

What's happening to Primary Teachers?

The Bigger Picture

The Government is revealing more and more of its agenda for changing education in New Zealand and the picture is not always pretty. The change has already begun and there is very little evidence that teachers will be involved or given real opportunities to positively shape change. Therefore it is up to us to make sure we take action ourselves to influence change. This will take many different forms. Right now it means discussing bargaining and the direction we need to head in.

Devaluing the Professional Role of Teachers

The Government appears not to value the professional role of teachers. Not only were National Standards introduced without involving teachers in their development, but significant changes were introduced in this year's Budget that demonstrate the low value placed on teachers as professionals.

- Budget cuts for early childhood education reflect the Government's belief that not all teachers need to be qualified and registered.
- The Government will now allow schools to under-use their teacher staffing allocation so they can claim a cash refund at the end of each year. This effectively means trading a teacher for money to spend on other things and potentially puts further pressure on class sizes.
- The Government's Vision for the Profession paper see www.nzei.org.nz/vision includes a proposal that beginning teachers should be required to undertake post graduate study while completing their two years of teaching as provisionally registered teachers. This shows a lack of understanding of the workload involved in being an effective teacher, let alone the pressures around beginning teachers.
- The Government has put a stop to the Practice Based Attestation (PBA) roll-out despite the very successful and positively evaluated pilot completed in the Hawkes Bay. The PBA was a measurable way in which a teacher's skills and experience could be rewarded.

Measuring Teachers and Schools

The Government is looking for ways to measure teachers and schools in the belief that this will somehow improve student outcomes. National Standards were hastily introduced with very limited interaction with the profession. Their introduction was accompanied by rhetoric about identifying failing schools and ineffective teachers and allowing parents to compare schools.

Performance Pay

In June the Government released its Vision for the Profession paper. Among other things, it suggests that units and release time could be used as rewards. The Ministry of Education has made a claim that all units should be allocated on a fixed term basis. Instead of being used to support a secure career structure, this would allow units to be used for individual reward or, in other words, performance pay.

There are clear links between the National Standards, the Government's Vision for the Profession paper and the offer the Ministry has made in these negotiations. In promoting its National Standards the Government has continued to assign blame to teachers and principals for students who are not achieving in school. It continues to promote the idea that paying the "best" teachers more will solve this perceived problem and this view is reflected in its "Vision" paper. This is then translated into the claim for units to become effectively a subjectively determined performance pay mechanism.

NZEI has sent other material to members about both the National Standards and the "Vision" paper.

We encourage all members to take the time to put in a submission on the “Vision” discussion paper – these submissions are due in by 6th August and you can access a resource to assist with this at www.nzei.org.nz/vision.

We have also recently sent your worksite rep a “Warrant of Fitness” to use as a tool to determine your school’s readiness to implement National Standards and you are strongly encouraged to work with this with your principal. All of these materials are available online at www.nzei.org.nz