

# NATIONAL STANDARDS FAQs

## What are National Standards?

The Government plans to introduce national standards for primary sector (year 1-8) students next year as an annual process for all students at each year level. The aim is to standardise how teachers are measuring student achievement and progress and to introduce a format for reporting on that to parents that is easy to understand.

## Do we need them?

New Zealand primary school students are among the highest achieving in the OECD. However, we have one of the greatest disparities in achievement in the OECD between the 80% of children who do well and the 20% “long tail” of under-achieving children. This “tail” largely reflects the socio-economic inequities in New Zealand, and Maori and Pacific Island children are disproportionately represented in the “tail”.

Schools already use national assessment tools such as PAT or aSTLe and most schools have effective programmes for addressing under-achievement. “Rich” assessment focused on the individual child and their learning needs, assessment which allows a teacher to use their professional judgment and knowledge of the child, are core components of the way New Zealand primary schools currently operate. National standards will be helpful if they support and enhance these processes. They will not be helpful if they become the precursor to some form of pass or fail national test.

## What will they mean for our children?

If the national standards reflect current best assessment practice, they will outline what students should be achieving and when. They will focus on good teaching and assessment practice and give schools, teachers and parents clear benchmarks against which to measure rates of student progress.

## What about better reporting to parents – isn't that a good thing?

Yes, provided that the format doesn't become so simplified that it is no longer of any use. Ensuring that parents are fully informed about their child's learning progress should be the goal for all teachers and schools.

## What are the risks of national standards?

If standards lead to more simplistic assessment of children's learning there is a risk that teachers are coerced into “teaching to the test” – narrowing what they teach and focusing on simplistic measuring rather than rich assessment.

A second risk is the creation of league tables of schools if data from national standards is collated nationally. League tables don't help children learn better. They aren't “objective” - they don't necessarily show the effectiveness of the teaching and learning programmes – they are just as likely to reflect the socio-economic status of the school's intake.

League tables create a “blame and shame” culture that do nothing to boost children's achievement or increase effective teaching. They mean debate shifts from how well an individual child is learning and progressing, (which league tables cannot measure), to the ranking of schools. International research shows that league tables do not provide a fair picture of a school or how its students are achieving, and provide no context around what children can do. Often they are used to promote prejudice about the performance of students and schools in low decile communities.

The place to get true accountability is in the school's local community through clear reporting to parents, Boards of Trustees and other local groups.



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## What can I do?

- Talk to parents about the issues raised by national standards. Ask them what they think needs to be improved about current assessment and reporting. Explain how assessment works now and what risks school league tables would create.
- Attend the Ministry of Education's consultation meetings about standards – see [www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/Consultation/NationalStandards/ConsultationPackSector](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/Consultation/NationalStandards/ConsultationPackSector) for more information and make clear your objection to the creation of league tables. If there is no meeting scheduled in your area, tell the Ministry you want one. It has indicated that it will try to accommodate any such requests.
- Write to Prime Minister John Key urging him to ensure league tables are not permitted because of the harm they would do to quality teaching and learning.
- Find out more at [www.nationalstandards.org.nz](http://www.nationalstandards.org.nz)

