards. The Board has resolved to raise their outcome of these discussions in writing.

We have faced concerns raised by our parents, teaching staff and school leadership around the introduction of Government's policy on National Standards and we believe we would be failing in our responsibility as a Board not to bring these concerns to your attention. We also believe we needed to take steps at a local level to ensure we continue to foster children's achievement as our primary goal.

We have sought as much information as possible on the subject including reading NZCER reports, material from the Ministry of Education, other publications and attending local meetings. These publications, papers and forums have only served to reinforce our concerns. Our first observation is that the apparent disconnect between the collective organisations that represent teachers and principals and Ministry/government has left a void of information for Boards and parents. It also appears to have generated an inability to address concerns in a positive manner.

Our concerns can be broadly categorised as follows:

Are the standards really national?

While potentially useful as a school-based standard, the rushed implementation and resultant lack of moderation at a local or national level undermines credibility in a 'national' standard. In the absence of moderation opportunities and processes there are grounds to doubt the reliability of the judgements and subsequent collated data on a national basis. This lack of appropriate moderation processes and time for moderation to occur are significant concerns.

Lack of clear and consistent connections between the standards and normed assessment tools

This concern follows on from the moderation issues above. Our teachers and leadership report that the initial promise of clearly mapped connections between the standards and widely used standardised assessment tools which would support judgements and offer some consistency across schools, has not been delivered. Available guidance on their use has been confusing and at times contradictory. Again this seems to lend to criticism that the standards are being introduced too quickly and without input from, and sufficient and high quality professional development and support for those who will use the standards.

High stakes judgements and labelling

We are concerned that high stakes judgments are being made about young children who are just starting their schooling and who come with very differing stages of development and readiness. Our concerns extend to the labelling within that judgement where a child could effectively be labelled a failure within months of first attending school at age five by not meeting or by being 'well below' the standard. Our school will not use the widely suggested terms "well below", 'below', 'at' and 'above' at this time and until the issue is considered further.

The potential use of data that we believe is fundamentally flawed

In other countries collated school 'achievement data' has become 'public domain' effectively setting league tables and comparisons. Whilst there has been no official decision to develop tables, the reality remains that it is almost inevitable they will occur; the tables and comparisons would be based on flawed data and, as such we are compelled to protect our school from such processes.

Strategic direction for the school

We are aware that the Secretary for Education has requested that our 2011 'Charter review' include setting achievement targets based on National Standards by February. We have decided at this time that we will defer setting achievement targets based on the standards until our concerns (as raised in this letter) are addressed or until such time as we are legally required to set achievement targets on what we believed to be a flawed system. We hope that by writing to you, it will be the former of these two options.

Our Board, as I am sure most do, supports aspiration in planning and reporting on our children's learning and preparedness to introduce the requirements of NAG 2a at Titirangi Primary School is well advanced. We are, however, concerned about the lack of opportunity available to voice our on-going concerns, listen to advice and discuss ways to ensure that the educational changes we are about to make will improve the way we provide education for our children.

We look forward to your reply

Yours sincerely

Mick Prior
Chairman
For Titirangi Primary School Board of Trustees

Cc. Right Hon John Key Prime Minister, Karen Sewell Secretary for Education, David Cunliffe MP for Titirangi,
Ms Charmaine Munroe: President, Waitakere Area Principals Association, Iain Taylor President APPA, NZSTA,