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NATIONAL STANDARDS NEED CLOSE SCRUTINY

Today's launch of new National Standards of literacy and numeracy means principals and teachers will finally get a look at what they're expected to work with from the beginning of next year, says the education sector union NZEI Te Riu Roa.

The Standards have been unveiled by the Prime Minister at a launch function in Auckland.

NZEI President Frances Nelson says it's problematic that schools' first real look at the Standards is so close to the end of the year, at what is always a very busy time.

"To date teachers and principals haven't been involved in the development and use of the Standards material. We need time now to study them closely and see how they're going to fit alongside everything else we do in terms of teaching and learning and getting the best results for students."

The Standards are also arriving at a time when schools are implementing the revised curriculum. It is a major piece of work and the key focus for schools in 2010. Ms Nelson says the challenge will be to keep that focus on the curriculum.

There is no doubt that National Standards are causing upheaval in the sector and stirring up debate. As a result NZEI will be hosting a forum in November for practitioners, assessment experts and researchers to look at the standards in the context of what schools aim to achieve for students. The main issue for the forum is to ensure a focus on improved student achievement across the broader school curriculum not just in literacy and numeracy.

"We have already seen the results of the government's agenda through its cuts to funding for professional advice and support services in other curriculum areas such as PE, art and science. It all adds up to teaching to a very narrow focus and ultimately narrowing educational opportunities for children," says Ms Nelson.

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