

**Research, Analysis and Insight into
National Standards
(RAINS) Project**

First Report
***Researching Schools' Enactments of New
Zealand's National Standards Policy***

Martin Thrupp & Ann Easter

February 2012

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**Report Commissioned by:
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(NZEI)**

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February 2012

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OVERVIEW OF THIS REPORT

1. This is the first report of the Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards (RAINS) project, one year into a three-year study of the introduction of National Standards into New Zealand primary and intermediate schools. (Section 1).
2. A range of conditions have lined up to create something of a ‘perfect storm’ for making National Standards the most debated development in New Zealand education for decades. The National Standards have become a highly politicised or ‘hot button’ issue. (Section 1.1).
3. There is not enough research being done on the National Standards and the Ministry of Education’s research is framed too narrowly. In these circumstances the RAINS project can make a significant contribution. (Section 1.1).
4. A key theme of the report is the distinction between implementation and enactment of policy in schools. Implementation tends to assume linear, generic and uncontested processes. Enactment focuses on how policy is translated and reinterpreted amidst the messy complexities and uncertainties of schools operating in diverse settings and against the background of other education policies and wider social and political contexts. (Section 1.2).
5. Another key theme is performativity, for instance the perverse effects of ‘impression management’. (Section 1.2).
6. The RAINS project and its analysis is informed by a range of other understandings from educational research and scholarship. (Section 1.3).
7. Justifications of the National Standards are of various kinds but generally problematic. Overt contestation of the policy by principals, teachers and others has been extensive and impressive from an international perspective and there are various reasons for this. Government responses are reviewed and the potential for covert contestation noted. (Section 2.1–2.2).
8. The best recent theories about how schools ‘do’ policy are reviewed. Key ideas in this ‘policy enactments’ literature include interpretation and translation (rather than implementation), those in schools as policy ‘actors’ as well as policy ‘subjects’, the complexity and incoherence of the policy process, schools’ contingencies and materialities, the micro-politics of school life, the different policy positions of those in schools, policy discourses and artefacts, to what extent National Standards is an imperative/disciplinary/readerly policy or a exhortative policy, intensification, performativity. (Section 2.3).
9. The Ministry of Education’s commissioned research on the National Standards being undertaken by Maths Technology Ltd (MTL) is discussed and critiqued. The MTL research demonstrates an instrumental and ‘politically sanitised’ approach to research. While it does useful work at some levels, it has not been designed to speak to the broad debate around the National Standards and leaves many questions unaddressed. (Section 2.4).
10. The research questions guiding the RAINS research are informed by policy enactments research as well as other literatures particularly those that focus on the impact of context and the effects of testing and target-setting in other countries. The RAINS research centres on case studies of six schools. These RAINS schools are diverse but intended to illuminate issues rather than be representative. The case studies draw on multiple data sources allowing rich descriptions of school contexts and processes. The report discusses the ethics and politics of the research and the research activities carried out during 2011. (Section 2.5–2.6).
11. Case studies of the six RAINS schools are provided. (Sections 3 and 4).
12. The following general conclusions can be drawn from the RAINS school case studies as far as they have been developed after one year:
 - Schools approaches to the National Standards are ‘intimately shaped and influenced by school-specific [contextual] factors’.
 - Changes around National Standards are typically incremental.

- While large and rapid culture shifts are unrealistic, more subtle changes are likely to become important over time.
 - It is clear that some effects of performativity are beginning to emerge.
 - Teachers and school leaders often prefer to think their practice is not being ‘directed’ by policy even if it might be.
 - The potential for continuing covert contestation of the National Standards appears high. (Section 5).
13. The case of Seagull School is so far seen to raise the following issues:
- How New Zealand primary schools may be relatively coherent.
 - How existing high quality processes in schools may be compromised by National Standards.
 - Schools using the National Standards categories for reporting even when staff have deep reservations about the effects of labelling.
 - Between-school comparability of judgements around the National Standards.
 - Existing tensions between curriculum ‘basics’ and ‘frills’ and the academic and social/pastoral purposes of schooling and how National Standards may exacerbate these.
 - Teacher workload and opportunity costs.
 - Resources and their use to support learning.
 - The responses of middle class parents to the National Standards. (Section 5).
14. The case of Kanuka School is so far seen to raise the following issues:
- How existing discourses/philosophical commitments—in this case to kaupapa Māori education and against ‘deficit theory’—may become lenses through which the National Standards become viewed in schools.
 - ‘Other’ reasons why schools might support the National Standards policy.
 - Low entry levels and the need for acceleration.
 - Cohort change, transience and the reporting of National Standards results.
 - Reporting practices: ignoring ‘well-below’ and using ‘below’/‘at’/‘above’ in other than National Standards subject areas.
 - The way National Standards interact with Ngā Whanaketanga in schools that offer both.
 - The teacher practices and experiences underlying the acceptance of the standards system in this challenging setting. Questions around staff buy in, collaboration, ‘short cuts’.
 - Child/parent perspectives in this kind of predominantly Māori and lower socio-economic setting. (Section 5).
15. The case of Juniper School is so far seen to raise the following issues:
- National Standards being enacted in a highly favourable staffing situation.
 - The pros and cons of a very small roll.
 - Where the impetus for ‘going with’ or contesting the National Standards comes from.
 - Pressure in small schools to meet the demands of particular families.
 - Artefacts that are ‘in development’.
 - Processes and relationships being damaged through rigid adherence to managerial directives.
 - Alternative policy approaches. (Section 5).
16. The case of Magenta School is so far seen to raise the following issues:
- Connections and tensions between the National Standards and the New Zealand Curriculum.
 - School leaders feeling increasingly directed by the National Standards policy.
 - ‘Rogue’ cohorts.
 - Concern about wider policy developments around schools. (Section 5).

17. The case of Cicada School is so far seen to raise the following issues:
- Being ‘civilly disobedient’—the reasons behind becoming a BTAC school, experiences with the Ministry over 2011, and the energies used.
 - The use of 78J letters by the Ministry.
 - The importance of local politics in supporting overt contestation of the National Standards.
 - That schools overtly contesting the National Standards may borrow National Standards concepts or use a variant of them.
 - The shifting situation around ELLs and special needs students.
 - NZEI supporting competence procedures.
 - The potential for the private sector to profit from the National Standards. (Section 5).
18. The case of Huia Intermediate is so far seen to raise the following issues:
- The particular features of intermediate schools (also middle schools, Year 7–13 schools and perhaps also area schools to some extent) that will often make responding to the National Standards more difficult than in contributing and full primary schools.
 - How some schools will be a long way from the standards system and how their school leaders will struggle to make ‘required’ step changes.
 - Whether National Standards will help provide better information about children who are transferring or transitioning schools.
 - Substantial changes to the curriculum as a response to the National Standards. (Section 5).
19. 2012 will be the interim year of the RAINS Project in which a range of matters will be explored before repeating, in 2013, the research activities already carried out. During 2012 we will
- Analyse teacher, child and parent interviews already carried out in each of the schools;
 - Try to interview more children considered ‘below’ or ‘well below’, and their parents;
 - Explore the issue of between-school comparability of judgements against the National Standards;
 - Continue investigating the way teachers and schools are enacting the National Standards, particularly those in the most challenging contexts;
 - Carry out more interviews with ERO reviewers; and
 - Focus particularly on Huia Intermediate while our cohort is still there. (Section 5).

GUIDE TO ACRONYMS

AP/DP	Assistant Principal/Deputy Principal
asTTle	Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning
BOT	Board of Trustees (also referred to as ‘Boards’)
BTAC	Boards Taking Action Coalition
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EHSAS	Extending High Standards Across Schools
ELL	English Language Learner
ELIP	English Language Intensive Programme
ELLP	English Language Learning Progressions
ERO	Education Review Office
ESOL	English Speakers of Other Languages
GATE	Gifted and Talented Education
GloSS	Global Strategy Stage (Numeracy Project assessment tool)
IKAN	Individual Knowledge Assessment for Numeracy
LPDP	Literacy Professional Development Programme
LSM	Limited Statutory Manager
MoE	Ministry of Education (also referred to as ‘the Ministry’)
MTL	Maths Technology Ltd
NumPA	Numeracy Project Assessment
NZC	New Zealand Curriculum
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
NZEI	New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa
NZPA	New Zealand Press Association
NZPF	New Zealand Principals Federation
NSSAG	National Standards Sector Advisory Group
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ORS	Ongoing Resourcing Scheme ¹
OTJ	Overall Teacher Judgement
PAT	Progressive Achievement Test
PD	Professional Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLD	Professional Learning and Development
PRG	Practitioners’ Reporting Group
PRT	Provisionally Registered Teacher
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
QPEC	Quality Public Education Coalition

¹ Previously known as the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Scheme (ORRS)

RAINS	Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards
RFP	Request for Proposal
RTLB	Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour
RTLit	Resource Teacher: Literacy
SAP	Student Achievement Practitioner ²
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SELLIPS	Supporting English Language Learning in Primary Schools
SLS	Supplementary Learning Support
SMS	Student management system
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
STA	School Trustees Association
STAR	Supplementary Test of Achievement in Reading
TFEA	Targeted Funding for Educational Achievement
TKI	Te Kete Ipurangi (the Ministry's portal website)

² Initially known as Student Achievement Function Practitioner (SAFP)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION: GETTING BEYOND ‘IMPLEMENTATION’

This is the first report of the Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards (RAINS) Project, a New Zealand educational research project that started in November 2010 and will run for three years. The project is investigating the introduction of National Standards into New Zealand primary and intermediate schools.³ The National Standards, a system of assessment in literacy and numeracy, were announced in April 2007, launched in October 2009 and are gradually becoming more and more required of schools. In 2011, while the research discussed here was being undertaken, schools were required to include a target against the National Standards in their annual charters. By the end of May 2012, the New Zealand Ministry of Education (‘the Ministry’) will be requiring annual reports from schools that include, for the first time, school-level data against targets set for National Standards achievement.

1.1 RESEARCH ON A HIGHLY POLITICISED ISSUE

A range of conditions have lined up to create something of a ‘perfect storm’ for making National Standards the most debated development in New Zealand education for decades. These include

- ‘standards’ having considerable ideological appeal and electoral appeal as well;
- a government hanging its hat on a single reform: National Standards were the National Party’s ‘big idea’ for the school sector coming into the 2008 election;
- National Standards apparently being little more than a slogan before the 2008 election leaving the Ministry scrambling to respond;
- the range of academic voices that would normally debate the National Standards being muffled by developments in the universities;
- Māori Party politicians being silenced by their coalition with the National Party;
- the Ministry being unprepared for opposition to the policy due to the more consensual education politics of the last decade;
- a primary school sector proud of its progressive traditions;
- two decades of experience of high stakes education systems in other countries;
- some outspoken critics in a country small enough to notice;
- the particular problems of the policy itself;
- a national and educational culture of people expecting to be heard;
- united leadership within teacher unions and professional associations that represent a very high proportion of primary teachers and school leaders;
- a Minister of Education from 2008-2011 whose approach to the portfolio both attracted criticism and absorbed it;
- the Ministry probably being the most directive it has ever been with schools (around National Standards targets in school charters);
- less than searching media coverage, reflecting wider issues around the quality of the New Zealand news media;
- the culture built up by two decades of self-managing schools; and
- the growing role of the internet and social media.

Many of these elements of the National Standards debate are discussed further in this report. They have led the National Standards to become a highly politicised or ‘hot button’ issue where opinions have been offered freely, opposing perspectives have been stereotyped and caricatured, and arguments

³ In fact, almost all types of state and integrated schools covering the primary years from reception at Year 0/1 through to the end of Year 8. Many New Zealand primary schools are ‘contributing’ schools, taking children to the end of Year 6 (aged 10 or 11) with children then going to intermediate schools for Years 7 and 8. ‘Full’ primary schools cover all the primary years. New Zealand also has some secondary schools that include Years 7 and 8 and also area schools that cater for all the primary and secondary years. Integrated schools are mainly Catholic schools or other schools with special character that are substantially government-funded.

have sometimes become too personal. Yet the heat and noise of the debate over National Standards has also served to distract from the inability of New Zealanders (or international observers) to become more informed about the impact of the National Standards should they want to. In New Zealand, it is the Ministry that funds most educational research and might be expected to be arranging high calibre research into the Standards. Indeed there has been research commissioned by the Ministry: the School Sample Monitoring and Evaluation Project. Two reports from this project have been released so far (Maths Technology Ltd, 2010; Thomas & Ward, 2011) but they have hardly featured in the debate over National Standards. One reason for this is likely to be that this research has been framed too narrowly to offer much to the debate.

In these circumstances, the RAINS project is able to make an important contribution and it is fortunate that the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) has decided to fund the research. Contrary to early scepticism in some quarters, the NZEI has wanted high calibre research and this has been our concern too. The RAINS project draws on an important body of recent research and theory about how schools ‘do’ policy and seeks to connect the lessons from this to the cases of six diverse New Zealand schools. The RAINS research avoids the burdensome representative sample the Ministry’s research framework has required of its commissioned research, opting instead for the capacity to provide rich insights into what is actually going on in schools. This first annual report sets the scene for the overall study and provides some early findings. It gives a flavour of the kind of case study research RAINS offers, reflects on—rather than ignores—the impact of the political context of the research, and indicates the questions to be explored further over the remainder of the project.

In this report, we sometimes replace ‘National Standards’ with the ‘New Zealand standards system’ or just ‘the standards system’. Mentioning New Zealand now and again is intended to remind the reader that this country’s version of national standards is rather idiosyncratic compared to the rest of the world: this is agreed by critics and proponents alike. Referring to the ‘standards system’ (lower case) is an attempt to get behind the label of National Standards and the grand narrative it has quickly come to represent in New Zealand education. ‘Standards’, especially ‘National’ ones, have broad appeal, politically and ideologically. While we recognise the importance of this on one level, the ‘standards system’ helps remind us that the policy also involves a specific set of directives and approaches that people in schools are grappling with. It is much the same with the recent post-election announcement that New Zealand is to trial ‘Charter Schools’. These have such a history that the announcement means everything and nothing: the details of the policy will be crucial to consider and the way it works out in practice even more so.

1.2 IMPLEMENTATION AND ENACTMENT

The concern to take a view of policy that is as ‘true to life’ as possible introduces a key theme of this report: the distinction between implementation and enactment. The present New Zealand Government led by John Key, as well as its agencies and others, tends to see the introduction of the National Standards as a problem in policy ‘implementation’. Often this is stated explicitly, as in the then Minister of Education, Anne Tolley, announcing a “timeline for implementing National Standards” (Tolley, 2009a), the Ministry of Education stressing “particular expectations of school leaders in the implementation of National Standards” (Ministry of Education, 2012), Learning Media providing “support to effectively implement the National Standards” (Learning Media, 2012), or the Education Review Office (ERO) report[ing] “progress on the implementation ... of the National Standards in each school” (ERO, 2011). The National Standards Sector Advisory Group (NSSAG) is intended to “contribute to the continuous improvement of the National Standards implementation” (NSSAG, 2010a). The recent electioneering of John Key and Anne Tolley was also full of references to ‘implementation’.

While implementation-speak is the Government’s main discourse for talking about the National Standards, it tends to assume linear, generic and uncontested processes. Too often, it implies that politicians and policy makers decide on policies and those in schools will simply do as they are told and put the intended policy into practice, regardless of circumstances. Sometimes it can be patently unrealistic. For instance, by November 2011 Anne Tolley’s biography on her Ministerial website was telling the reader that ‘[s]he has implemented the ... National Standards’ (National Party, 2011). This was wishful thinking, even in the Government’s own terms, when the Ministry is only partially

through its intended ‘roll out’ of the standards system. The limitations of the implementation perspective have also been highlighted to some extent by recent public management literature. This recognises ‘complex implementation’ situations and seeks to “augment simple and linear models of the policy process with explicit practices based on an iterative experimental-learning process” (Eppel, Turner, & Wolf, 2011, p. 3).

Nevertheless, other researchers reject the language of ‘implementation’ altogether. For Ball and colleagues, ‘implementation’ represents “a travesty of the policy process and a massive interpretational failure by researchers and policy-makers” (Ball, Hoskins, Maguire, & Braun, 2011, p. 12). Their recent work in secondary schools in England is of central interest here because it probably represents the best conceptualisation of how schools ‘do policy’ to be found worldwide at the present time (Ball, Maguire, Braun, & Hoskins, 2011a, 2011b; Braun, Ball, & Maguire, 2011; Braun, Ball, Maguire, & Hoskins, 2011; Maguire, Hoskins, Ball, & Braun, 2011; see also Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Essentially, Ball and colleagues focus on how policy is translated and reinterpreted by individuals and groups in different ways and to varying extents amidst the messy complexities and uncertainties of schools operating in diverse settings and against the background of other education policies and wider social and political contexts.

Policy *enactment* is the term used for this type of understanding of what goes on in schools. The key implication of an enactment perspective on the New Zealand standards system would be the *expectation* that there will be diverse responses to the policy in schools that relate to history, culture and context, as well as the agency (or ability to act on the world) of individuals and groups. From this viewpoint, the government’s implementation discourse around the standards system will be far too sanitised and instrumental and it would be naïve to see it realistically capturing much of what is actually going on in and around schools. For instance, policymakers might be satisfied that principals had attended some particular training seminar on the National Standards. But, in fact, if most were disengaged, only attending under sufferance or spending most of the seminar covertly doing other work on their laptops, this is not the same thing.

An important part of thinking about the enactment of an assessment policy such as the New Zealand National Standards will be to consider how schools and the individuals within them are caught up in *performativity*. As Ball (2003b, p. 216) describes it, performativity:

... employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change—based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’ or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement.

The New Zealand standards system is also going to involve new judgements, comparisons and displays. It will require new performances by students, teachers, school leaders and boards as complex social processes are translated into those simple categories of ‘well below’, ‘below’, ‘at’ and ‘above’ standard and reported at different levels within and beyond the school. These changes need to be researched and understood. The above quote brings to mind the perverse effects of ‘impression management’ but performativity also needs to be understood in terms of what new subjectivities are being brought about; in other words, how the standards system may be changing what it actually means to be a pupil, a teacher, a principal or board member.

The likely performative effects of the New Zealand standards system were raised in the early days of the debate when the case of Paul Heffernan hit the headlines. Heffernan was a primary principal who had been blogging in a forum on a Ministry of Education website for education leaders after it had been taken over by principals as a space to express their concerns about the standards system. He wrote a tongue-in-cheek account of how he would play to win under National Standards:

Awesome, awesome, awesome – by crickey we are going to teach to the easiest test we can find. We are going to reteach and reteach baby. We will even fudge the results big time. My school is going to be top school on the league table so that my community will know I run a brilliant school – an outstanding principal – parents will flock to my door. To hell with anything creative. Hmmm, i will have to toss out Inquiry Learning as well

as i will not have any time – its all literacy and numeracy test preparation time now.
Hmmm, perhaps i need a further run through/practice of the test... (Weatherill, 2009)⁴

A *Dominion Post* editorial did not see the funny side, asking ‘Why has this public servant still got a job?’ (“Listen and Learn, Teachers”, 2009). Yet Heffernan’s comments are quite likely to represent something of a ‘true word spoken in jest’. Certainly it would be surprising, particularly if National Standards achievement data becomes public, if New Zealand boards, principals and teachers did not seek out ‘well-meaning deviations’ from more authentic previous practice (‘advantageous’ assessments, ‘advantageous’ ways of using or reporting them, ‘advantageous’ curricula shifts) if they want their schools or particular children within them to achieve more success in relation to National Standards. Moreover, it is entirely plausible that blatant fabrication will be happening in some schools. A teacher in one of the RAINS schools gave an example of this happening in her previous school:

It was getting to the end of the [2010] year and in my senior syndicate, your outstanding kids going on to intermediate weren’t working ‘above’, they were working ‘at’. The decision was made that those kids were the brightest in the school and they needed to be ‘above’, the parents would be expecting them to work ‘above’ but the data didn’t show that and so it was changed in their reporting. The decision was made by the management and a couple of teachers said ‘no’ but the data can always be changed. I don’t know if it was every class but definitely three out of four. Some teachers weren’t in permanent positions so they just did what they were told and it was also around interviewing time [i.e., interviewing teachers for permanent positions]. It was the principal reading the reports and going ‘hang on, no, this kid is outstanding and this doesn’t shine enough.’ ... And then [the principal] stands up at assembly and says ‘90% of our children are at or above the standard’ and I’m thinking ‘half my class is below’ and so the staff are sitting there and thinking ‘this is a load of rubbish’.

From the implementation viewpoint, the above approach to the National Standards would only be seen as an ‘unprofessional’ aberration from the norm, rather than one of a range of predictable responses to the incentives being set up for schools by such an assessment system. In as much as the Key Government is unwilling to recognise the ‘games’ that are likely to be played by schools because of the kinds of performative power relations put in place by the standards system, its agencies will have no more ability to be searching about schools’ responses to the standards system than the po-faced editorial already noted. It offers little to anyone who really wants to understand how National Standards are going to shape our schools.

Like the Key Government’s approach more generally, the School Sample Monitoring and Evaluation Project also supports rather than challenges an implementation perspective. This research on the National Standards is being undertaken for the Ministry by Maths Technology Ltd. (MTL) and, in part, the problem is that its large scale methodologies limit what it can look at. There are layers of beliefs, understandings and actions in schools that will never be uncovered through online surveys. More significant though are the types of research concerns being investigated as these are highly constrained. This means the reports are full of assumptions and silences, some of which are very obvious. While the MTL research may satisfy the implementation purposes for which it was commissioned, it is too narrow and ‘on message’ to have much to offer a wider audience as a research account of the National Standards.

In contrast, we maintain that if policy is ‘enacted’ rather than just implemented, and if performativity is likely to be a important issue, then insights about schools’ responses to the New Zealand standards system won’t be gathered without being ‘hands on’ and getting into schools to probe beyond the obvious. This first report therefore illustrates an alternative approach to researching the ‘impact’ of the National Standards. It requires properly considering the influences of schools’ diverse contexts on their day to day processes, opening up questions beyond those intended to inform the ‘rolling out’ of the policy, recognising the multiple issues and outlooks that could be involved and being positioned as a researcher in such a way as to—as much as possible—get behind each school’s performance, as well as being the recipient of it.

⁴ For some unknown reason this post is now attributed to M. Weatherill in the Educational Leaders forum.

1.3 FURTHER STARTING POINTS

The RAINS project and its analysis is informed by a range of other understandings based on educational research and scholarship. Some worth mentioning at the outset (we will refer back to them in this and other reports on occasion) include:

1. The understanding there is a *considerable history of debate over standards* in reading, writing and mathematics in primary schools in New Zealand and elsewhere and that the trajectory of these debates have been coloured by the social, economic and political features of their times (Alexander, 2009; Openshaw & Walshaw, 2010; Lee, 2010).
2. The understanding that over the last fifty years New Zealand primary teachers have been acculturated into a *distinctive and internationally-admired professional culture in primary schools* and that many aspects of this learner-centred culture with its broad and progressive approach to curricula, pedagogy and assessment continue today (Middleton & May, 1997; Locke, Vulliamy, Webb, & Hill, 2005; McGee & Fraser, 2011).
3. The understanding that the taught curriculum in New Zealand primary schools had nevertheless *already shifted towards a more explicit emphasis on literacy and numeracy teaching and assessment* under the Clark Government 1999-2008. Indeed, this trend started under National Governments in the 1990s. Relevant policies, assessment tools and teacher professional learning and development (PLD) have revolved around the National Literacy Strategy (Ministry of Education, 1999), the Curriculum Stocktake (Ministry of Education, 2002), the Numeracy Development Projects, AsTTle, national exemplars, and the Literacy Learning Progressions. By 2005, the Education Review Office (ERO) noted that there was “... considerable emphasis on raising student literacy and reading achievement in primary schools through national initiatives such as the Literacy strategy. Many schools had strengthened the quality of classroom and teaching resources to support this focus” (ERO, 2005, p. 63). The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), despite in many ways continuing the tradition of a broad curriculum, points to a “focus on literacy and numeracy” and this continuing to require “focused teaching” (p. 41).
4. The understanding that *family background—social class or socio-economic status (SES) in combination with ethnicity and family structure—has a powerful influence on school achievement* (Berliner, 2009; Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003; Lareau, 1989; Nash, 1993; Snook & O’Neill, 2010; Wylie, Hodgen, Hipkins, & Vaughan, 2006). Analysis of the 2009 results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which includes data from New Zealand schools, found that “[a]lthough poor performance in school does not automatically follow from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, the socio-economic background of students ... does appear to have a powerful influence on performance” (OECD, 2010, p. 13).
5. The understanding that over and above individual family backgrounds, the *SES characteristics of school intakes are also likely to impact on school processes and student achievement*. (Gewirtz, 1998; Lauder, Kounali, Robinson, & Goldstein, 2010; Metz, 1990; Mills & Gale, 2009; Thrupp, 1999; Thrupp, Lauder, & Robinson, 2002). The PISA results also suggest that, “regardless of their own socio-economic background, students attending schools with a socio-economically advantaged intake tend to perform better than those attending schools with more disadvantaged peers” (OECD, 2010, p. 13).
6. The understanding that *many other elements of school context also impact on processes and achievement*. These include other intake differences (such as ethnicity, turbulence, the proportion of pupils from refugee families or with special needs) and other school and area characteristics (urban/rural location, local education policies, market position compared to surrounding schools). There are also internal contexts, such as past leadership or reputational issues, significant staffing changes due to personal circumstances or schools being damaged

by fire or flood. These internal factors are more context than agency in the sense that they can weigh heavily on schools but there is little that schools can do about them (Carrasco-Rozas, 2010; Lupton, 2004; Thrupp & Lupton, 2011a, 2011b).

7. The understanding that it is *difficult for practitioners, policymakers or researchers to properly take account of school contexts in a way that allows schools to be compared with each other* (Goldstein & Leckie, 2008; Lauder, Kounali, Robinson, & Goldstein, 2010). While there may be enough commonality in the practices adopted in schools with clusters of common contextual characteristics to provide guides to good practice, the proxies used for school context in value-added analyses are not robust enough to allow judgements about performance. Moreover, many attempts at comparing school performance do not even try to use the best statistical methodologies. The increasing use of decile-based approaches to comparing school performance is the most obvious New Zealand instance of ‘a little knowledge being a dangerous thing’ (Thrupp & Alcorn, 2011).
8. The understanding that *high stakes approaches to assessment in other countries, such as England and the USA, have led to a range of negative impacts on teaching and curricula*. These include: ‘teaching to the test’ and narrowing of the curriculum (Alexander, 2009; Hursh, 2008; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Stobart, 2008); an increasingly instrumental conception of teacher professionalism (Ball, 2003b); valuing of some students over others because of their ability to perform (‘commodification’ of students) (Bagley, Woods, & Glatter, 2001); prioritising the teaching of some students over others (‘educational triage’) (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000); and damaging effects on students’ conceptions of themselves as learners (‘I’ll be a nothing’) (Reay & William, 1999). Many of these are related to the effects of performativity which, as already mentioned, pushes schools and teachers towards impression management, for instance, fabricating evidence to meet requirements (Ball, 2001). A New Zealand example is the way teachers began to internalise a new set of values and practices when Education Review Office reviews started in the 1990s. Practices that could demonstrate ‘value-added’ for ERO, even if elaborate and of dubious value, began to be adopted by New Zealand teachers (Robertson, Dale, Thrupp, Vaughan, & Jacka, 1997).
9. The understanding that *a system like the National Standards will affect children’s motivation in particular ways*. Fraser (2010) cautions that extrinsic target goals of the kind created by the National Standards can easily lead to inferences of low ability (Meyer, 1992), over justifying of performance (Kohn, 1999), encourage performance and ability at the expense of attitude and effort (Mueller & Dweck, 1998), cause the perceived locus of control to shift from internal to external (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001) and encourage invidious social comparison (Kohn, 1999; Dweck, 2006).
10. The understanding that *parental decision-making around schooling is not just about school and teacher quality but reflects SES and other contextual factors*. This is because it is often dominated by concern about social mobility and the advantages that come with getting one’s child into a socially elite school setting (Ball, 2003a, 2006; Lauder et al., 1999). Because high SES schooling is a positional good (Marginson, 1997), such schools are nearly always more popular than low SES schools, almost regardless of how well schools actually go about the task of helping students to learn.
11. The understanding that it is *very difficult to sustainably improve schools and student achievement in disadvantaged areas*. While the media offers accounts of heroic teachers and principals winning against the odds, school improvement researchers are more circumspect (Gray, 2001). Achievement levels often turn out to be improved but still low. Impoverished suburbs turn out to be gentrifying in a way that has brought a different school intake. Around the globe it remains the case that ‘schools cannot compensate for society’ (Bernstein, 1970) so that even good education policies tend to achieve ‘small victories’ rather than large ones (Anyon, 1997). Moreover, even though some teachers and principals do achieve the extraordinary, this may not be useful in policy terms. Mortimore and Whitty (1997, p. 9) suggest that “whilst some schools can succeed against the odds, the possibility of them all doing so, year in and year out, still appears remote given ... the long-term patterning of educational inequality”. To Berliner (2009, p. 6), “[i]t is poor policy indeed that erects huge

barriers to the success of millions of students, cherry-picks and praises a few schools that appear to clear these barriers, and then blames the other schools for their failure to do so”.

12. The understanding that *despite all the researched factors already noted, some governments want to put responsibility for student achievement squarely on teachers and schools*. This is what the first author has called the ‘politics of blame’ (Thrupp, 1998, 2009; see also O’Neill, 2009). Commentators and researchers can contribute to the politics of blame when they neglect context and overemphasise the ability of schools/teachers to make a difference or make too much of ‘deficit thinking’ amongst teachers/in schools, as if the impact of poverty and racism on the lives of their students outside of school should be ignored.
13. The understanding that *it will be a combination of international policy borrowing and local conditions that influences the nature of the standards agenda and the politics around it in any country* (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). As Stobart (2008, p. 24) points out, “it is hard to find a country that is not using the rhetoric of needing assessment to raise standards in response to the challenges of globalization” while for Lingard (2010, p. 131) “the evaluation message system (manifest as high-stakes national census testing) has taken the upper hand in many schooling systems around the world.” But Lingard (ibid) also cautions that we need to “recognise that national and provincial uptakes of this discourse always occur in vernacular ways mediated by local histories, politics and cultures.”
14. The understanding that a key ‘vernacular’ feature of the New Zealand standards context is the way *Māori perspectives can chime with the politics of blame*. This occurs when Māori academics, politicians and commentators recast teachers’ valid recognition of the impact of poverty and socio-economic constraints on Māori students as ‘deficit theorising’ (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003; Bishop, 2005; Flavell, 2007; Tamihere, 2008). We are concerned that this argument often implies that teachers are solely accountable for student achievement (Thrupp, 2010a). We accept that teachers—like the rest of society—can hold monocultural and racist perspectives and we see value in culturally responsive pedagogies. Nevertheless, we think New Zealand teachers hold more complex and contradictory beliefs about how and how much they can make a difference to student achievement than are captured in the ‘deficit theorising’ argument (Gutschlag, 2007; Thrupp, Mansell, Hawksworth, & Harold, 2003).
15. The understanding that there is a *considerable history of teachers, principals and others opposing education reform for principled reasons* in many countries and that this contestation takes many forms from the public and overt to much more covert activity depending on the social and political context within which contestation occurs (Bottery, 2007; Frankel, 2011; Sachs, 2003; Weiner & Compton, 2008). It should be noted that we use the notion of ‘contestation’ rather than ‘resistance’ in this report so as to include its more subtle forms and because ‘resistance’, like ‘subversive’ or ‘activist’, often carries the implication of taking up a self-consciously radical stance. In contrast, we argue that working against potentially damaging reforms should be regarded as the legitimate work of good educators, part of their ‘extended professionalism’ (Thrupp, 2005, 2011).
16. The understanding that apart from the RAINS project and the MTL research there has been *other research offering perspectives on the National Standards*. Research we are aware of that offers broad perspectives includes: Schagen and Hipkins (2008), Wylie and Hodgen (2010), Cameron (2010) and Hipkins et al., (2011). There is also research intended to develop or evaluate particular elements of the New Zealand standards system, for instance, the work on aligning the Progressive Achievement Test (PAT) Mathematics to the National Standards (NZCER, 2012).

1.4 THE REST OF THIS REPORT

Section 2 provides further background to the RAINS research. We begin by introducing the National Standards policy but do not try to provide much commentary on its features in advance of Section 5, which draws on the RAINS case studies to exemplify many of the issues. Instead, we consider the justifications for the policy, the nature and extent of opposition to it, the response of government and

media to that opposition and the likely further responses of schools. Some of the main features of the policy enactments work of Ball and colleagues are explained; with an emphasis on the conceptual resources it offers the RAINS research. This discussion also highlights the limited scope and conceptualisation of the Ministry's research undertaken by MTL, critiqued in section 2.4. Finally, Section 2 turns to the research design and features of the of the RAINS research, including the ethics and politics of the research (section 2.5), and the specific research activities undertaken during the first year of research (section 2.6).

Sections 3 and 4 provide case studies of each of the RAINS schools. A key overall theme is that the contextual features of each school powerfully influences how the New Zealand standards system is being enacted there. At the same time, the cases open up many other points about the standards system. Section 3 is about Seagull School, the most advantaged school in the study in terms of its intake and organisation readiness to introduce the National Standards. This case study is in more depth than those that follow and illustrates how research at more than one level within a school can provide a more thorough and complex picture. We begin by describing the school's context, leadership, governance and staffing and the way that curriculum and assessment were being dealt with leading up to the introduction of the National Standards. The following sections reflect the idea that schools have a public face around the National Standards but that there are likely to be layers of important understandings to be uncovered behind this. Hence, we discuss the overt responses of the RAINS schools to the standards system and then the 'behind the scenes' perspectives of senior leaders and board and then provide a sense of the range of views on staff as well.

Section 4 introduces the other five schools in the study: 'Kanuka', 'Juniper', 'Magenta', 'Cicada' Schools and 'Huia' Intermediate. In terms of the perspectives illuminated, these five case studies only go as far as some members of the senior leadership team but they again provide the context to illustrate that the particular contextual features of each school are crucial for the way the standards system gets enacted there. Each case also introduces some new issues as well as repeating familiar themes.

Section 5 draws together and discusses the main points of the case studies, both collectively and individually. It also indicates a range of matters for further investigation.

For those who don't have time to read pages of case study material, going direct to Section 5 will provide some discussion. Nevertheless we make no apology for including accounts of the schools and putting them in the heart of the report rather than as appendices. For those readers with the time and interest, the case studies provide a rare amplification of the voices of those in schools and the school contexts they deal with on a daily basis. Making that detail available also allows readers to see for themselves where our emerging arguments are coming from. The case studies have all been strengthened through review by principals and others in each school and we are grateful for their involvement.

We have had several audiences in mind when writing this report. We trust that it will help to open up a different view of the National Standards to the New Zealand public than has been available through policy documents and through the media. We particularly hope the case studies as far as we have got will resonate with some principals, board members and teachers (the views of parents, children and ERO reviewers will also be reported in later reports). There are clear messages for policymakers about thinking beyond 'implementation' in terms of what the National Standards policy has introduced into schools. We hope other New Zealand educational researchers will be interested in various aspects of what we have to say here. Finally, we have also written with an international audience in mind: our international reference group in the first instance. We hope our explanation of local features will generally suffice.

2.0 BACKGROUNDS

2.1 THE NATIONAL STANDARDS POLICY AND ITS JUSTIFICATIONS

New Zealand's National Standards involve schools making and reporting judgements about the reading, writing and mathematics achievement of children up to Year 8 (the end of primary school). These judgements are made against a four-point scale (above, at, below, or well below the standard) and are made after one, two or three years at school in the junior school and then at each year level from Years 4-8 (that is *by the end* of Year 4, Year 5, etc.). The policy matches up existing curriculum levels and assessment stages and progressions with the National Standards and so, in practice, teachers are supposed to consider students' achievement against what is required for those levels, progressions and stages and use that understanding for then making overall teacher judgements (OTJs) about achievement against the National Standards. OTJs are intended to be 'on-balance' judgements made by using various indications of a child's level of achievement, such as teachers' knowledge of each child from daily interactions, exemplars (examples of the quality of work required to meet each standard) and assessment tools, tasks and activities (Chamberlain, 2010). The National Standards policy also requires schools to report to parents about a child's achievement against the National Standards twice a year in writing. Schools do not need to use the wording of the four-point scale in this reporting but they are expected to report against the scale when they report annually to the Ministry about student achievement levels in the school.

The National Standards policy was announced by then Opposition leader John Key in April 2007. In the decade before that, the National Party proposed to introduce national testing in 1997, 1999 and 2005 and Labour also toyed briefly with the idea of national testing in 1997 (Lee, 2010). The shift from national testing to a national standards approach was probably in anticipation of greater electoral appeal and less opposition from the school sector. Advice from then University of Auckland academic, Professor John Hattie, as discussed later, may have also helped to instigate the change of direction. Nevertheless, this is likely to have been only one influence: the international and national pressures towards this particular standards system at this particular time deserve further analysis (Lingard, 2010; Openshaw & Walshaw, 2010).

After the Key Government was elected in November 2008, the Education (National Standards) Amendment Bill was passed under urgency almost immediately (13 December 2008). In 2009 there was a rather token consultation and the National Standards policy was launched in October 2009 (see also Thrupp, 2010b for discussion of developments in 2009). During 2010, senior leaders in schools received some training in the National Standards and during 2011, while the research discussed here was underway, Boards were being required to include a National Standards related target for the first time in the annual charter each school sends to the Ministry.

Much detail about how the New Zealand standards system is intended to work and be progressively 'rolled out' can be found on Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI), the Ministry's portal website, and in its publications (see <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/National-Standards> for a sense of the edifice that is developing around the standards systems). Remarkably, following a change of guidance in late 2011, there are no longer any exceptions for particular populations. All children in Years 0-8 in state and integrated schools and who are learning against the New Zealand Curriculum must be included in schools' reports of school-level National Standards data to the Ministry and in schools' reporting to parents against the National Standards (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 16). This includes all English language learners (children with English as a second language) even if they have very little English⁵ and all children with special educational needs, even if they have needs which are serious and complex enough to be funded through the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) or receive Supplementary Learning Support (SLS) and are likely to learn long term within Level 1 of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2011, p.16). It is only children in Māori-medium settings using Te Marautanga o Aotearoa (Ministry of Education, 2008) that are exempt from the National Standards because they are subject to an alternative set of standards, Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori. Many schools will use both the New Zealand Curriculum and related National Standards and Te Marautanga

⁵ Schools are also advised to assess their progress and achievement and report to parents and children against the English Language Learning Progressions (ELLPs).

o Aotearoa and related Ngā Whanaketanga for different cohorts of children, but any individual child will only use one or the other.

The rationale for the policy

The main justifications used by the Key Government, the Ministry and other proponents of National Standards include: the government's electoral mandate and polling on National Standards; what could only be described as aspirational justifications (those that are untested assertions); academic arguments; and justifications based on evidence from ERO. These are each discussed below.

The National Government has claimed a mandate to bring in National Standards because they were a key feature of its manifesto prior to being elected in 2008. There have also been various surveys that have been cited in support of National Standards (e.g., Tolley 2010a). There are various problems with these claims, including whether being elected ever represents a mandate for any *particular* policy and whether the public have been in a position to understand National Standards beyond the idea of schools having standards, which has almost universal appeal. There was little information available about the standards system until well after the election and plenty of subsequent evidence from opinion polls and blogs (and indeed from the parents interviewed for the present study) that most of the public have not been in a good position to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the policy (e.g., Davidson, 2010; Binning, 2010).

The main *aspirational* justification is that the New Zealand standards system is needed to address the problem of the claimed 'one in five' mainly Māori and Pasifika students who leave schools unable to read, write, or do maths at the level deemed necessary to be successful. This point was used almost mantra-like by Tolley during the Key Government's first term but, of course, draws most of its power from being seen to be concerned about these students (actually more like one in ten and much more complicated⁶), rather than supporting the idea that National Standards can fix the problem. The problem is that the failure of some students is likely to be largely a socio-economic issue because of the way the long tail of underachievement mirrors the long tail of poverty in our society. We are back to the issues of family background, school composition, the difficulties of school reform and indeed—at least implicitly—the politics of blame as discussed in Section 1.3 (numbers 4, 5, 6, 11, 12 and 14).

There have also been a number of claims that the policy will not have negative impacts but these are untested assertions, at least for the time being. The broadest of these is the claim that National Standards are (another) example of New Zealand being innovative enough to avoid the problems that many other countries have experienced:

In doing this New Zealand has taken a different approach to the rest of the world. We have used our national curriculum to determine the standard of achievement that needs to be reached at the end of each year. Other countries' approach to standards has been to set them in relation to how students have actually performed on national tests. This approach could lead to narrowing the curriculum, and mediocre outcomes. Our approach has been bolder, to look to the future, and to determine what our students need to know in order for them to succeed. It's not just about where we are today – but where we can be in the future. (Chamberlain, 2010)

Of course, it remains to be seen whether the New Zealand standards system can avoid the pitfalls experienced by other countries. It is more predictable, given some of the theory and research around high stakes assessment mentioned in 1.3 (number 8), that New Zealand will not so much avoid the problems as develop its own particular variant of these problems. The Q&A section of the National Standards website (Ministry of Education, 2011b) also suggests plenty of more specific areas where it is simply being asserted by the Ministry that predictable problems will not eventuate. For instance, there is to be no increase in workload as teachers should already be doing much of what the National Standards demands, no reason why National Standards should narrow the curriculum because "teachers need to give students rich and diverse curriculum contexts to apply and fully develop their literacy and numeracy skills and understandings" and no problem with students becoming labelled

⁶ Figure cited and discussed by Professor Terry Crooks, University of Otago, during an interview with Kathryn Ryan on Radio New Zealand (2010, February 4).

because “teachers are professionals and as such know the importance of using appropriate language that motivates students” (ibid).

Academic arguments are another form of justification used to support the National Standards. For instance, in the same article quoted above, Chamberlain uses quotes from professors Gordon Stobart and Royce Sadler: “Success will come down to how you structure this, how much teacher judgement counts and how broad you keep things as you’re doing this” (Stobart) and “achievement needs to be on something significant, something that is costly personally and requires effort. Good standards will be appropriated by students for their own learning” (Sadler). These quotes were taken from a meeting at the Third International Assessment Conference in Queenstown in early 2009, which gathered a range of leading assessment experts in New Zealand about the time the New Zealand standards system was being introduced. A problem here is cherry picking of academic ideas that seem to be supportive of the policy direction because other accounts of the meeting between Chamberlain, the Minister and the academics in Queenstown is that the overwhelming emphasis was on the dangers of national standards.⁷ Academics closest to the policy process also report parts of their advice being ignored. John Hattie, who first tried to advise government and then joined a group of academics, including the first author, who wrote a cautionary ‘open letter’ to the Minister (Thrupp, Hattie, Crooks, & Flockton, 2009), has commented:

I did speak to Bill English and a coterie of National people a few years ago, and we talked about the value of standards and particularly formative assessment, knowing where “we” are and where “we” wish to be, the importance of progress, the realities of normal curves and thus progress and levels are critical (never one or the other), simple is rarely the answer. I later spoke, at his request, to John Key and his advisors. Again, same message ... and impressed him to avoid national testing or any version of it ... I have no problems with standards – as long as they are clear and transparent, that there are appropriate sources of evidence as to the value and credibility, and we know the targets we are aiming for ... So was I the inventor – hardly as this notion has been around for eons. Was I the instigator – yes, I did push for clear criteria for success of our system (of course, not that this is easy and simple!), and yes I did push for clear implementation plans. (J. Hattie, personal communication, December 11, 2009)⁸

The use of academic references to support the National Standards policy is also worth noting. National Standards documents provide academic references, particularly references to the international literature, only very sparingly. There are a few more in a Ministry position paper on assessment in the schooling sector (Ministry of Education, 2010a) where we are told that “our approach to the implementation of *National Standards and Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori* has been influenced by the work of D. Royce Sadler” (p. 16). But the main set of academic references being cited as relevant to the National Standards are listed in a National Standards ‘factsheet’ that provides references related to maths, literacy and assessment (Ministry of Education, 2010b). We would make two points about this style of academic justification. The first is that, while we can see the advantage of not cluttering practitioner texts with references, we would again want to question in lots of cases whether those being referenced would agree that their work provides support for the standards system.⁹ The second is that there is no sense here that the Ministry has measured its National Standards against other and more critical relevant literatures, such as the ‘policy sociology’ literatures often being discussed in this report.

ERO reports (for instance ERO, 2009) have also been used to provide justifications for the National Standards. A distinction often needs to be made between the reports and the way they have been used in Ministerial media releases (e.g., Tolley, 2009). The reports themselves largely depend on data gathering by ERO reviewers as they go about their work in schools. As we discuss in Section 2.6

⁷ There are DVDs of the conference but they do not include the meeting with the Minister.

⁸ Hattie understood this email correspondence was to be ‘for the record’. See also: Hattie (2010) and commentaries by Grace (2010) and Snook, Clark, Harker, O’Neill, & O’Neill (2010) for an exchange over the appropriate role of academics in an issue such as the National Standards.

⁹ Many academics are concerned about having their arguments misused by policymakers. The first author has argued that researchers have an obligation to reflect on the politics of their research—of whose interests it serves—in order to take steps to minimise it being used in damaging ways (Thrupp, 2010a).

RAINS is looking at how ERO reviews the National Standards in schools and we will discuss ERO's role with regard to the standards system in a future report.

2.2 CONCERNS, CONTESTATION AND THE RESPONSES OF GOVERNMENT AND MEDIA

Areas of concern about the National Standards developed amongst New Zealand teachers, principals, board members and others over 2009. They included

- concerns that the claimed difference between National Standards and national testing would not be enough to prevent league tables, an increasingly narrow curriculum, de-motivated students and many of the various other perverse consequences for schools and students evidenced under national testing regimes in other countries;
- concerns that the New Zealand standards system would undermine the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) a broad and generally progressive policy that had just been launched after many years of consultation;
- concerns that the policy was being introduced too quickly, without trialling and without sufficient consultation or training;
- concerns about the mismatch between the standards system being applied to nearly all New Zealand children and the Key Government's claim that it was mostly needed to address the problem of the mainly Māori and Pasifika children who make up New Zealand's so-called 'long tail of underachievement';
- concerns about statements from Anne Tolley and John Key suggesting the Government was operating with simplistic notions of poorly performing teachers needing to be made more accountable through the standards system;
- concerns about advisory services for teaching the arts, science and physical education being withdrawn at the same time the National Standards were being introduced;
- concerns about numerous problems in terms of aligning the National Standards with existing tests, progressions, expectations and levels; and
- concerns about various practical problems that bring complexity and workload that schools could do without. For instance, during the first three years children get assessed after one year at school, two years and so on. So for a child who starts in August, an OTJ needs to be made the following August and the one after that, rather than fitting the annual reporting cycles of children at Year 4 and above.

There was no immediate opposition to the standards system from the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) and the New Zealand Principals Federation (NZPF), the organisations representing most New Zealand primary teachers and principals. It was only towards the end of the consultation period, some six months after the legislation was passed, and having consulted extensively with members, that the NZEI and NZPF firmed up their opposition to National Standards. In the case of the NZEI, this was done at the end of June 2009 through a press release that called on Government to push out the timeline and said schools would actively oppose any centralised reporting of the standards data (NZEI, 2009). In early July, the NZPF conference was used as a platform to voice primary principals' opposition to National Standards as well (Buutveld, 2009). These stances triggered a media response that was vociferous for the New Zealand media, being more comparable to the attacks on teachers in England during the late 1970s and 80s. With the support of the media apparently behind it, the Government proceeded to roll out its National Standards policy with few concessions, apart from pushing out the timeline for schools reporting National Standards data to the Ministry and setting up a National Standards Sector Advisory Group (also discussed below).

In response to the Government's generally uncompromising stance, those opposed to the National Standards have found many and various ways to campaign against their introduction. Here we list the activities we are aware of and that are the public domain. Dates are indicated but many of the activities are continuing ones:

1. New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI)
(see <http://www.nzei.org.nz/National+Standards.html>)
 - press releases, usually several times a month;
 - numerous radio and TV interviews and comments and newspaper articles and letters;
 - development and dissemination of campaign resources, professional discussion kits, promotional tools, resources for parents, information resources;
 - creating opposition with many different faces e.g., influencing key players (lobbying of local MPs and candidates);
 - advice and support for schools coming under pressure from the Ministry of Education;
 - advice, support and resources for communities and parents aimed at raising awareness e.g., 39 community forums Aug-Nov 2011; Te Kahui Whetu statements, Boards meeting in Taranaki;
 - Pasifika networks; Samoan language flyer produced;
 - submissions to the consultation (June 2009);
 - not attending the National Standards launch (October 2009);
 - hosting ‘expert forums’ on the National Standards and disseminating academic papers and think pieces (November 2009, June 2010, November 2010), Early Childhood Education (ECE) ‘experts’ forum (March 2010);
 - a bus tour (actually multiple buses) from the top of the North Island and the bottom of the South Island to Parliament in Wellington to raise public awareness of the concerns about National Standards and call for a trial. This also launched a continuing ‘Hands Up for Learning’ public campaign. The bus tour visited more than 250 communities and schools and involved dozens of public meetings (Feb-March 2010);
 - having public polls conducted e.g., (UMR Research Ltd, 2010, February), regular polling of principals;
 - presenting a petition to Parliament (June 2010);
 - submission to Parliamentary Select Committee on National Standards (September 2010);
 - silent protests during Minister’s speeches at NZEI annual meeting (especially September 2010, some again in August 2011);
 - setting up social networking pages Ning (since April 2009) and Facebook (since February 2010);
 - ‘Operation Orange’ network for NZEI members opposed to National Standards (since August 2010);
 - promoting alternatives to National Standards; television advertisements about the “one size fits all” nature of National Standards (August 2011);
 - promoting alternatives to National Standards: Te Reo Areare campaign Whakahau, Whakamana, Whakahihi hui and Ning to discuss successful strategies for Māori achievement (May 2011);
 - promoting alternatives to National Standards: ‘School is Cool’ competition attracting 2500 student artworks and media coverage (June 2011); and
 - promoting alternatives to National Standards: ‘Speak Up’ campaign (August 2011);.
2. New Zealand Principals Federation (NZPF)
(see <http://www.nzpf.ac.nz/news/national-standards>)
 - press releases;
 - numerous radio and TV interviews and comments and newspaper articles and letters;
 - development and dissemination of information;
 - advice and support for schools coming under pressure from Ministry of Education;
 - submissions to the consultation (June 2009);
 - not attending the National Standards launch (October 2009);

- setting up of ‘Our Principals’ website to show professional opposition to the National Standards (October 2010);
 - setting up Facebook page dedicated to National Standards (May 2010);
 - withdrawing from National Standards Sector Advisory Group (February 2011); and
 - conference votes, e.g., 750 principals voted no confidence in National Standards at the NZPF national conference (April 2011).
3. Regional/sectoral Principals Associations
(Google ‘Principals Association National Standards’)
 - Auckland and Southland Primary Principals Association boycotts of National Standards training (June 2010);
 - Canterbury and Otago Primary Principals Association boycotts of reporting National Standards (Aug 2010);
 - Hawkes Bay Primary Principals Association announcement of campaign against National Standards (September 2011);
 - Catholic Primary Principals Association statement against National Standards (March 2011);
 - Te Akatea Māori Principals Association statement against National Standards (July 2011); and
 - Invercargill Principals Open Letter to Minister of Education (August 2011).
 4. Boards Taking Action Coalition (BTAC)
 - announcement that initial group of 225 schools would not set National Standards-related targets (November 2010); and
 - hand-delivery of charters without National Standards-related targets (July 2011).
 5. Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA)
 - position paper; and
 - survey of members.
 6. Other noteworthy activities
 - principals, teachers, board members at individual schools involved in submissions, letters and articles in newspapers, school newsletters, TV and radio interviews, blogs, Utube clips, comments on Ministry principals forum, publicity stunts like auctioning NZ curriculum on ‘Trademe’ website, meetings for parents and communities;
 - local boards disputing School Trustees Association (STA) stance on National Standards;
 - Parents Against Labelling (PAL) lobby group;
 - academics supporting NZEI and NZPF activities, popular and academic writing¹⁰
 - Stories in magazines of other unions - Service and Food Workers Union, Maritime Union of NZ;
 - ‘Marae’ Māori TV programme covering National Standards;
 - Pasifika fono in Wainuiomata (Aug 2011) and in Porirua resulting in Porirua City Council statement (October 2010);
 - Steiner parents’ launch campaign and website (www.protect.org.nz);
 - Autism New Zealand attendance at Select Committee (September 2011);
 - Māori Party: Pita Sharples¹¹ briefly against National Standards (February 2010);
 - Labour Party: numerous questions in the House, blogs, alternative policy; and
 - Green Party: press releases, blogs, pamphlet, alternative policy.

Several points can be made about this activity. First, there has been a great deal of it, even if not all activities have come to much. Second, it has exploited numerous avenues and allowed for participation at different comfort levels, for instance just signing a petition or becoming involved in

¹⁰ Including the first author (see ‘About the authors’).

¹¹ Māori Party Co-Leader and Associate Minister of Education in the National Government.

BTAC. Third, it has generally involved peaceful protest or being ‘civilly disobedient’. Occasionally, anger has boiled over (see, for instance, NZPA, 2010) but not very often.

Teachers and principals, the NZEI and NZPF were at the heart of this contestation, often in collaboration with boards of trustees and other interested groups. Although at least one commentator from within the education sector dismissed the NZEI’s activities as “little more than an embarrassment to the teaching profession” (Langley 2010), we see them connecting with an important history of educators contesting potentially damaging education reforms (see 1.3, number 15). In fact the contestation of the National Standards would have to be one of the most impressive campaigns against any education policy to be found internationally in recent years; a different kind of example of this small country ‘punching above its weight’. It seems that in the case of the National Standards a number of factors converged to create the conditions for exceptional contestation.

Some have to do with the nature of the policy and its introduction. The National Standards policy raised some rather obvious problems. For instance, it was clear at the outset that teachers were being asked to categorise children crudely (as ‘at’, ‘well below’ etc.), even if the process of reaching those judgements was intended to be a sophisticated one. There was also no apparent educational rationale for where the standards were set, being above national norms in some instances. As time went on, it was such obvious problems that encouraged those opposed to explore and highlight less apparent ones. Second, the Key Government was particularly unresponsive when it came to providing plausible answers to teachers’ concerns. For instance, although New Zealand was going into its form of (potentially) high stakes assessment at primary level, long after many other countries had experienced the pitfalls of such policies, the Minister and senior policymakers could only insist that National Standards would not have the same effects; however, they were unable to provide a plausible account of why this would be the case. Nor were there any clear assurances about taking steps to prevent the misuse of data in league tables; indeed, there was much vacillation on this issue in the first half of 2009. Third, the introduction of the policy could hardly have been better designed to raise the temperature in the sector. It had all the hallmarks of a ‘rollout’ developed hastily and without much consultation, in stark contrast to the long history of collaborative policy-making processes that New Zealand teachers had willingly participated in and come to expect. In short, had the policy been better designed to connect with teachers existing craft knowledge, had policymakers been able to develop a more plausible and empathetic account of what it wanted to do and had Government had a better plan for ‘implementing’ the policy, it is unlikely that opposition to the National Standards would have gathered so much momentum.

As well as the problematic nature of the policy itself, there have also been many other features of their situation that New Zealanders have been able to draw upon in contesting the National Standards policy. These have included

- a small and generally highly connected population. This means, for instance, that many of those contesting the New Zealand standards system will have personally met or even worked with those trying to roll out the policy, making opposition less daunting than in larger countries. Māori have been less involved in contestation activities than might perhaps be expected given their socio-economic positioning and previous antipathy to generic approaches in education. Resistance from Māori may have been partly headed off by development of Māori-medium standards with more consultation and concessions¹². The Māori Party has also been a coalition partner with National, making it difficult for the Māori Party and its supporters to oppose the National Standards policy. As signalled earlier (1.3, number 14) some Māori clearly regard the National Standards as a means to ensure the predominately Pākehā teaching workforce does not hold deficit perspectives in relation to Māori students, instead of a policy that may require teachers to disproportionately label Māori students as failing (Collins, 2011). How widespread this view is amongst Māori is hard to know;
- the organisational politics and history of New Zealand primary schooling which have allowed for a particularly co-ordinated response of teachers and principals to the National Standards. The NZEI is New Zealand’s only union representing primary teachers; it represents more than 50,000 primary and ECE teachers and support staff, special education

¹² For instance, having two years before the first assessment.

and school advisory services. There is also only one large primary principals association, the NZPF, representing over 2300 principals in a country with only about 2500 schools. These organisations are closely interconnected as the NZEI has a Principal's Council and around 95% of primary principals are also NZEI members. There has also been savvy leadership within these organisations and good relationships with other allies such as the secondary teachers union (PPTA) and organisations representing special interest groups such as Steiner schools;

- the fact that principals and teachers have not been prevented from criticising Government policy, as in some countries. In November 2009, the State Services Commission invited the NZPF and NZEI to discuss including schools and boards of trustees in the Standards of Integrity and Conduct Code which prevents employees commenting on Government policy if it constitutes a 'personal attack' on a minister, work colleague or other state servant. However, after an intervention from the Minister of Education, the process was stopped (Beaumont, 2009);
- the discourse of 'school self-management' in New Zealand. This has been in place since the Tomorrow's Schools reforms of 1989 and was one of the reasons for the NZEI bus tour; it was seen as crucial to connect with individual schools and their communities in this 'decentralised' context since it tends to undermine centrally-driven initiatives. On the other hand, self-management has also worked against resistance where Boards of Trustees have not supported teachers taking action against the National Standards. Therefore, boards have been a significant arena for influence as they were advised by the School Trustees Association (STA) that they must support the Government's position on the National Standards but sometimes chose to contest the National Standards instead (Lewis, 2010). When they took the latter stance, they were important allies for teachers and principals, especially as boards consisted mainly of parents, in a situation where the Government was repeatedly insisting that parents favoured National Standards, even if (some) teachers were opposed. It was no accident then that the group that came to represent the 'rebel' schools that were publically not co-operating with Ministry charter requirements around National Standards was called the Boards Taking Action Coalition (BTAC), stressing that the interests being represented were not just those of teachers;
- the involvement of various enthusiastic educationalists, particularly blogging individuals like Kelvin Smythe (<http://www.networkonnet.co.nz>) and Bruce Hammond (<http://leading-learning.blogspot.com>). Their independence from institutions allowed them to develop often trenchant critiques and they had a key role in disseminating intelligence and providing those with concerns about the standards system with an alternative to the Ministry discourses around the national standards. The Quality Public Education Coalition (QPEC) was another significant voice, as was Lester Flockton. A number of other New Zealand academics and researchers supported the campaign against National Standards and few indicated support for the policy.¹³ But most were unable or unwilling to be actively involved in the opposition to the standards system for various reasons, including research funding, the politics of their institutions, preoccupation with other work, the way they saw their roles and of course their views of the standards system too; and
- the benefit of international experience with high stakes testing as already mentioned (1.3 number 8); this would often not have been available in other settings.

¹³ Some academics who spoke in the media or wrote articles about their concerns included: John O'Neill, John Clark, Howard Lee, Warwick Elley, Cedric Croft, Deborah Fraser, Terry Crooks and John Hattie. Academic supporters of the National Standards included: Tom Nicholson, Helen Timperley, Graeme Aitkin and John Hattie. The role of academics in the National Standards debate would be an excellent research study in its own right. It would also be interesting to find out how many of the 30+ academics and others listed as doing the writing of the National Standards, or as their 'critical friends' or having been consulted in the process, realised quite what they were involved in and would still be happy about that involvement.

Why some schools have been more involved in contesting the New Zealand standards system than others

Factors influencing how much schools resist National Standards would be the stance of a school's Board of Trustees, as already mentioned, the support of organisations like BTAC and the NZPF and NZEI which have supported BTAC, the stances of other local principals and the characteristics of particular regions, schools and principals. One indication of some of these influences is provided by considering the characteristics of 228 schools that had joined BTAC at the time of its launch in November 2010.¹⁴ These schools were spread across the country broadly in line with regional populations but with notably low participation in the Bay of Plenty and notably high participation in Northland and South Auckland. These latter two areas have many low socio-economic schools, suggesting that concern about the National Standards will be most felt in such schools where students have low levels of achievement on entry to school and where league table positioning is likely to be most unfavourable. Analysis of the decile ratings of the schools supports this view, although there is also opposition across the socio-economic spectrum (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Decile Rating of BTAC Schools

Decile	No. Schools	% Schools
1	42	18.4
2	27	11.8
3	23	10.1
4	29	12.7
5	21	9.2
6	22	9.6
7	16	7.0
8	18	7.9
9	19	8.3
10	11	4.8

Another likelihood is that overt contestation is being weighed up against career prospects, with more established principals often being more willing to take publicly oppositional stances. Whether or not an ERO review is imminent may be another issue which impacts on whether the senior leadership team (SLT) and board of any school have perceived the space to contest the National Standards.

Government responses

The contestation of the National Standards by teachers, principals and others in schools has been met by a variety of responses from government. These include accommodation, promotion, reinforcement, a new consultation forum, and using the threat or actuality of directives and sanctions. They also include recent demands made on schools under Section 78J of the 1989 Education Act that, in some cases, were made after schools had already complied with the Ministry's demands but had included a statement saying they were only doing so under duress.

Few concerns about National Standards have been *accommodated* but in August 2009 the timeline for schools reporting National Standards data was pushed out from 2011 to 2012. This gave schools an extra year to set targets and collect data. Although the then Minister argued that "this would show I

¹⁴ Up just slightly from the 225 schools advised in BTAC publicity at the time. We are grateful to Perry Rush for providing this information. By May 2011, BTAC membership had grown to over 350 schools (Rush, 2011).

have fulfilled my promise to listen to [schools'] concerns" (Tolley, 2009), it is also likely that the original timeline was too ambitious even within the terms of the Government's own 'implementation' processes.

There has been *promotion and reinforcement* of the National Standards above and beyond what might normally be expected of education reforms. They have not only featured in the Gazette and Ministry website but, in February 2010, Key and Tolley announced a \$200,000 mailout to 350,000 households and justified it by accusing the NZEI of protecting poorly performing teachers (Young, 2010). The New Zealand Herald was critical of this development ("Class-standards leaflet a misuse of public funds", 2011) but it seems likely there are many other instances where, because of contestation from the sector, resources have been directed to support the National Standards policy beyond what was originally intended.

Tolley lost the Tertiary Education portfolio in January 2010. Key (2010) said this was to allow her to "fully focus her efforts on the Education portfolio and, in particular, the implementation of the Government's national standards policy". However, Latham (2010) suggests other reasons for this development as well. Other resources brought in to support National Standards include the employment of former advisors to schools to deliver National Standards training (other positions were 'disestablished'), the employment of 50 regional Student Achievement Practitioners (SAPs) to "improve outcomes for all students" (Ministry of Education, 2010c) and the development of a 'progress and consistency' tool intended to be "fully functional" in 2014 (Ministry of Education, 2011c).

In September 2010, the Minister increased *consultation* with the sector by announcing a National Standards Sector Advisory Group chaired by Emeritus Professor Gary Hawke (NSSAG; see <http://nssag.minedu.govt.nz>). This was supposed to signal a new direction compared to the National Standards Independent Advisory Group (NSIAG) created in February 2010. The NSSAG added more members to this group and, whereas the NSIAG had been a technical advisory group, the main intention of the NSSAG was to "attract the confidence of the sector both in NSSAG and in the process of change being experienced in the education sector" (NSSAG, 2010b). Hawke, a seasoned performer in such roles, skirted the controversy around the National Standards by positioning the group as taking both a bigger view and a creative one:

There is general agreement that the National Standards initiative is part of an evolution in which the implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum is central, and in part a specific project whose introduction surprised many in the sector. There is disagreement about the relative weight of the two components...

Specific, but not exclusive questions to be addressed include:

Where did the link to NCEA level 2 come from?

- i. There have also been questions of the feasibility of the standards – are they intended to set an objective of enhanced student performance, not merely record the performance of students relative to the average of what is currently achieved?
- ii. Is it reasonable that "mathematics for living", for example, now requires greater capability than was formerly the case, because managing greater life expectancy requires financial literacy, and desired citizen engagement in relation to climate change and other social issues requires understanding risk in the sense of mathematical capability.
- iii. How has the mathematics teaching community resolved the debate about the relative weight to be attached to mathematical processes and subject content in explaining how statements of the mathematics standards are to be understood and applied? (NSSAG, 2010b)

The NSSAG seems to have been trying to operate with disarming openness, possibly because of early criticism by NZEI of its "lack of honesty in the public reporting style which ... creates an inaccurate

impression of unanimity around the issues” (NZEI, 2011a).¹⁵ A recent chair’s report notes discussion of a host of ‘implementation’ problems around the National Standards: “The dominant perception in the sector is that it has experienced withdrawal of what it was accustomed to and had come to think it was entitled to, while perceived promises of funding are not delivered” (NSSAG, 2011).

Despite this approach, Hawke’s best efforts have failed to get key critics of the National Standards to buy into the NSSAG. The NZEI and NZPF attended a couple of NSSAG meetings, identified the group as failing to address their concerns and withdrew (NZEI, 2011a). This has marginalised the NSSAG in the National Standards debate somewhat but it continues to want to “attract more direct participation by teacher unions”, stressing “the importance of sector participation in the implementation process since it must be a learning-by-doing experience” (NSSAG, 2011).

Turning now to the *threat or actuality of directives or sanctions*, these began as early as December 2009 when Tolley threatened to call in Limited Statutory Managers (LSMs) to take over resistant schools (Trevett, 2009), a threat that the Prime Minister subsequently downplayed (Latham, 2010). Schools that refused to include National Standards targets in their charters were informed that these documents would not be signed, that they would be unable to access Ministry-funded professional learning and development (PLD) (Romanos, 2011) and further threats of statutory intervention were also made. It was these that apparently led BTAC to recommend to schools in September 2011 that they start to include targets in their charters, albeit with a statement of duress (Garrett-Walker, 2011). It was revealed in the House (Hansard, 2011) that there had been Ministry directives to 93 schools over July–September 2011 telling them they had to include Ministry-supplied statements about National Standards targets in their charters in order to meet the relevant section of the 1989 Education Act (Section 61, Section 62 and Section 63A were also invoked). It was also advised that 93% schools were now compliant although an unknown number had put their charters in with a statement of duress (ibid). Later the same month some Northland schools were apparently threatened with LSMs unless they removed their duress statements (NZEI, 2011b).

Other sanctions available to government have included ‘gold standard’ ERO reviews not being made available to schools that did not specify National Standards targets. “Four-to-five year returns are given to schools with exemplary practice, and by definition a school that either chooses not to comply, or is not able to, could not be exemplary” (ERO, 2011). In the case of Moerewa School in Northland, the fact that the school had not implemented National Standards and therefore “your school’s charter is not compliant” was given as part of the Minister’s written justification for not approving the extension of this school’s programme to include senior students (Tapaleao, 2011). Although a spokesman for the Minister is reported as later saying that the declined application had nothing to do with the disregard of National Standards, what is of interest here is the pressure towards compliance even if, like the LSM, the threat is later rescinded.

It seems likely that local Ministry and ERO staff who have had to deal with schools over National Standards have mostly regarded this work as a matter of necessary compliance with legislation. Particularly where they believe that non-compliant schools are otherwise good schools, they may also see opposition to National Standards as misinformed rather than really deserving of a punitive response. In this situation, the most recent developments around what have become known as 78J letters, would have put Ministry of Education staff in their most difficult position yet because these letters clearly had the potential to put considerable pressure on schools that, in many cases, have already complied with the demands for National Standards, albeit grudgingly.

The Section 78J statutory intervention involves a Board of Trustees being directed by the Secretary for Education to provide particular information:

This intervention could be as a result of an information gap or because of a reasonable cause for concern about the operation of the school, or the welfare or educational performance of the students. The response by the board will either confirm or allay the concern and the Ministry of Education will establish a monitoring system accordingly. The day-to-day management of the school remains the responsibility of the principal.

¹⁵ Although even the action points for the first meeting on 14 October, 2010, noted that the Chair would be advising the Minister that “the National Standards were a government policy position and a legal requirement and not just the view of the Minister” (NSSAG, 2010c).

The Ministry is required to review the intervention at least annually. The intervention may be revoked when the Secretary is satisfied that either no further action is required, or an increased level of intervention is required. (Ministry of Education, 2011d)

From the point of view of schools, the effect of the 78J letters would have been to unexpectedly demand huge amounts of information. They were sent out to an unknown number of schools by Karen Sewell and must have been one of her last actions as outgoing Secretary for Education. As one of our RAINS schools (Cicada School) had received a 78J letter, we sought some basic information from other schools that had received the same letter. We report this as part of our discussion of Cicada School in Section 5.0.

Media responses

McGregor (2007) has asked whether New Zealand journalism promotes a genuine competition of ideas and opinion. She points back to writing more than a decade earlier:

The news media are dangerously under-debated in New Zealand society. There is a worrying absence of critical scrutiny about such issues as ownership and control, the role of the news media, what values they employ and the relationship between politics and the news media. (Comrie & McGregor 1992, p. 9; as cited in McGregor, 2007)

Certainly these are issues that seem to be highlighted by the coverage of the National Standards debate. Detailed analysis is beyond the scope of the RAINS project but we make three relevant points:

1. Media coverage of the National Standards seems to have been particularly uncritical during the initial phases of introducing the policy. At least in print media, we are not aware of any substantive coverage of concerns about the National Standards prior to the 2008 election, around the passing of the legislation or in the period leading up to the launch of the policy on 23 October 2009. Until this time most newspaper editors and commentators across the country seemed to think that the story to be highlighted was one of teachers refusing to be accountable.¹⁶ It was not until just after the launch of the National Standards policy that an editorial of any of the larger newspapers seriously questioned the policy (“Let Teachers Teach”, 2009).
2. Many editorials or opinion pieces have been ill informed or simplistic. A repeated theme of the *Dominion Post* was that teachers were more responsible for achievement than socio-economic conditions. One editorial argued that “research project after research project shows that it is teacher expectations and teaching methods that have a greater effect on children than the homes they were born into and the decile rating of the school they attend” (“Better to Make it Plain”, 2009). Another editorial (“Listen and Learn, Teachers”, 2009) claimed that research in the year before “showed that 90 per cent of prisoners are “functionally illiterate”... Yet most of these inmates passed through a New Zealand primary school.... How can these teachers live with themselves knowing they have failed so many children?” A repeated theme of the *New Zealand Herald* was that the unfairness of social polarisation between schools and poorly contextualised test results could be overlooked. One editorial suggested that “educationalists...are not looking at tests in the same way that parents do ... League tables are a perfectly legitimate tool from the parents’ point of view. A good school for their child is one where high standards are maintained and if the pupils come with advantages, so much the better (“Govt Mustn’t Give Way on League Tables”, 2009). A recent editorial maintained that parents “take variables into account. They are aware, for example, of the benefits to a school of social advantage and will incorporate that into their assessment of performance information” (“Trust Parents With the Facts About Schools”, 2011).
3. The role of the newer media such as internet blogs has clearly been important but the calibre of their contributions vary as much as positions on the political spectrum. Some can further understanding of an issue such as the National Standards while others do little more than distract. Blogs also often over-personalise the issues, e.g., ‘Anne wins, BTAC loses’ (Farrar,

¹⁶ Misa (2009) provided a rare exception.

2011b), ‘Tolley Suckered’ (Smythe, 2011). Even the best blogs cannot be research-informed unless research is actually being done. This is where the online debate about New Zealand’s National Standards has been poorly served.

Prospects for future contestation

Is contestation of the National Standards likely to have finished now that BTAC has capitulated over the 2011 charters and the Ministry has fired a shot across the bows of slow-to-comply schools with its 78J letters? We would not rule out further public contestation as there may, for instance, be opposition to supplying data to the Ministry in 2012 or subsequent years (NZPF, 2011). But what is also abundantly clear is that much contestation of educational reform is not of the public kind. For instance, activities that have been used by teachers and heads in the UK to contest education policy over the previous decade have ranged from the national and public to the local and often more covert, including tokenism and fabrication (Thrupp, 2005). We anticipate that covert forms of contestation will become more important in New Zealand as the context shifts and overt expressions of opposition to the National Standards become more difficult. Our attention is returned to the range of experiences of the New Zealand standards system within schools and the relevance of policy enactments research.

2.3 POLICY ENACTMENTS RESEARCH

The purpose of this section is to introduce the policy enactments research that Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins have been undertaking in the UK. Their research is published in various journals and a book (see section 1.2) but our discussion here draws particularly on four related articles which make up a part special issue of the journal *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, published in October 2011. There is much in these papers and in the space available we can only give a flavour. Indeed, our selections hardly do justice to Ball and colleagues analysis but we hope there is enough here to indicate why policy enactments research provides a very useful set of ideas against which to consider the data collected by RAINS.¹⁷

While RAINS is not a study of policy enactments in the same way that Ball and colleagues were engaged in, many of the premises, emphases and concepts of policy enactments research may be usefully employed, including the complexity and incoherence of the policy process, schools’ contingencies and materialities, the understanding that policy is interpreted and translated in schools (rather than just implemented), intensification and performativity, policy discourses and artefacts, the micropolitics of schools, the idea that those in schools are policy ‘actors’ as well as policy ‘subjects’, the different policy work of policy actors in schools and the extent to which the National Standards policy is an imperative/disciplinary/readerly policy or a exhortative/writerly policy.

The introduction to the articles in the special issue explains that policy enactments research offers “a set of concepts and ideas intended to generate some theoretical leverage for making sense of education policies in process in schools” and for addressing the “complexity and incoherence” of the policy process (Braun, Ball, & Maguire, 2011, p. 581). The researchers aim to

explore the ways in which ‘teachers come to understand new policy ideas through the lens of their values and pre-existing knowledge and practices, often interpreting, adapting, or transforming policy messages as they put them in place’ (Coburn, 2005, p. 477) and the role of different kinds of policy actors in ‘bringing off’ policy as a performance or an accomplishment that is ‘good enough’. Over and against this we also identify different kinds of policies and policy subjects and the ways in which policy speaks to teachers. (ibid, p. 477)

They are concerned with the setting of policy “within a framework of contingencies and materialities”, that is “the role of context in forming, framing and limiting interpretative and practical responses to policy” (ibid). It is a conceptually sophisticated approach that draws on a range of theoretical resources, including “Foucault’s work on discourse and governmentality, Barthes literary theory, some actor-network theory and some earlier writing on the ‘policy cycle’ (Ball, 2006) and on the more

¹⁷ Note that references in quoted material are all as cited by Ball and colleagues.

substantive work of Spillane (2004) and Supovitz and Weinbaum (2008)” (ibid). The particular policies that have been studied by the research in England are standards policies and learning policies of various kinds, which are set with a “myriad of others which address other aspects of school life and over-lap, inter-relate and contradict—a kind of ‘policy soup’” (ibid). These policies are studied in case studies of four secondary schools using interviews as the primary means of data collection but it is emphasised that the concern is not the case but the topic of policy enactment, particularly

(1) the localised nature of policy actions, that is the ‘secondary adjustments’ and accommodations and conflicts which inflect and mediate policy; (2) the ways in which many different (and sometimes contradictory) policies are simultaneously in circulation and interact with, influence and inhibit one another; (3) the interpretational work of policy actors; and (4) the role of resource differences in limiting, distorting or facilitating responses to policy. (Braun, Ball, & Maguire, 2011, p. 582)

Contexts

In their first article, Braun, Ball, Maguire and Hoskins (2011, p. 585) begin to stress that policies are not merely implemented but “diversely and repeatedly contested and/or subject to ‘interpretation’” (ibid). Just as policy is complexly coded, so the decoding of policy is also complex—there are “creative processes of interpretation and translation, that is, the recontextualisation—through reading, writing and talking—of the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices” (ibid). Braun and colleagues (p. 586) note that policies can be ‘contained’ or ‘disruptive’ in schools, they can have unintended outcomes and be affected by the rich ‘underlife’ and micropolitics of individual schools:

They may be subject to ‘creative non-implementation’ (Ball, 1994, p. 20) and/or ‘fabrication’, ‘where policy responses are incorporated in school documentation for accountability reasons, rather than for reasons of pedagogic or organisational change (Ball, 2001). Policies may be diluted and they may sometimes just peter out (Maguire, 2007) and where they get superficially mapped on to current practices, any innovatory potential may simply be ignored (Spillane, 2004).

Braun and colleagues emphasise that “policies are intimately shaped and influenced by ‘school-specific factors’ that are neglected in much central policy making and research” (p. 585). They discuss and give examples of the significance of numerous inter-related contexts of different kinds:

- situated contexts (such as locale, school histories, intakes and settings);
- professional contexts (such as values, teacher commitments and experiences and ‘policy management’ in schools);
- material contexts (e.g., staffing, budget, buildings, technology and infrastructure); and
- external contexts (e.g., degree and quality of local authority support, pressures and expectations from broader policy context, such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions, legal requirements and responsibilities).

Braun and colleagues conclude that focusing on such contexts is necessary for being realistic about policy enactment in ‘real’ schools. They see it as a way of disrupting the idealism of the ‘best possible’ environments assumed for ‘implementation’.

Visuals and artefacts

The second article “detail[s] and describe[s] some of the discursive artefacts and activities that make up, reflect, and ‘carry’ within them ... key policy discourses” (Maguire et al., 2011, p. 597, drawing on Foucault, 1986). Maguire and colleagues argue that “the ‘seductive discourses’ and ‘inmate cultures’ which currently prevail in English schools are embedded in a range of visual artefacts and practices that work to establish and maintain the normalisation of the student, the teacher, and the school” (p. 608). They note that policy analysis tends to ignore the artefactual; the article aims to begin correcting this omission. It examines discursive productions of the ‘good student’, the ‘good school’ and the ‘good teacher’. The discussion seems particularly relevant to the National Standards where Maguire

and colleagues discuss the “on-going visual data trails that ... ‘show’ that progression is taking place” (p. 604):

... we see normalising assumptions about the integrity of the levels, the measurement of student capacity and the power of teacher interventions - a very particular discourse of learning and teaching... we can also see a dominant discourse about education’s purpose - getting points, achieving levels, making the grade. And this discursive formation is picked up in sets of visuals, recorded artefacts of attainment that simultaneously produce and constitute the school: the visualisation of grids and charts means that you can literally ‘see’ improvement, comparison, performance over time, ‘see’ the work done by the school on the student. This work visualises policy, but these visual artefacts ... are only meaningful, only ‘work’ alongside written texts, practices, organisation and talk. Policy is represented, interpreted and translated in all these forms together. (ibid)

Policy subjects and actors

The third paper focuses on the “role of policies in producing teacher (and other adult) subjects in schools” (Ball et al., 2011b, p. 611) or how teachers ‘make meanings with the discursive possibilities available to them’. It also looks at different policy actors doing the work of interpreting and translating policy. The discussion begins by considering the power relations inherent in different kinds of policy. Imperative/disciplinary policies (or ‘readerly’ policies) like those involved in the standards agenda produce teachers as more passive policy subjects than exhortative/developmental policies or (‘writerly’ policies) like personalised learning. (New Zealand’s National Standards policy arguably involves both, although the balance shifted more to the readerly over 2011). Ball and colleagues go on to argue that teachers in their case study schools in England move between these forms of policy and the different professionalism they require with ‘unreflexive ease’ because they have neither time nor space to consider the contradictions: “a lot of the time teachers do not do policy – policy ‘does them’” (p. 616). “Concern and critique are reduced to discomforts and murmurings” (p. 617) as the language of policy squeezes out all but its main business, the standards agenda. “Policies work to exclude statements which they characterise as false and they keep in circulation those statements which they characterise as true” (p. 618).

The second part of the paper looks at policy actors interpreting and translating policy. Interpreting involves an initial reading of policy, making sense of it and ‘selling’ it. Translating is “closer to the language of practice ... an iterative process of making texts and putting those texts into action, literally ‘enacting’ policy, using tactics, talk, meetings, plans, events, ‘learning walks’, producing artefacts (see Paper 2) and borrowing from other schools, from commercial materials and official websites, and being supported by local authority advisers (see Paper 4)”. (Ball et al., 2011b, p. 620). At the classroom level policy translations become one a number of priorities but nevertheless ‘drip’, seep’ and ‘trickle down’ into practice. There is always some ‘leakage’ from the process of enactment but how much depends on the strength and clarity of the policy imperative in the first place (pp. 620–621). Ball et al. conclude that

teachers are agents in the mediation and enactment of policy but at the same time a great deal of the meaning of teaching and its practice is now made up of policy concepts which have been sedimented over time in the language of teaching and which constitute the contours of professional practice and subjectivity. These concepts form the objects about which they speak - what it means to be a teacher, what is learning, what is good teaching, what is improvement, what is a good lesson. In this sense most teachers are now fluent in policy but are spoken by it.... Policy provides a vocabulary for thinking about and talking about practice, reflecting on it and evaluating it, and for estimating one’s own self-worth as a teacher. The ‘field of memory’ of teaching made up of earlier vocabularies of possibility is being whittled away.... (p. 622)

Policy actors

The fourth and final paper is concerned with differentiating the ‘policy work’ of policy actors in schools involved in the processes of interpretation and translation. Seven types of policy actors and the policy work done are discussed:

- Narrators: Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings, mainly done by head teachers and the SLT;
- Entrepreneurs: Advocacy, creativity and integration;
- Outsiders: Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring;
- Transactors: Accounting, reporting, monitoring;
- Enthusiasts: Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career;
- Translators: Production of texts, artefacts and events;
- Critics: Union representatives: monitoring of management, maintaining counter-discourses; and
- Receivers: Mainly junior teachers and teaching assistants: coping, defending and dependency. (Ball et al., 2011a, p. 626)

These positions are not necessarily vested in individuals and they may move between them but individuals in schools may also specialise in one type of policy work. Ball and colleagues look at these policy positions in some depth, providing examples of the work involved and the relationships between the positions: this will be helpful for thinking about the different roles taken up in schools in response to the National Standards policy too. It is emphasised that policy does not reach uniformly across schools, meaning that the school is often not the most sensible unit for policy research and that “what we mean by ‘the school’ in such research is typically partial and neglectful” (p. 637). Finally, Ball and colleagues warn that:

A great deal of what goes on in schools in terms of policy is ‘configuration’ and ‘re-configuration’ work which aims to extend the durability of the institution in the face of the de-stabilising effects of context, of change and of policy. There is a danger that as researchers we try to analyse away this incoherence as an effective complexity and represent ‘school’ as more stable and coherent than it really is. (ibid)

Relevance to the RAINS project

The challenge for us working with the RAINS schools is to think deeply about them and the policy subjects/actors within them in the light of Ball and colleagues’ work, not just ‘picking the eyes out’ of their analysis but reflecting on the similarities and differences in our New Zealand primary school cases to the processes and power-relations Ball and colleagues highlight. This is work hardly started yet but this report is informed by some of the starting points of policy enactments research, particularly the general complexity of how schools ‘do policy’ and the importance of taking context seriously.

2.4 THE MTL RESEARCH

The Ministry of Education has commissioned research on the National Standards, the School Sample Monitoring and Evaluation Project (2009–2013). This project is a key part of the Ministry’s monitoring and evaluation framework for the National Standards and is being undertaken by Gill Thomas and colleagues at Maths Technology Ltd. (MTL), a Dunedin based company. Here we examine the MTL research because, although it is intended to be the main evaluation of the National Standards, it demonstrates the limitations of an instrumental, ‘thin’, and ‘politically sanitised’ approach to research. While it does useful work at some levels, it leaves many questions unaddressed because of its largely ‘hands off’ methodology and ‘significant silences.’

The MTL research initially sounds quite promising. We are told that “[t]he project will report on a range of information about how a sample of schools is implementing English-medium National

Standards in reading, writing and mathematics in Years 1–8”. Amongst other things, it will include information about “schools’ (principals and school leaders, boards of trustees, and teachers) understanding about the purpose and content of National Standards [and] the relationship of the standards to the New Zealand Curriculum” (Education Counts, 2011). This sounds a bit like what RAINS also is aiming to do, the more so where there is also to be “a more detailed study looking at changes in professional practice” (Ministry of Education, 2010c). Nevertheless, the reports of the project released so far (Maths Technology Ltd., 2010; Thomas & Ward, 2011) suggest that any concern with practitioner understandings will be heavily circumscribed.

The 2010 MTL report

In the 2010 report (Maths Technology Ltd., 2010), the Ministry’s evaluation is described minimally as:

... a three year project, established to evaluate the implementation of National Standards using a large representative sample of schools.... The project has two purposes: to describe the implementation of National Standards within schools, and to monitor and systematically evaluate the effect of National Standards on students, teachers, schools and whānau. (p. 1)

Later discussion reveals that the project allows for 27 different combinations of school characteristics (p. 3) involving up to 126 schools. There is nothing wrong with this *per se* but are there qualitative approaches to complement and add some richness to the numbers? The listed sources (Table 1, p. 2) suggest some interviews with principals (not reported in either of the two first reports) but mainly online surveys and analysis of documentary evidence. The only rationale for the research approach is provided in a footnote, which notes that the study is based on Stake’s countenance model (Stake, 1967) but does not provide any detail. Stake’s model is a general approach to evaluating any educational programme or intervention, rather than a theoretical perspective relevant to the National Standards themselves. This is also the only international reference or, indeed, the only reference to anything other than papers written by or for the Ministry in this report or the later one.

In neither report is there any scene setting regarding the history or politics of National Standards, international experience with such interventions or any other opening comments. Nor are the backgrounds of the researchers undertaking the Ministry’s evaluation project discussed, indeed their names are not even provided on the first report. In this respect, discussion of this intensely political reform is so apolitical that it seems quite redundant to include the standard caveat ‘Opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily coincide with those of the Ministry of Education.’

If the introduction to the research is technicist (decontextualised), the research questions guiding the study do nothing to alter this view. There are 12 ‘monitoring and evaluation’ questions which are intended to guide the study (Table 1, p. 2 in the 2010 report) but these are not asked in any remotely critical way and their accompanying seven intentions (Table 1, p. 2) that describe the intended effects of National Standards are not put up for critique either.

To illustrate the assumptions of the approach, take the first research question: “To what extent are the National Standards understood as a set of common expectations for student achievement?” To begin with, it can be seen that if this was asked in a more critical, open-ended way, it would be enough to ask, “How are the National Standards understood?” Defining them as ‘a set of common expectations for student achievement’ is adopting the Ministry’s implementation frame rather than finding out what principals actually think. Moreover, when this broad research question is followed through in an online survey of 88 principals (see Appendix A, p. 25) many of the questions in Section 1 (‘Your understanding of National Standards’) involve responses to statements of intentionality; for instance, “National Standards are intended to increase student access to the breadth of the New Zealand curriculum” or “National Standards aim to lift achievement in reading, writing and maths by being clear about what students need to achieve and by when.”

Not only are principals’ responses to most questions in this section pigeonholed into true/false/don’t know (the usual stuff of surveys), these responses then become reported as principals either

‘understanding’ or ‘misunderstanding’ National Standards (see Figure 1, p. 6) or OTJs (Figure 2, p. 7). The position being taken here is clearly that Ministry arguments about the National Standards must all be taken at face value. Interpreting the data as principals ‘misunderstanding’ does not allow for their responses being about not accepting the Government’s account of the National Standards. This is an obvious possibility but it is ruled out by the politics of the analysis. Had the research been honest, this section should not have been called ‘Your understanding of National Standards’ but rather ‘Your acceptance of the Ministry’s messages about National Standards.’ Some questions are so obvious that they seem more about driving practice into schools; for instance, would anyone be surprised that 95% of principals ‘understood’ that “one purpose of moderating OTJs is to ensure consistency within the school?” What readers also needed was some information about the process of recruiting the schools; for instance, what were the schools told and, given this, would schools that were not keen on the National Standards have been willing to participate in the research?

The report continues and so do the questions it raises. There is some discussion on page 8 of how principals rated their own understanding of various aspects of the National Standards, but it is hard to know what to make of this. For instance, the most highly rated item was ‘plain language reporting to parents’ but this seems likely to have picked up the view from principals that they are already good at reporting to parents in plain language, rather than being particularly good at reporting the National Standards in this way. Questions about how well supported or how confident principals feel, are required to be answered as ‘very’, ‘moderately’, ‘minimally’ or ‘not’. It is the kind of answer that could change by the hour (‘do I feel moderately supported at the moment or only minimally?’) but is all dutifully reported anyway. Of course, the same is true of the following questions about how principals’ opinions about the value of the National Standards (‘very’, ‘moderately’, ‘minimally’, ‘not valuable’) and how concerned principals are about ‘unintended consequences’ like national testing, narrowing of the curriculum, league tables and demotivation of students (‘very’, ‘moderately’, ‘minimally’, ‘not concerning’). On the other hand, at least these questions were asked and they constitute a nod to recognising concerns about the National Standards policy.

The 2010 report moves to slightly firmer ground where it is reporting factual information, such as principals’ participation in professional development (Table 4) and their approaches to communicating to their school communities (Table 5). But, as indicated in the example of principals attending a training seminar in the introduction to this report, it remains impossible to know what to make of the findings described without more information.

The most useful section of the 2010 report is the part that provides information about reporting against the National Standards. This is because the MTL evaluators have more to work with—not just the principal survey but copies of the formats schools used for mid-year reporting to parents—which are able to be used to provide examples of what is being discussed. The report (p. 21) emphasises that there was

- substantial variation between schools in the ways they had used National Standards to describe student achievement and the ways in which they had presented this information in school reports; and
- considerable variation in the language the schools used to describe student achievement against the Standards. Many different terms were used to describe each level of achievement, and, in many instances, the same term was used by different schools to describe different levels of achievement.

While this is true at one level, what is also clear is that schools that were reporting against the standards were nearly all using scales that were the same or a variant on the Ministry’s four point scale. What was not being used was the less labelling type of reporting that doesn’t “merely comply with NAG 2A [but] also meet[s] the intent of the NZC” (“Reports to Parents”, 2010). This is an important issue that we return to in Section 5. In the meantime, it is enough to note that the MTL report does not tell us whether the Ministry could be pleased that 54% of schools were describing achievement against the standards system or concerned that they were nearly all using some variant of the four point scale because it does not provide commentary, only description.

What is also completely missing is the reasoning behind the different approaches being taken by schools. To what extent are they simply a matter of the personal preference of the principal (or

someone else on staff who has influence), perhaps carried over from another school or a chance conversation with a colleague who ‘does it that way’, or do the differences reflect some coherent thinking about how reporting should be done in particular schools and communities? Or a bit of both? It is impossible to understand the diversity of report formats without being more hands on and connecting up report formats with the experiences and outlook of the staff of the particular schools concerned.

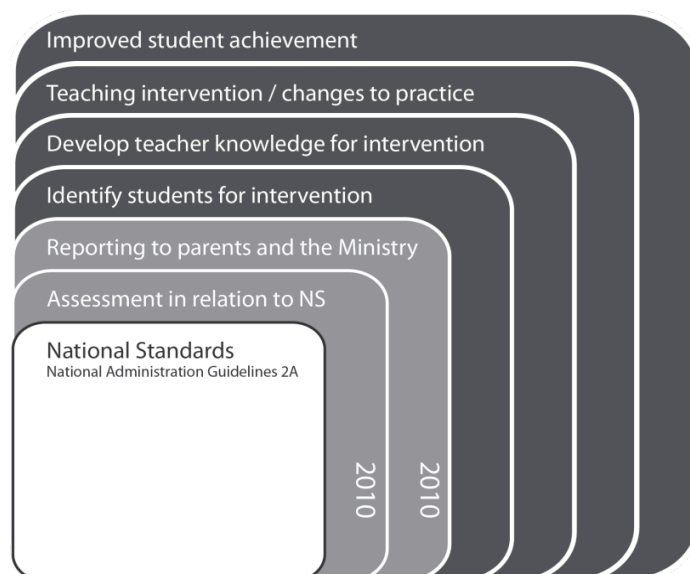
The 2011 MTL report

This report (Thomas & Ward, 2011) is concerned with OTJs and approaches to reporting and is largely based on samples of OTJs and students’ end of year reports. In this respect more of it is like the reporting section of the 2010 report, with the weaker ‘understandings and perspectives aspects repeated but only a smaller part.

The introductory (‘Methodology’) section depicts the implementation of national standards as shown in Figure 1 below. This diagram is described as showing that

... changes in schools can be considered as a series of ripples, arising from the introduction of National Standards and the alteration of the National Administration Guideline 2A. The first change in schools has been a change in assessment practices: teachers are now required to make OTJs about students’ achievement in relation to the standards. This change in assessment has resulted in changes to reporting procedures. The information which schools report to parents has changed, the way in which schools report to Boards has changed, and the way in which Boards report to the Ministry has changed. This can be seen as the second series of effects in schools. (Thomas & Ward, 2011, p. 3)

Figure 1: Anticipated series of effects in schools as a result of the introduction of National Standards (from Thomas & Ward, 2011, p. 3)



As we have already stressed, such a linear model of implementation is deeply inadequate and it takes a particular kind of research to just report this diagram without critique. Nor is there any comment about the difficulties of getting schools to be involved in the research (despite incentives) as reported in the following pages. As with the first report, there is no discussion about why principals or teachers might have chosen to be involved or not. The introduction to this report is also decontextualised, limited to discussion of response rates and caveats around these.

Despite these problems, the following sections on making, moderating and dependability of OTJs provide some useful information, although again what is not discussed is the reasoning behind what is reported and the nature of the specific schools involved, nor, for the most part, what principals and

teachers think OTJs are actually contributing or costing. It is reported that 52% of teachers agreed with the statement “I have better understanding of what students need to be achieving at the level(s) I teach”, while 31% of teachers disagreed with this statement (p. 13). Thirty percent of teachers agreed that they had raised their expectations for the achievement of the students they teach, while 46% of teachers disagreed that this was the case. About half of the teachers said they were spending the same time on assessment as previously and a third said they were spending more time (p. 18). On the other hand, it is suggested that ten minutes or less should be spent on OTJs—on this basis “approximately one-half of the teachers surveyed made OTJs efficiently” (p. 17) while around half of teachers are spending inordinate amounts of time but this is not commented on. There is some evidence of between-school moderation, especially in writing, but whether or not these are new collaborative relationships is not clear. It is also argued that OTJs across reading, writing and mathematics are all being made in line with Ministry data on gender, ethnicity and school decile but that ‘substantially larger proportions’ and ‘larger proportions’ are being rated ‘at’ or ‘above’ in writing and the higher year levels in maths respectively when compared to other Ministry analyses and smaller than expected proportions of students being rated as ‘well below’ in writing (see pp. 27–31). The possible significance of this is not discussed.

The report moves on to reporting to parents; end of year reporting in this instance. In this area a distinction is made between the 21% of reports received that did not mention National Standards at all and the 79% that referred to the National Standards ‘directly’, some of which were deemed sufficient and some not. Again, not discussed by the MTL researchers is whether schools were making any efforts to use less labelling types of reporting. For us, this is important because it signals whether schools are attempting to avoid the demotivating effects of repeatedly assessing students as ‘below’ or ‘well below’ which the 2011 MTL report goes on to suggest is an unintended consequence that 83% of principals find ‘very concerning’. This issue again highlights the need for the ‘backstory’, in this case an understanding of the local context of reporting and what the format of the report is trying to achieve.

Summing up the MTL research

It can be seen from the above discussion that the MTL research is intended to address a range of issues to do with how schools are responding to the National Standards but that it has largely involved gathering a range of particular information in a decontextualised and instrumental manner. It appears the MTL research is unable to speak to the wider debate around National Standards, nor does it seem intended to, apart from a token group of questions around unintended consequences. To be fair to the MTL researchers, it seems from the original Request for Proposals (RFP) for the project that there would not have been a lot of room for manoeuvre around the research design or sampling approach. The same RFP also mentions that the Ministry intended to commission other work that might possibly include more detailed case study work. This possibility should remind us that the problem is not just a question of methodology, of numbers over narratives. Detailed case studies could be just as unsatisfactory if they do not attempt to respond to the concerns that have been expressed in New Zealand about the National Standards and the wider international literatures those concerns generally reflect.

2.5 THE RAINS RESEARCH

This section discusses the RAINS research in broad terms, including the research design, the choice of case study schools and the ethics, quality and politics of the research. Further specifics about our activities over the last year are dealt with in Section 2.6.

Research questions

RAINS is seeking to address the following research questions:

1. How are Boards, senior leadership teams and teachers in different school contexts *enacting* the National Standards policy? (See Section 1 and Section 2.3);

2. To what extent is *performativity* apparent in these enactments of policy? (see Section 1);
3. How does the evidence on policy enactments and performativity in relation to New Zealand's National Standards compare to the international evidence?; and
4. What lessons are there from the research for policy and for practice in schools?

It can be seen that these research questions are informed by the policy enactments work of Ball and colleagues as well as the various other relevant literatures mentioned in Section 1, particularly those that focus on the impact of context and the effects of testing and target-setting in other countries. This is not a 'stacked deck' against a favourable account of the National Standards where this is possible. It is an approach that builds on and is informed by what is known internationally, rather than pretend to set that aside.

Features of the research design

In-depth qualitative research is required to investigate the above questions. The RAINS research design has involved case study research in schools illuminating a wide range of perspectives and practices by drawing on multiple data sources. Case studies are of course studies of singularities but multiple cases allow for some level of generalisation (Basse, 1999; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). They are a 'prime strategy for developing theory which illuminates educational policy and enhances educational practice' (Sikes, 1999). The ways in which Board of Trustees, the senior leadership team and individual teachers are enacting policy as well as responses of children and parents are all being investigated. The views and approaches of other education professionals (e.g., ERO reviewers, regional MoE staff, school support services staff) are also of interest where they are in contact with the case study schools in relevant ways during the period of the research.

Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A) and other recorded and unrecorded discussions form the mainstay of data collection and there is also observation of classrooms and meetings and collection of relevant school documents and student data. Classroom wall displays have also been photographed. It is crucial the research is not just a 'snapshot' but looks at changes in schools over time because the way National Standards are enacted can be expected to emerge and evolve over time and there are new developments in the National Standards policy over time too. At the same time, a longitudinal research design that repeats the same research activities over three years leaves little flexibility for exploring emerging findings. As a result, we will repeat the first year's research activities in the final year but in the intervening year (this year, 2012) will do some more specific investigations (see Section 5) while keeping an eye to emerging developments through occasional interviews with principals.

Another important feature of the research has been the involvement of an experienced teacher from each school—the RAINS 'lead teachers'—in the RAINS research team. These teachers—generally APs or DPs—were chosen by the schools and have a role in facilitating the progress of the project in their respective schools, provide advice on matters such as the contexts of each school, the best areas to explore and questions to ask and whether emerging findings fit with their experiences in the setting under discussion. The lead teachers met as a team early in 2011, will meet again during the project, and may also be involved in the dissemination of the research findings at the end of the project.

The RAINS project aims to provide rich descriptions of how schools are enacting the National Standards. It generates internal validity through a 'chain of evidence' approach that allows readers to make their own judgements as to the plausibility of research claims. A 'chain of evidence' approach provides "a tight and interconnected path of recording evidence so that the reader who was not present to observe the case can follow the analysis and come to the stated conclusion" (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998, p. 159). For the RAINS project, data is being collected to refute or support existing theories and to add to them if possible. This implies comparative analysis within and across schools and also provides many themes to structure the analysis. At the same time, the analysis has needed to be sensitive to differences between New Zealand and the overseas contexts that have produced many of the previous research findings and open to considering the implications of these differences.

The RAINS schools

Six schools were about all that was manageable as case studies given the type of research involved. The key criteria for choosing the schools was diversity. Because of the importance of socio-economic contexts, as discussed in Section 1.3, we decided the case studies should comprise two low decile, two mid decile and two high decile schools. We were also looking for diversity in terms of rural/urban, primary/intermediate and ethnicity, including at least one school serving a high Māori intake and preferably grappling with Ngā Whanaketanga. We also thought it better to choose schools that were generally well-regarded and without known staffing or other problems that could hinder the research. Finally, because of the politics of the research and the way it was being funded by the NZEI, we wanted to avoid schools where boards or staff were known to be strongly opposed to the National Standards.

Possibilities for case study schools were discussed with members of the RAINS national advisory group, as well as with a few principals who were particularly well placed to know schools in their areas. In the event, the first six schools approached all agreed to participate. They were

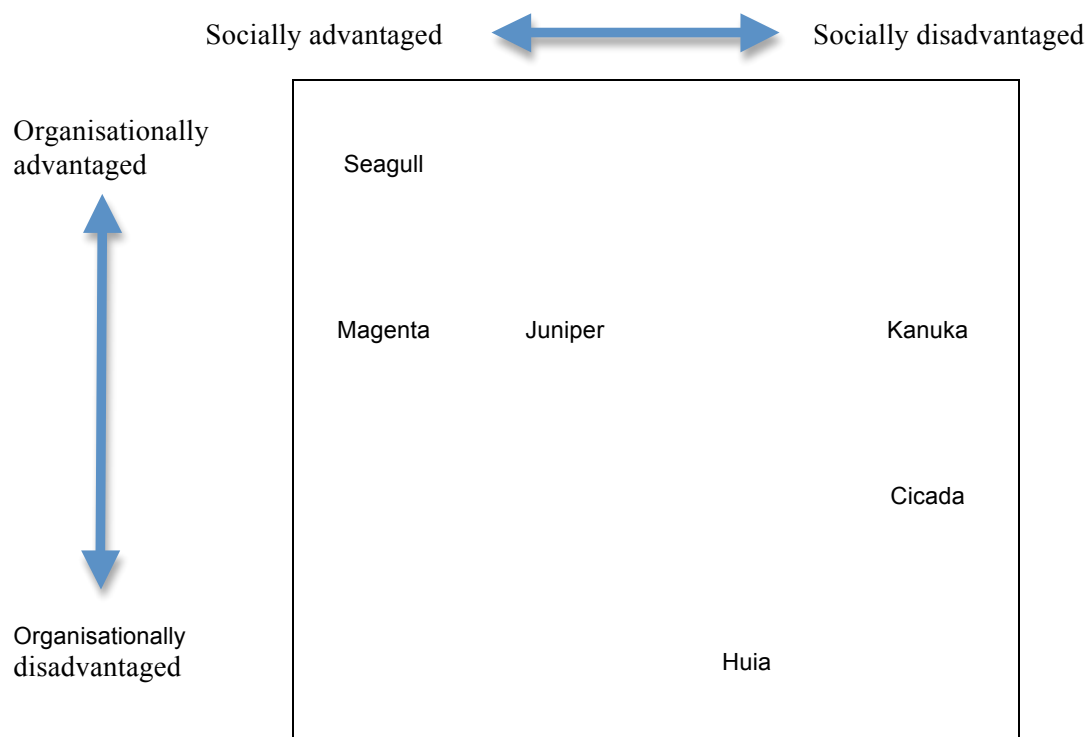
- Seagull School: A large high decile Year 0–6 suburban school. About 65% NZ European/Pākehā, 12% Māori, 23% Asian;
- Kanuka School: A large low decile Year 0–6 suburban school. About 70% Māori. Transience 25%+pa. About 40% of children in total immersion or bilingual classes. Total immersion (Level 1) classes use Ngā Whanaketanga while bilingual classes (Level 3) use National Standards;
- Juniper School: A small mid-decile Year 0–6 school in rural location about 10 minutes drive from nearest town and an hour's drive from nearest city. 20% Māori. Parents nearly all involved in farming;
- Magenta School: A high decile Year 0–8 school with a mainly New Zealand European/Pākehā intake in a rural location about 30 minutes drive from nearest city. Parents a mix of commuting professionals on lifestyle blocks and local farmers;
- Cicada School: A large low decile Year 0–6 suburban school. About 20% Māori, 40% Pasifika and 30% Asian. About 80% ESOL; and
- Huia Intermediate: A large mid-decile suburban intermediate. Intake draws from numerous schools. About 30% Māori, 40% NZ European/Pākehā and the rest extremely diverse.

We found out in our first meeting with the principal at Cicada school that it was actually a BTAC school, quietly but strongly opposed to the National Standards. We decided to keep it in the sample anyway as a school—one of six—that could highlight issues faced by schools that overtly contested the National Standards. As it turned out, involvement in RAINS was hardly what Huia Intermediate needed as it went through a stressful and time-consuming staffing analysis in 2011. However, this could not be anticipated when we selected this school and it served to highlight for us that many schools will be grappling with other serious problems at the same time as they are enacting the New Zealand standards system.

Figure 2 below may help readers begin to think about the positioning of the six RAINS schools in relation to the National Standards. This illustrates that schools' enactments of the National Standards are very much coloured by both their social or situated contexts (such as intake and community characteristics) and their organisational contexts (such as school type, stability of staffing and leadership and recent approaches to curricula, pedagogy, assessment and professional development). It is important to note that we are not making judgements on school quality in Figure 2 but arguing that, cumulatively, these factors create more or less advantaged positionings for enacting the National Standards. At the top left, Magenta, Juniper and especially Seagull School are high SES schools that were also well positioned in terms of their organisational contexts to enact the National Standards. To the right of the diagram are low SES schools that are disadvantaged in terms of their social or situational contexts although Kanuka School, in particular, is quite well-positioned in organisational terms. Huia Intermediate is the most disadvantaged overall. With a fairly disadvantaged social context and a less cohesive and less ready organisational context than any of the other schools, it was clearly

going to struggle the most to respond to the National Standards, whether it chose to ‘comply’ or to ‘contest’ them.

Figure 2: Contextual positioning of the RAINS schools in relation to National Standards



It is also important to explain the way these case studies are being used in this report and in the RAINS project as a whole. If it is accepted that there are numerous kinds of contextual differences between schools, then it will be clear that any RAINS school can only be seen as partly like other schools that share similar intakes, locations or forms of provision. The claim made for the RAINS schools here then is not so much that they are representative, but that they illuminate a range of important themes and issues that should be considered in relation to other schools enacting the National Standards. Put simply, themes and issues raised by individual RAINS schools can alert us to issues that are likely to be relevant to many other New Zealand schools as well.

Ethics and quality

The RAINS project has made applications and gained approval from the Faculty of Education Research Ethics committee three times over 2010 and 2011; one for the research in the RAINS schools, another for the ERO-related elements of the research and one specifically for the research involving interviewing children and parents (see Section 2.6 for details). Key ethical principles include ‘doing no harm’, informed consent and confidentiality and each has required careful consideration. For instance, all those associated with the project at every level understand that however identifiable particular cases might be in a small country, research ethics require that the schools or individuals involved are on a strictly need-to-know basis and are otherwise not up for discussion. The research team has used letter codes in discussion of the schools from the outset; these have been converted to pseudonyms for this report. Lead teachers have been aware of the schools involved and the individuals involved in their own school but have not been privy to all the data collected from those individuals.

University research nowadays involves many checks and balances on the quality of research, apart from ethical approval. The RAINS project has benefited from high-calibre academic advice from both a national advisory group and an international reference group (see Appendix B) as well as from the

academic and administrative services provided by the Wilf Malcolm Institute for Educational Research (WMIER). The national group met for a day in August 2011 to discuss the RAINS research and some members of both the national and international groups have provided comment on drafts of this report. Another kind of quality assurance has been provided through the lead teachers and principals (and in some cases others in the schools) providing comments on drafts of the case study of their schools until an agreed version was reached¹⁸. While this was a time-consuming process, it has also been very helpful for correcting significant inaccuracies and ensuring some of those closest to the cases could recognise their schools in the text. Finally, we are grateful for feedback provided at conferences and public seminars during the year¹⁹; these have invariably provided some food for thought.

Politics

Research is political in many senses despite the popular conception of it being ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’. Most obvious, perhaps, research findings may be used to support some kinds of policies and practices over others. This is very much the case in education as a relatively applied field where researchers are often doing research in order to directly or indirectly inform education policy and practice. Decisions around methodology and theory also involve political stances when they open up or shut down certain ways of relating to research participants and the chances of particular kinds of research findings. The wider politics of the times also tends to colour what gets researched and what gets overlooked. While academics have sometimes reflected on the politics of educational research (e.g., Ball, 1997; Fitz, 1999; Grace, 2000), research reports rarely provide much discussion of the politics of the research carried out. We have already seen that this is the case with the MTL reports as well.

What we have chosen to discuss in this report are research politics that have impacted on the RAINS project more than usual because of the politics around the National Standards. In the first instance, the context of the NZEI being in dispute with the Ministry over the National Standards and the Ministry being almost the only funder of New Zealand education research made it difficult to get approval for the RAINS research at the University of Waikato as it made the University’s senior managers cautious about committing to the research.

Second, as soon as the RAINS research was announced in February 2011, there was immediate criticism of its ‘independence’ by the ‘Whaleoil’ and ‘Kiwiblog’ bloggers (Slater, 2011; Farrar, 2011a) because the first author had already been publicly critical of the National Standards and supportive of the NZEI and NZPF campaign against them (see ‘About the authors’). Unfortunately, a press release put out jointly by the University of Waikato and the NZEI got written up by some media outlets (e.g., 3 News, NZPA) as the NZEI funding ‘independent’ research although this was never claimed in the project press release or on any other occasion.

Indeed, had Slater and Farrar looked into the issue further, they would have realised just how difficult the issue of research ‘independence’ is in a small country like New Zealand. For instance MTL, described in the Ministry fact sheet as “an independent evaluation company” (Ministry of Education, 2010b), actually develops and operates the nzmaths website on TKI (<http://nzmaths.co.nz>) under contract to the Ministry of Education. Moreover, MTL’s principal researcher, Gill Thomas, was involved in writing the Mathematics National Standards. We are making a wider point than the bloggers’ hypocrisy of criticising RAINS while ignoring the lack of ‘independence’ of the MTL research. Vince Wright, lead writer of the Mathematics National Standards, was at the University of Waikato until recently. Sue Douglas, lead writer of the Reading and Writing National Standards, has worked closely with Sue Dimmock who is on the advisory group for our project, most of whom have taken up a range of roles for the Ministry over the years. The second author of this report is no longer working on the RAINS project as she is working on a PLD contract funded by the Ministry. New

¹⁸ An exception was Huia Intermediate where fieldwork ran later than the other schools but the school allowed an unchecked case study.

¹⁹ Included papers given at the PPTA professional conference, Wellington, April 19; Symposium on Assessment and Learner Outcomes, Wellington, Sept 1; British Educational Research Association conference, London, September 7; New Zealand Association for Educational Research conference, Tauranga, November 30. Public seminars in Morrinsville, August 11 and Thames, August 18.

Zealand's few educational researchers create networks within which is it impossible to be really independent and these networks are heavily influenced by the only major educational research funder, the Ministry of Education. Researchers in other countries have access to more funding streams and so are less dependent on any particular one of them.

Slater and Farrar (c.f., Cox, 2011) also seem to be implying that academic researchers should be silent on matters that involve their expertise if they are researching in the area. This is another more complex matter than they allow for because academics have an advocacy role as public intellectual or 'critic and conscience' as well as a research role, a tension we return to below. There is perhaps a further assumption in the blogging that a more 'neutral' researcher would do a better job but this idealised researcher would need to be naïve of relevant research or they would have inevitably developed a view. In fact, it is the first author's immersion in research around the lived effects of policy in schools in New Zealand and elsewhere that has provided direction to the RAINS research (see 'About the authors').

Also relevant here was an editorial in the *Waikato Times* in April 2011 which described the first author as a 'union hired gun' because the RAINS research was funded by the NZEI ('Hired gun in crossfire', 2011). One reason this editorial was off-beam was that if academics are going to be called 'hired guns' for doing external research contracts then we have legions of such individuals at the University of Waikato and at every New Zealand university. Moreover, had the *Waikato Times* bothered to make enquiries, they would have revealed that the first author approached the NZEI about funding the RAINS research, not the other way around. They would have also shown that he was publishing his concerns about the National Standards long before any involvement with the NZEI on the matter (e.g., Thrupp 2007, 2008); this is hardly the stuff of a 'hired gun'.

Had the *Waikato Times* been more searching it could have noted that a relatively large educational research project being funded outside of the Ministry was an unusual thing and queried why it was happening. In fact, given the nature of the MTL research already discussed, it is easy to see why the NZEI wanted to fund research on the National Standards. The NZEI was rightly concerned that research on the National Standards would become framed by narrow Ministry agendas and concerns, rather than properly open to other issues raised by the international literature. Far from only wanting to commission 'biased' research, the NZEI was confident that a wide-ranging research approach would vindicate many of its concerns about the National Standards. It was therefore happy to support the collection and analysis of many kinds of evidence about the impact of National Standards on teaching and learning. The NZEI's main requirements were that the research be longitudinal, rather than a snapshot, offer a rich qualitative picture, be well informed by existing research and scholarship and that the research would allow for the close involvement of teachers. Throughout the first year of the research, the NZEI has maintained an appropriate distance from the RAINS research, receiving progress reports but never trying to influence the direction of the research or research findings. Indeed, the NZEI is much more 'hands off' around the RAINS research than the Ministry would be of its research contracts. Ministry RFPs (requests for proposals) tend to have some fairly specific requirements and there are also stronger contractual requirements around permission to publish, which do not apply in the case of RAINS.²⁰

The *Waikato Times* editorial followed an article in which the first author was criticised by Anne Tolley ("Tolley slams biased course", 2011). This mentioned his involvement in the RAINS project and criticised him for 'biased' teaching about National Standards in a university class, claiming it had led to students being "let down", "clearly distressed" and "deserv(ing) to be treated with respect". Tolley's comments in this article set a dangerous precedent as they involved a Cabinet Minister publicly smearing an academic's work on the basis of scant evidence (and evidence that is contradicted elsewhere²¹). There were 86 students in the class and Tolley was criticising the teaching

²⁰ We have requested a copy of the contract the MTL researchers would have had to sign.

²¹ A course evaluation done by the University's Teaching Development Unit on April 15 2011 asked students in this class to rank statements on a scale of 1-5 (1 being best, 5 being worse, response rate of 69%). In this survey the statements 'This teacher made me feel safe to express my views', 'This teacher listened to my views', 'This teacher was responsive to student concerns' and 'Overall, this teacher was respectful of me as a learner' all received means of between 1.5 and 1.8. The paper outline also provides ample evidence of a more generous approach to the debate over National Standards than the public were led to believe. Assignments allowed for multiple perspectives and the students were advised to look for "Discussion of

on the basis of hearsay evidence from four students. It is all too easy for academics to be attacked in this way as students can be dissatisfied with a paper for all sorts of reasons, which may include the calibre of their course but may also include challenges to their politics or beliefs. There are well-publicised channels for student complaints in tertiary institutions.

Tolley's argument about 'biased' teaching also suggests little understanding of the purpose of a University where it is an important matter of 'academic freedom' for academics to pursue challenging and sometimes unpopular lines of argument if they so choose (Grey, 2011). As Edward W. Said put it

... the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. (Said, 1994, pp. 11–12)

Where there are tensions between 'different' aspects of academic life, such as advocacy and research, these need to be considered and managed rather than any part of the role dropped altogether. Timing is perhaps part of the solution; for instance, during the RAINS research the first author has necessarily been less involved in speaking about the National Standards and more involved in 'listening' to the cases of the RAINS schools. As the research comes to a close, advocacy will become more important again, adding what has been learnt from RAINS to the international picture that informed earlier work. But there are also a multitude of specific decisions involved. For instance, in 2011 we turned down speaking engagements in areas where the RAINS research is being undertaken. There was no specific requirement to do so but it seemed sensible from a research perspective to avoid our views dominating the discussion space in the RAINS schools.

Turning to the politics of actually undertaking the research, we mainly chose 'compliant' schools for the study, only getting a BTAC school by chance. Reasons why the schools may have participated included getting potentially useful feedback on school processes, accessing a form of professional development, and an opportunity for 'speaking back' to the National Standards policy and contributing to primary education in New Zealand. At the same time, it was soon clear that all of the schools were proud of what they offered. Having been assured around matters such as workload, it was probably as much a case of 'why not?' as having any particular rationale for involvement.

For the most part, the involvement of schools in the research went smoothly over 2011, thanks largely to the expertise of the lead teachers. None of the adverse media coverage mentioned above caused any problems for carrying out the research. We did not have anyone in the schools raise any concerns or withdraw from the study on account of the coverage and, where it was mentioned, it was dismissed as 'political mischief' rather than something that needed to be taken seriously. Concerns were expressed in the two rural schools, Juniper and Magenta, that parents might not like the schools being involved in research that was questioning government policy. This came to a head when the schools were asked to contact some parents to get permission for their children to be interviewed and for parents themselves to be interviewed, if possible. In the event, there were no issues raised by parents but these schools' sensitivity to parent opinion illustrates how small rural schools may feel particularly vulnerable to becoming out of favour in their small, highly connected communities if they upset influential individuals. This is no imagined threat. Since local education boards and inspectors were removed by the Tomorrow's Schools reforms more than 20 years ago, there is little support available for schools that become offside with their communities and there have been various cases of principals and Boards resigning as the position of their schools in the community becomes untenable.

Giving the senior leadership teams (SLTs) their draft case studies back for comment and revision was another point at which the politics of the National Standards was felt. It was recognised by SLT members that the standards system was a contentious issue amongst primary schools and teachers and they were often keen to revise comments made in interviews that on paper seemed to be too judgemental about the stances of other schools or organisations such as the NZEI, NZPF or BTAC and

national standards on following websites – Ministry of Education, National Party, New Zealand Principals Federation, NZEI, PPTA, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Stuff, Herald, Listener, Red Alert (Labour Party) etc.”.

might damage external relations. They were notably less concerned about being seen as ‘on message’ with government policy, perhaps because they had complied with the Ministry’s formal requirements or in the case of Cicada school had been openly opposed to the National Standards policy in any case.

2.6 RESEARCH APPROACH IN 2011

The first year of the RAINS research has largely involved gaining access to the schools, trying to understand the complexities of the school contexts into which the National Standards are being introduced, how they are being introduced into those contexts and what people in and around the schools in different roles think about this development.

The research to date was undertaken in several phases over late 2010 and during 2011. Gaining access began by preparing written materials and holding meetings with principals over November and December 2010. In three schools we spoke to staff and in one met with the Board. Consent forms were distributed to staff and Boards. Between December and early February we then interviewed each principal regarding the contextual features of their school and each school’s response to National Standards to date. Principals of the RAINS schools were each asked to nominate a lead teacher to be part of the research team and all met for a day in March. In March and April there was another round of interviewing, this time with lead teachers and cohort teachers. In Terms 2 and 3 (May–August 2011) we interviewed most other teachers in each of the schools, board chairs and sometimes other board members, reinterviewed principals and spent a day in each of the cohort classrooms with follow-up. The last part of Term 3 and Term 4 (August–December 2011) was largely taken up with interviewing parents and children and getting feedback from schools on the draft case studies. In total, we spent 115 half days in the schools (including time on phone interviews with parents) between December 2010 and December 2011, with 26 half days spent in the cohort classrooms. We also amassed 242 recordings of interviews or discussions.

The focus of research activities within schools

At the ‘whole school’ level, the study has been investigating the characteristics of the community and intake served by the school, the reputation it enjoys, the way it has approached curriculum, assessment and reporting and PLD, as well as the way the school is organised, led and governed; observations within the schools while we have been there have also been important. At the classroom level, we have focused on particular ‘cohort’ classes at both junior and senior levels, as indicated in Table 2 below. For each of these classes, we have an account from the teacher in each school about what they do on a day-to-day basis in their classes, a small amount of general classroom observation (a day in each of these cohort teachers’ classes) and interviews with children and parents. The intention is that, with the exception of Huia Intermediate, most of the children at these levels will still be in the schools in 2013 so we can have a follow up interview with the children to see whether their perspectives have shifted and whether the National Standards are looming larger in their awareness. We can also re-interview the teachers interviewed this year, as well as interview some of the teachers of the classes the cohort children end up in 2013.²² The same process will be undertaken at Huia Intermediate but this will have to be in 2012 as the cohort children will have left this school to go to secondary school by 2013.

²² In smaller schools, children are likely to all have the same teacher in 2013 but this will probably be a different teacher to 2012. In larger schools, the children are likely to be spread across a number of classes and we will only interview some of their teachers.

Table 2: Cohort Classes at the RAINS Schools

School/Type	Cohort Class 1	Cohort Class 2	Cohort Class 3
Cicada School Contributing primary	Y1	Y4	
Huia Intermediate Intermediate	Y7	Y7	
Juniper School Contributing primary	Y1/2	Y3/4	
Kanuka School Contributing primary	Y1/2	Y2/3	Y2/3/4 Bilingual class
Magenta School Full primary	Y1	Y6	
Seagull School Contributing primary	Y0/1	Y4 GATE class	

Against all of this contextual background we have then explored the introduction of National Standards to varying extents and in varying ways in each school. We have asked questions about the approach to National Standards in each school of principals, boards, lead teachers, cohort teachers, children (where appropriate), parents and ERO reviewers. In all the schools we have also interviewed most teachers about the National Standards, allowing perspectives from across the school.

To summarise, for each school we have collected the following data

- recorded meetings with lead teachers going into the specific details of curriculum, assessment, reporting and PD over last few years;
- multiple recorded or unrecorded interviews and discussions with principals;
- interviews with two cohort teachers in each school (three at Kanuka);
- field notes from a day observing in each of the cohort classes and recorded follow up discussions;
- interviews with some children in each of the cohort classes and some of their parents (discussed further below);
- short interviews with most other teaching staff in each school;
- interviews with the board chair and sometimes other board members;
- notes or recordings from some other relevant school meetings;
- documents including charters, annual plans and samples of student reports and how these have been changing over recent years;
- school websites and newsletters;
- photographs of wall displays in each cohort class; and
- interviews with ERO reviewers (Cicada School and Juniper School only at this stage, discussed further below).

From all of this material, we are well-placed to have a broad understanding of each school and how it has approached the problem of introducing National Standards and the related experiences and perspectives of the Board, senior staff, teachers, children, parents and ERO reviewers. In this report, the Seagull School case study in Section 3 reports more of the kind of data we have collected for each of the schools but it still does not cover the cohort classrooms, teachers, children and parents, nor the views of ERO reviewers. There are processes in all of the schools that require further investigation and we will move into these in 2012 as part of the range of matters discussed in Section 5.

Interviews with children and parents

As noted above, individual interviews with children in each of the cohort classes were conducted during Term 3 and Term 4 of 2011. Teachers were asked to choose about half of the children in their class to participate in the research and an informal letter was sent home to parents by the school asking for permission to allow their child to participate in the research and inviting parents to take part also. Further information about the research, consent forms for children and parents and examples of possible interview questions were then sent home to parents who expressed interest. Where schools found it difficult to recruit children and parents for the research, this process was repeated with the remainder of the class until there were sufficient participants.

Ninety-one children ranging in age from 5.3 years to 12.3 years were interviewed across the six RAINS schools (see Table C1, Appendix C). Teachers had been asked to try and ensure some diversity: 'a mixture of boys/girls, ability levels, ethnicities, family backgrounds, etc.' and it can be seen from Table C2 and other tables in Appendix C that this was a reasonably successful strategy, except that few children being judged 'below' or 'well-below' were interviewed. This is something we will try to address in 2012 by finding out in the first instance what proportion of students are actually being judged as being in these categories in the schools and then looking at what can be done to get interviews with more such children (and their parents).

The interviews were conducted during regular class time and each school made available a suitable space for the researcher to use, such as a meeting room or resource room that was familiar to the children. Prior to the start of the interview, children were asked to give verbal assent to talk to the researcher and for the conversation to be audiotaped. As recommended in the literature, the interviews utilised a semi-structured format to enable the researcher to explore children's responses in greater detail (Cameron, 2005). Children's individual portfolios were used as a prompt for discussion to obtain relevant insights into their perceptions of themselves as learners (Bray, 2007; Danby, Ewing, & Thorpe, 2011). At Seagull School, children in the Year 4 cohort class were trialling electronic portfolios and these were viewed and discussed on the school's intranet system. At Cicada School learning portfolios were not used, so children were asked to bring their mathematics book, their story writing book, and a book they were reading currently to talk about with the researcher. Most of the children engaged willingly in discussion about their learning experiences at school and older students, in particular, appeared to be quite knowledgeable about their progress and achievement. Classroom teachers were also asked to provide standardised achievement data in reading, writing and mathematics for each of the children who were interviewed and to estimate whether they were working 'at', 'above', 'below' or 'well below' the National Standard in these curriculum areas.

The interviews with parents were organised by the lead teacher and/or office staff at each school. This arrangement signalled that the research was 'approved' by the school and helped to make parents feel more comfortable about speaking to the researcher about their child's experiences at school. Altogether, 33 parents (4 fathers and 29 mothers) were interviewed across the six case study schools with parents from the low SES schools less willing to participate in the research (see Table C1, Appendix C). Again, this is something we will need to come back to in 2012. Most parent interviews were conducted at school, generally in the morning or afternoon when parents dropped off or picked up their children from school. Some interviews (n=9) were carried out by telephone (via Skype), usually in the evening. All of the interviews were recorded and used a semi-structured format (see Appendix A). There was sometimes an overlap between the parent interviews and other interviews conducted in each school. For instance, at Huia Intermediate one of the participants was also a relieving teacher at the school and, at Kanuka School, one of the participants was also interviewed as a member of the Board of Trustees. Although parents were very willing to discuss their children's experiences at school, most of the participants admitted that they had very little knowledge or understanding of the National Standards policy. This initial report does not include any material from the interviews with children or parents.

ERO interviews

Asking ERO reviewers about their approach to reviewing National Standards has been part of understanding the external pressures schools are coming under which may influence their approach to

National Standards. As a group collecting data about schools, it was considered that ERO might also be able to provide contextual insights into the RAINS schools that would be useful for the project. ERO does not have a history of allowing reviewers to participate in research but was agreeable to us interviewing some local ERO reviewers and accessing ERO data by working with a member of the evaluation services team providing we met various provisos such as only interviewing reviewers after their reviews and getting specific consent from the RAINS schools principals and boards. Having met these (not unreasonable) requirements we held recorded interviews with ERO reviewers for the schools reviewed in 2011 (Juniper and Cicada schools). We also met with ERO senior managers to discuss and better understand ERO's approach to the National Standards. This initial report does not include any material from these ERO interviews or meetings.

Data analysis for this first report

Our concern has been with rich description of the schools and their perspectives on the National Standards in the first instance, after which we have looked for issues and themes related to claims around the National Standards and the wider literatures drawn on. This has involved working with the interviews and other materials until we have reached a point of data saturation or are at least satisfied we have an case study that is relevant and comprehensive enough to be seen as a good account by the schools themselves as well as being informative for readers. With over 240 recorded interviews or discussions, full transcription has been limited to interviews and discussions with SLT and Board members²³ while other recordings have been selectively transcribed. There are advantages both ways (Nisbet, 2006) but some selectively transcribed recordings may eventually be fully transcribed to allow use of data analysis software such as NVivo.

²³ An exception was Juniper School where full transcripts were not available early enough for this report.

3.0 SEAGULL SCHOOL

As indicated in Figure 2, Section 2.5, Seagull School was the most advantaged for introducing the National Standards. It had the most advantaged intake and was also the best positioned organisationally to respond to the standards system. Seagull School had made the most of its advantages over many years to generate a very high performing school culture where able children were extended and struggling children were picked up and given extra support. Given this background there were comparatively few challenges involved in the National Standards and publicly resisting them had never been seriously considered. Nevertheless the SLT, Board and staff were all concerned that the standards system represented a unfavourable distraction from the more specific assessment and reporting the school had already been doing. Seagull School raises the following issues, which are discussed further in Section 5.0:

1. How New Zealand primary schools may be relatively coherent.
2. How existing high quality processes in schools may be compromised by National Standards.
3. Schools using the National Standards categories for reporting even when staff have deep reservations about the effects of labelling.
4. Between-school comparability of judgements around the National Standards.
5. Existing tensions between curriculum ‘basics’ and ‘frills’ and the academic and social/pastoral purposes of schooling and how National Standards may exacerbate these.
6. Teacher workload and opportunity costs.
7. Resources and their use to support learning.
8. The responses of middle class parents to the National Standards.

3.1 ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Intake, community and reputation

Seagull School is a large (600+) primary school that has remained a decile 10 school, despite being located in an ageing suburb. While the staff at this school readily acknowledge the advantages that come with its middle class intake, compared to others, they also typically point to some elements of student diversity, arguing that it is not realistic to have the intake stereotyped as being entirely straightforward from a teaching and management point of view. Hence, the children (about 65% European/Pākehā 12% Māori and the rest from a variety of Asian backgrounds) are described as ‘generally well prepared and certainly positive about school’ but also ‘increasingly varied in ethnic and even socio-economic terms’ (Principal). There are also problems caused by busy working couples: ‘even some [children] with working parents are not better prepared for school, it depends on their family situations’ (Principal). Transience is negligible. In terms of special needs, Seagull School has only two children who qualify for ORS funding and, at any one time, typically ‘a couple’ of children who receive support from the RTLB service and ‘about four children on Reading Recovery’ (Principal).

The school enjoys ‘good support from our parents but also high expectations’ (Principal), expectations that the school seems to have become very proficient at managing and addressing. The Board surveys parents every year and implements changes as a result of that survey, ‘... we listen to it [although] I have to say, of course, that how you phrase the questions is very important too [as to whether] you get something meaningful from it’ (Principal). Moreover ‘the partnership thing is certainly something that we push, that we talk about...we hold curriculum evenings ... explaining what we do. So the high expectations are there, sure, but we actually put them on ourselves’ (Principal).

Parents at Seagull School have also long expected to be kept informed about student achievement:

We do an annual survey of our parents and I think its probably the socio-economic culture of the community is that parents always want to know how their child is doing

in relation to something, most parents do, they are keen to know where their child is sitting against something, you know, something to compare them against and how are they doing, whereas there might be other schools out there where parents aren't so concerned, so we have always kind of had to do that (Board chair)

Seagull School is over-subscribed and has had a zone in place for many years. Having a zone has stabilised the roll as it is necessary to live in zone or have siblings already enrolled to get one's child into this school. Local schools range from decile 1–10 but zoning in combination with plentiful primary age children in the area has taken much of the heat out of local competition:

... we're supposed to have lost numbers years ago when [neighbouring schools] were built and now they are crowding up and we've managed to hold ... it's the reputation of the school, people know they get a good deal here, and they want to have their kids in the school. (Principal)

A number of staff mentioned involvement in various national roles and trials in a way that suggests Seagull School staff would be well regarded by the Ministry of Education too. It also seems likely that the local ERO office regards Seagull School as 'review—ready' as its last review happened at very short notice when the review of another school was unable to go ahead.

As might be expected from its intake and processes, Seagull School has a longstanding pattern of most students achieving at or above national norms, stages and levels. For instance 2009 numeracy results at or above expected numeracy stage ranged from 89% (Year 5) to 98% (Years 1 and 6). In reading at or above expected reading age, stanine or AsTTle level ranged from 73% (Year 5) to 95% (Year 3). In writing at or above national curriculum levels ranged from 55% (Year 6) to 86% (Year 1). Writing had been the area of most concern leading to multiple changes of practice after revising the school's writing implementation plan in 2008.

Seagull School's favourable reputation does not merely rest on exploiting the benefits of having many children that progress relatively easily. It has for some years been intervening strongly with any children at risk of not progressing well and the school has been using its own funds to develop many kinds and levels of support for addressing learning difficulties in the school beyond the handful of students covered by government funding of special needs. How the school has been able to manage this would be worth exploring further but seems to be a mix of economies of scale, the ability of the principal to 'work the money' and a small amount of extra funding from a benefactor. It is also concerned with extending 'able' children—in this large school there are GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) classes at junior, middle and senior levels of the school. Seagull School also has the benefit of a very experienced senior leadership team who have in turn been able to develop a hard-working and harmonious staff team. It is a school where staff confidence in the knowledge they are part of a strong and successful organisation is balanced by humility around the search for further improvement. It has a pushing, learning-focussed culture where few stones are left unturned and already successful approaches are being continually fine-tuned.

Leadership, staffing and governance

Seagull School's SLT is particularly experienced and at least two of the three have long connections to the school. The principal has been at the school for over 20 years as well as teaching at several other schools prior to that. The two DPs—one with particular responsibility for numeracy, the other for literacy—have extensive local and national involvement in curriculum development in their respective areas. We found all of them well able to articulate what they thought of the pros and cons of National Standards in relation to their perspective on teaching and on being a teaching professional. They had a multifaceted and multi-layered critique of the National Standards, most of it grounded in many years of teaching children. These senior staff have developed sophisticated understandings of what works and what has the potential to work in their school. While they have certainly been listening to the national debates over the National Standards, they are weighing the issues against their own understandings in the first instance.

Beyond the senior leadership team the large (30 +) teaching staff ranges from beginning teachers to staff who had been at the school several decades. The school has rarely had much of a problem

recruiting suitable teachers, it depends on time of year but it has ‘never been stuck’. The mainly female teaching staff are described by the principal as ‘motivated and professional, very much together as a team’ and this was our perception too. It is a school where staff have their own views but where they seem to understand and accept the collective view too. The tone of the staffroom is friendly and caring and senior staff are respected: there are few gripes and little disharmony. One likely reason for the cohesiveness is that all staff are involved in a variety of groups that cut across teaching teams in a way that help to prevent the development of sub-cultures within the staff. Administration and support staff seemed well integrated into the overall staff culture too.

The Board of Trustees at Seagull School have also proved an asset over the years, supportive and searching but without interfering in the management of the school. The current board had a range of people with small business and professional backgrounds including industry training, accountancy and surveying. They were interested in assessment data and keen to know where they could put resources to help improve the school.

Curriculum, assessment and professional development

In some respects Seagull School offered a very broad primary curriculum. Apart from numeracy and literacy, areas such as environmental education, science, health and PE, creative thinking, Māori, social sciences, the arts, digital learning, languages and technology were all recognised in annual plans and catered for in integrated curriculum units focussed on some ‘big idea’ such as ‘identity’ or ‘culture’ (‘Understanding By Design’ approach), on top of which the school offered a differentiated curriculum with an optional programme that provided numerous options for children one day a week on a term by term basis (except for school camp term). The optional programme had been in place many years and had come about because staff had been ‘trying to cover all these curriculums and feeling they weren’t doing them all justice’ (Principal). So it was decided that it would be ‘working smarter’ if teachers taught an area of strength and interest about one day a week with children choosing between the various options put up by staff. Parents appreciated the wide choices and ‘personalised learning pathways’ available, for instance, the school offered several languages.

Yet even with the optional programme offering space for the wider curriculum, it would be wrong to underplay the tension between curriculum ‘basics’ and ‘frills’ in this school as elsewhere. For instance there had long been rules around the optional programme where part of that day had to have some writing component in it. Moreover the optional programme served to underline the longstanding pattern at Seagull School that reading, writing and maths were the main foci for most of the week regardless of curriculum integration:

So that one day is curriculum and we track those curriculums and so the children do a different thing each term [but] our big thing is that its literacy and numeracy on all the other days and so that’s what it is, literacy and numeracy. (DP1)

Another key curriculum feature of Seagull School was that, as noted, earlier, there were numerous programmes and forms of intervention to cater for children at different levels of achievement, both extending ‘able’ children and helping those who were struggling, despite the school not being eligible for much ORS or ESOL funding. As one SLT member commented ‘it’s just sort of endless really’. To begin with, the principal regularly ask the board to employ an experienced teacher or two on a short term basis (e.g., a one year contract) to fill some identified target area, arguing that it was more effective to employ someone with the required experience than someone cheaper but with less experience. Second the school had 10 teacher aides, one per teaching team (one senior teacher suggested that this was a lot – at her previous decile 10 school, there had only been one aide to support an ORS-funded child). Children who needed a little extra help got some extra teacher aide time, while children with greater needs were put into targeted programmes such as writing groups for different purposes. One of these had been funded by a benefactor who had wanted their funds to go to struggling learners only. For children who were seriously behind there was a level of additional learning support which involved small groups working with a specialist reading recovery, RTLb or RTLit. Other forms of support included Maths support teachers, a grandparents group of extended family who came and helped in class once a week, buddy groups, and a retired teacher who also helped out.

A further feature of Seagull School was a strong focus on Reception and the early years. As one of the DPs explained:

Our focus is to get them moving, we teach them wherever they are ‘at’ but our philosophy is that success breeds success so the sooner they start to see progress, the more motivated they continue to be. (DP2)

The school had also long taken a considered approach to curriculum, using achievement data to target particular areas for renewed attention. For instance, one of these was the junior curriculum:

That was a target area of ours, was it three years ago, to look at our practice in the first six months to a year of schooling. We were doing OK but we wanted to improve even better so we’ve really looked at those practices and our results show [a big improvement]. We actually do the 6 year Net, we do it six months earlier as well as at six years, after six months [at school] so if there are any problems, any issues we know straight away before they get to the 6 year level, So we know ... just what we need to do to lift those children before it becomes an issue and they’ve been at school two years. So we have been quite proactive in that. (Principal)

While often keen to innovate, the senior leadership team had become more wary about being ‘first cab off the rank’ with new initiatives:

We are definitely looking for best practice all the time in everything we do and every curriculum area [but] I don’t jump quite the same with Ministry things any more because you realise you’ll end up doing all the work and no funding and then suddenly things change and you have to make adjustments ... and you end up thinking ‘why did I jump in this so early?’ (Principal)

Seagull School has for many years had annual targets that feature in charters, strategic plans, annual plans, annual reports and ‘analysis of variance’. In the years leading up to the introduction of national standards, the target was that in reading and maths 95% of children would be at or above an expected level by the end of the year. However this level was not expressed in terms of NZ curriculum levels except in writing. Maths used the Numeracy Project stages; there are 6 of these over years 0–6 rather than the 3 levels of the New Zealand curriculum. In reading it was appropriate level as indicated by chronological reading age in juniors (as indicated by observational surveys and running records), STAR results in years 3 and 4 and asTTle in years 5 and 6). In other words the targets were there but being related back to whatever was regarded as the most appropriate formative assessment results. In writing up to 2008 there were ‘Seagull School writing expectations’ which were expressed in terms of the NZ curriculum level e.g., ‘By end of year 4 children should be working at or above level 2ii’ but no percentage targets. Instead the target was more general, for instance in 2008 it was to improve competence in surface features. There were similarly qualitative targets for other areas of the curriculum too.

Targets have formed the basis for annual planning and translated into school-wide expectations around assessment, including an assessment timetable, so all teachers know what is to be assessed and why:

For instance in reading we are looking at a variety of assessment practices depending on the age groups of the children ... we’ve got our 6 year Net and ... running records, ... STAR testing when we get to Year 3 ... asTTle testing for years 4 and above, and we also of course use running records throughout those years for formative assessment ... Maths we do numeracy assessment for maths and statistics, but also asTTle, PAT maths for 4-6 and also do that for the other strands we are focusing on, for instance geometry, measurement. In writing, we assess against the national exemplars we take samples and moderate as a staff. (Principal)

Week 3 our staff meeting is our writing moderation.... so you know by then you’ve got to do your writing samples. (Principal)

Teachers have also got data from a variety of other sources including observational surveys, literacy progressions and reading recovery data. All of this assessment has happened at the beginning of each year, teachers then use it to inform what they need to teach. There are ‘learning conferences’ in the middle of the first term where teachers discuss the data with parents and have a plan for next steps.

The senior team have also looked at the overall data and reported to the Board, providing advice about any areas where there's a need to put in more support. The middle of the year has been a kind of check up where in 20-minute conferences with parents, children share their learning and report on progress and set new goals for the next half a year. Teachers have also shared new assessment with parents, focussing especially on reading, writing maths and key competences. Finally at the end of year the assessment tools used at the beginning of the year are repeated to assess progress in each of the key areas and there has also been analysis of variance by gender, ethnicity etc.

Through a constant process of reviewing and trial and error ('lots of tweeking and fine tuning') over many years Seagull School has worked out which assessment tools work best at which level. The general approach was well described by the Board chair:

We were always at our board meetings, our learning report, twice a year I think we do it, was always about how our children are doing and that's always against the norm of, the national norm, of those particular tests. And we had targets, such as, I think we used to work towards 95% of all students being at or above their year level based on some particular test they were doing be it asTTle or STAR or whatever. And they kind of altered over time too, [the principal] might throw in another test that he might do for a particular group or a particular area just to see, you know, in the past, just to see what would work better for reporting to parents about how their child was doing. So we did a lot of that and it was always really good as a parent too, it was great.

There has been a discriminating, purposeful approach to including any new assessment tool:

Last year an innovation was for maths we thought we were getting really good data mid year from our Gloss testing and the numeracy and so on but ... and actually this came through discussion probably from leadership but also the Board as well, about the other strands we do in maths as well as numeracy, 'how do we know if our kids are going off, are there any other weaknesses?' So we decided why don't we give the PAT Maths another try ... we haven't done PAT for years, because they sort of went out of date for a bit and they've been updated. So we actually do PAT in term 2, just before the middle of the year and it's really a snapshot, 'is there anything that's coming through that we need to take a look at, any strand where the level has dropped?' And if it was, we would adjust our planning for the rest of the year. (Principal)

Students have portfolios, which are used in conjunction with their regular exercise books ('we prefer to look at process than a piece of flash writing'). To date the school has mostly kept away from online digital portfolios, these are not seen as a priority although they were being trialled in the Year 4 class observed.

For some years Seagull School teachers have also been doing regular writing samples. There has been a culture of being very specific about the handling of the sample—'this long for motivation, put away brainstorming, no whole class writing first, it's got to be consistent' (DP2). Moderation of the samples was done across the whole school; it used to be in teams but changed to whole school in 2008.

The main approach to reporting at Seagull School since 2008 has been to use a series of continuum charts for reading, writing and numeracy on which teachers circle a child's levels of achievement in relation to reading levels, writing curriculum levels and numeracy stages for Years 0–3 and in relation to running records, asTTle reading, STAR, writing curriculum levels, numeracy stages, and the asTTle test for a particular focus strand in maths Years 4–6. The continuum scales have reflected the specific test or indicator being referred to, for instance reading levels 1–23. In other words, parents have been given a quite specific indication of where students have 'sat' in relation to both a series of nationally-normed tests as well as the more global curriculum levels and stages that indicate achievement in New Zealand primary schooling. The continuums have allowed for reporting of both achievement and progress as teachers have been able to circle where students have been at the beginning of the year and how they have progressed somewhat along the continuum by the end of the year. More generally they have had the advantage that

The parents could see where the child was at, a little bit above or still needed to meet the [age related] target, we didn't state it but it was visual but they could see it and we could talk to them about where to next. (DP1)

It was the SLT that drew up the continuum, they wanted to refine how they were informing parents: 'Parents like to know where their child sits'. Continuums have been provided at beginning and end of the year. There were also mid year goals and parent conferences. There were no written comments by teachers mid year but 6–7 sheets were written by the child and signed by parents and teachers. There was a fuller report with teacher comments at the end of year. As for the Seagull School assessment approach more generally, reports were always considered a working document, with much tinkering with the report format over the years.

A further part of reporting was a culture of 'sharing learning' whereby every term there were learning events in every classroom that reflected the purpose of the optional programme and whatever the chosen 'big idea' was. The children would share or make something to demonstrate learning. This might be a French day or launching a humorous webpage to help sick children at home. This approach was an important expression of home-school relations, with hundreds of parents coming in each term to share children's learning.

Turning now to professional development, there was always some whole-school focus. This used to stem from 'perceived weakness areas' but in more recent times it has been more about making sure the school covers reading, writing and maths and at least one other area as well (the 'other area' in 2011 was *te reo me ngā tikanga Māori*). These whole school focuses have typically lasted two-three years, because 'more than one year is needed to embed practice'. (Principal)

The school was involved in a whole school reading contract 2006–7, followed through with school-organised PD over 2008, turning it into something practical. Then over 2009–10 there had been school-organised writing PD drawing on a range of sources. The numeracy team also has leadership days in maths, making it sustainable in school—all teams have someone from all levels in the team, workshops within the school as well as taking the maths team out for extra training. The numeracy team also got into classrooms and modelled practice, this was regarded as the best PD. Sometimes it was not just for new staff, some others did not get their head around maths, so it was supporting those teachers too, who often asked for help. The main purpose of the two DPs getting into classrooms was to make sure numeracy and literacy programmes were as good as they could be. The school had also been involved in a programme that helped create innovative approaches to classroom practice in order for students to engage in deeper thinking and also developed gifted and talented education. New teachers were released for training. The SLT was always thinking about areas to improve. The school tried to send teams rather than individuals to courses.

Professional goal setting at Seagull School involved the same first goal for all staff around the school focus with a second personal goal that was really different for each teacher. Examples were learning a new language, doing an MA or leadership paper. This was personalised learning, personalised pathways. The principal argued that if staff felt good about themselves as learners, it would translate to their teaching and children's learning would benefit.

3.2 'ON THE FACE OF IT'—THE MOST APPARENT RESPONSES

On the face of it, Seagull School has taken the following actions since 2009 in response to the National Standards policy:

- Becoming informed—they got resources from Ministry, read about the National Standards on websites, in the newspapers, 'it's been everywhere'. The principal went to National Standards-related events and the DPs went to the initial workshops run for school leaders.
- Informing parents—the school ran an information night on the National Standards. There was also information sent out in newsletters and other communications. Not all of this presented National Standards in a favourable light:

I guess when I heard about it, I was just really disappointed, because I almost saw like a backward step for us and I was scared of compromising the good things that we have done and that's how I've communicated about it with parents. Thankfully I put things in our parent survey—are you happy with our reporting system and we got really good feedback. They loved the conferences, if anything we sometimes give them too much information! (Principal)

- Looking at assessment and school expectations against curriculum levels and looking at how that fits in with national standards ‘like I think a lot of other schools have been doing—that’s what schools have been doing, making those adjustments, trying to work with National Standards as they can’ (Principal). In some cases these have involved moving expectations back. For instance reading levels had been 19 and 23 for 7- and 8-year-olds, these got moved back to 17 and 21 respectively. In other cases expectations have had to be raised e.g., Year 5 maths from stage 5 to well into stage 6.
- Some changes to the charter goals. In 2009 with a view to the New Zealand standards system coming in, the writing goal shifted from a qualitative one to a quantitative one. ‘95% of children at year levels are writing at or above their appropriate level according to the Seagull School writing expectations which are in line with the national curriculum’. From 2010 the goals for reading, writing and maths all shifted from 95% to 90%. All the previous curriculum areas are still represented in the 2010/2011 plan.
- At the end of 2010 some moderation of OTJs to decide where students were placed on National Standards, this occurred in teaching teams. As Seagull School already had across-school moderation of writing samples, this hasn’t been a significant development as in some other schools.
- Some changes to reporting. From 2010 the continuums indicating achievement against various indicators continued but what was also starting to feature, were the National Standards, for instance in numeracy ‘by the end of Year 4, students will be achieving at level 2 of the National Standards curriculum’. Points on the continuum were marked and dated. Also creeping in was a stronger indication of where achievement should be at particular years in particular test results e.g., ‘expected levels at Year 4, 5, 6’ or ‘below expected level, at expected level, above expected level’. A separate sheet of comments provided with the 2010 end of year report used the National Standards four point scale of ‘well below’, ‘below’ ‘at’ or ‘above’ standard. There was also some other ramping up of assessment. From 2010 a teacher comment was added into the mid-year reports and the school provided photocopied notes from the mid-year learning conference and created a written report whereas that hadn’t happened previously. The school also began marking continuums at beginning, middle and end of year from 2010 where it had been just circling beginning and end. ‘That changed not because of National Standards but because that’s when we are taking in the data, we may as well share progress with parents.’ (DP2)

3.3 ‘BEHIND THE SCENES’ 1—VIEWS OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM AND BOARD

The SLT at this school offered several different kinds of comments about the National Standards. Some were about the way the school had responded to the standards system and the way the issue was being handled in discussions with staff and Board and other local schools. Also noteworthy was a tension between a discourse that the National Standards were having little effect on the school and the concern that actually they might be having quite an adverse effect or might do so in future. When it came to more general comments about the National Standards, these were nearly all critical but with occasional mentions of understanding the reasoning behind particular features of the policy and redeeming features of it. Despite the positives, the National Standards were generally damned by faint praise and as we shall see later the perspectives of the teaching staff showed the same pattern.

While the three members of the SLT developed similar criticisms of the National Standards, they took up slightly different positions. The principal seemed the most conscious about managing the impact of the New Zealand standards system on staff and children. The two DPs were more prepared to express concern about impact of the National Standards with one of them also the most likely to note points in favour. Comments from the Board chair suggested the Board’s thinking was quite in tune with the SLT. The Board saw little point in overtly opposing the National Standards but questioned the need for them given Seagull School’s history of assessment and reporting.

Overall, this first view ‘behind the scenes’ finds that while there was never any prospect of Seagull School senior staff and Board overtly resisting the National Standards policy, in fact they have

numerous objections to and concerns about this reform, both in terms of process and substance. In particular, they feel the way the National Standards have been imposed is disrespectful of the excellent work the school has already been doing for many years and worried that their high expectations might turn out to be more of a liability than an asset if they are not matched by other schools with which they will be compared. They also raise numerous issues around moderation and reporting and are concerned about labelling, arguing that the labels are very often misleading.

On the schools' response

Seagull School is working with the National Standards despite being unhappy with the policy: 'We are attempting to work with it, we are attempting to make the best of something that's not a good thing' (Principal). 'There was an expectation that we had to start and so we have started and tried different things (DP1). The principal described this as an uncomfortable position to be in:

So it's kind of strange, because we are sort of doing that [making adjustments to fit with National Standards], at the same level the Board knows and I know that they're not really [laughs] There's issues with them basically. (Principal)

I guess we have done a huge amount of double up work around the National Standards. Versus we have this great system in place and then we have to redo it. (Board chair)

So I guess now with the implementation of National Standards we have had to quite change our reporting so we were quite clear on our reporting before and then National Standards have changed how we are going to do it because there aren't those national norms to work towards. So from a board point of view it's gone from being quite clear to, well, the staff have had to do a lot of different sort of work. (Board chair)

The principal and board chair gave a variety of reasons why the school had not overtly contested the standards system. These included a personal preference towards not being overtly political, a view that it would be a waste of time anyway, that it would put the school in a position of having to be covert rather than transparent, and that the community would probably prefer that the school go with the policy:

Lets face it, no matter what professional body you are involved with there are some people who are more politically active. I'm probably not one of those but I respect that is the way they see to bring about change. (Principal)

But at the same time we are professional, we want to do the best job we can, don't go out to be rebellious and not implement things ... but we know what works for our kids and our schools, we have spent years developing our own curriculums and the testing methods that work and building relationships with parents that we can sit down and talk to them about where the kids are at and where they are going [with their learning]. (Principal)

You don't want that feeling that you are hiding something, we have a culture of openness in the school ... I don't know any other way ... If I can't relate with my community and be open and honest with them ... this is not a political statement, this is just me. (Principal)

We never said, 'no we are not doing it', you can't just put your head in the sand, we knew we had to move forward.... The Board and the senior leadership team, it was like, none of us are particularly negative people, you know, so we weren't going to say 'well, we are just not going to do it', it was 'right, we now have to embrace this and how can we still make it work for us as best as we can'. We have been given this, something's been given to you, you have to run with it, its law and I guess the attitude is that down the track there may be a way that, like I guess we are involved in now [referring to interview], we might have a way to advise on it and make it better. (Board chair)

We have always been a positive school and community and I don't think it would be in our community to say 'no we are not doing it.' Because we are a big school, 600 kids and the wider community there's a lot of people, and we do have a lot of involvement

from parents and our community does get involved and is keen to know we are doing the 'right thing'. (Board chair)

Our community would rather we just worked through it and see if we can make it work, you know? (Principal)

We were I guess led by [the principal] who obviously had to implement it and had a view around 'well this is what we have to do and we'll try it'. (Board chair)

Of course it might be different when I start to see some of the results are published ... I keep wondering what is coming up in the future, especially as we get to election time. If they start publishing the results with league tables comparing schools that would be wrong. (Principal)

One of the DPs also noted a range of pressures on the school to comply:

... we have been to the courses and also know that when we had ERO we were asked 'so what are you doing to meet the national standards?' so you know you are going to be asked those things so you sort of want to make a move. (DP1)

And another huge pressure for us probably changing our data was that the government put out that much publicity to parents first, that 'we expect the teachers to be reporting to this' and that all went out without letting us know and so our parents were asking were we meeting the National Standards and so on and so forth because there was a lot of publicity at the start. (DP1)

Yet none of this is simple, for instance while parents including the Board might not want the school to overtly resist the policy, there were also arguments that this was not because they supported the National Standards:

The National Standards one was the most poorly attended [information evening] of the whole lot. We had large numbers to our curriculum nights and about 12 to the National Standards one ... it's just a non-event for them, I think parents actually see through it, they are more interested in their children's learning than the National Standards. We are already telling them enough about achievement and assessment and they can see that. (Principal)

I don't know how, when there's not actually a national standard, how you can report against a national standard, it does not make sense! (Board chair)

For us as a Board it was kind of like understanding how it would affect us, for us it was kind of like 'why do we need that', we were kind of like in our little bubble, 'this is what we do', so why would we be changing something that has been working really well, and we have always had great ERO reports, so we have always been praised or acknowledgement given about what we have done with our reporting or our testing and so it's always like why would we change it? (Board chair)

When it was first brought in there was quite a lot of discussion but there were a lot of unknowns so there wasn't a lot we could talk about initially. It was like, 'well we have to do this, but how are we going to do it?' and a lack of information initially and then over time they have realised there is a lot of misunderstanding and people are confused so there is now more and more information whereas that should have been there from the start. (Board chair)

And going with the policy carried the risk of being seen to agree with it:

Sometimes I think some schools are probably looking at us and saying 'Oh yeah, Seagull School agrees with National Standards' or something. But I also think everyone's got to look at their own situation too. (Principal)

Within the school the main approach with staff was to be transparent with no attempt to defend features of the standards system that were seen to be indefensible:

I've always been upfront and open about [my thoughts] and must say also I promised [the staff] we wouldn't do anything that means we we're going to go backwards in our practices.... The staff are professional and know their stuff and also very committed to the school and kids and so disrupting the great things they are doing is not right. (Principal)

They were a bit bemused by it all at the start ... [and] looking very much to me for leadership as to, is this going to be a whole lot of unnecessary work. (Principal)

No one's *for* National Standards, we just have a general ... 'get on with business' really. (Principal)

Relationships with other local principals around the National Standards also needed to be managed:

We are doing a little bit more collaboration within our cluster anyway because of [some changes] ... maybe we could look at moderating between [schools], even if our curriculum leaders had those discussions, but we haven't done that yet. (Principal)

I hold my breath some times thinking that it could lead to tension (amongst principals), I think it probably is ... There is probably behind the scenes a little bit of feeling from some people expecting everyone to [be more politically active]. (Principal)

It's not always easy to talk in a wider group with all the principals because everyone's doing totally different things and I'm not quite sure how we are perceived you know? ... So there is that bit of tension so it's good just on a local level to talk to a couple of people and find that they are concentrating on their schools and doing the best that they can. (Principal)

The arguments for lack of impact of National Standards

The SLT made various kinds of arguments that National Standards were not yet affecting their school in any substantive way. These included arguments that the New Zealand standards system only required token changes, were not causing conflict, must *not be allowed* to bring change, and most of all, that they pretty much fitted with what the school was doing anyway:

To be honest I could probably talk about what we do without even talking about National Standards because that's just not had an impact on what we do. It's not impacting learning, they don't raise achievement. (Principal)

Only thing was looking at some of those levels in the National Standards, which are not quite right, and there is quite a bit of discussion out there about that. (Principal)

I'm convinced National Standards is making absolutely no difference whatsoever to what we are doing, the only thing is the odd tweaking of this which I don't think alters the learning of the children whatsoever. (DP2)

The National Standards are not a highly emotional, not a conflict thing, on the Board, it's almost like it's not there. (Principal)

I don't think the optional programme will be affected by National Standards, I would like to think not, and hope that's the same in other schools. I feel very passionately about the arts not slipping off, it's always the first one to go, PE never slips but the arts will. (DP1)

As a general rule I suppose, the reading, writing and the maths, we haven't had to change terribly much because we have had very clear expectations in this school which have been there for a long time about what levels children need to reach by the end of this year or by the end of that year or whatever. (DP1)

Once again although it was for National Standards we have always tweaked, it's just something we do, we refine every year and we would have changed something whether National Standards had come in or not. (DP1)

We are not into the OTJ part but teachers here have been making OTJs since I can remember, we just didn't call them OTJs. (DP1)

... we just had to have a good look at the National Standards and try and work out from that what levels they were meaning, which wasn't easy I've got to say, and try and marry them up and make sure we were meeting them. And in some aspects that meant we had to slightly raise our expectations, in other aspects we had to lower [them]. But we were pretty much bang on, only the very odd alteration. (DP2)

Concerns about the impact of National Standards on Seagull School

Despite these arguments that National Standards were not bringing any important changes, in many other ways National Standards-related changes for Seagull School that were problematic, or had the potential to be, were being indicated by the SLT and Board. To begin with it is not just the wording of targets that has changed (from 'expected curriculum level' to 'level'), the percentages have changed as well:

And you see we've altered [the targets in the charter] too, our target used to be 95% we have now brought it back to 90% because you would be a complete idiot to set it as high as you possibly can and then you go 'oh well, we haven't reached our target'. In the [decile 10] school I was in before this, our target was 80%. You just pick a number [It doesn't matter than your target is higher], which is the best school? The school that reaches their target or the school that hasn't reached their target? It's just crazy! (DP2)

... we did 95% because a lot of research says that teachers who have high expectations will move children more, so you want to do that, you want to set [high targets], whether everyone meets it or not but [the National Standards system encourages you to be safe] and it doesn't alter any learning, all it does is cover your back. (DP1)

We have almost dropped our standard a bit, you know even now we have dropped our targets because there's always a bit of a concern that I guess our expectations at Seagull School have always been quite high, if we keep it high are we going to run the risk that we are moderating at a higher level than another school, I'm pretty sure it's 90% now is the target that we use, before it was 95% and quite clear cut whether a child was at their level or not, writing was always a hard one but the staff have done a huge amount of work around that in the last year or so anyway to get some consistency across the school around writing. (Board chair)

We did have quite a bit of discussion around our annual plan, you know, 'well I don't know that we can keep it at that level' (95%), particularly while National Standards is so new, it is around how are we going to go and what is going to happen. (Board chair)

There are also issues around expected levels, tracking student progress and moderation. Although the SLT found the writing National Standards much the same as the school expectations, this was not true of maths or reading. There were also problems around the shift from 'after three years' to 'at the end of year 4' and while there was some sympathy with the reason for this shift, it caused problems that were compounded by the sheer size of the school:

[For numeracy] that was taken from the NZ national norms at that time ... and I had to raise them slightly higher to match the book and I have been a numeracy advisor and I was quite surprised at the expectation. Poor old Year 5 had to really be up ... in stage 6 at some point whereas before there was the expectation they could be in the band from stage 5 to 6. (DP1)

[About reading levels having to come from 19 down to 18 for 7-year-olds] So that didn't make any difference to our teaching, but I had to articulate to teachers, 'this doesn't mean we are not going to try just as hard, just because you only have to, for the government, get them to 18 that doesn't mean we are going to get them to 18 and go 'oh well, we are done'. We have to keep on going, getting them as far as we can. (DP2)

When you are at the chalkface and you are actually trying to do it, certain things become obvious. Like the discrepancies ... when your Year 5s have to be at stage 6 to pass but so do your Year 6s have to be at stage 6. So that's pretty nice for the Year 6 teacher isn't it and not very nice for Year 5 teachers. (DP2)

[There's] the muckiness around the first three years being after this year or this year or this year and then the other years being end of Year 4 [Year 5 and so on]. And it's not until you have to work with the data that you realise this is actually quite a nonsense because you are not even able to compare the same children with the same children at the start of the year and the end of the year. (DP2)

I can see why they have done it. I can see why they thought that would be a good idea. Because it's pretty rough saying ... you're behind the standard even though you have only been at school five months, that's pretty rough, but actually managing the data usefully, that's quite difficult. (DP2)

We also find that with the juniors because it's on their age they are looking pretty good...when you get to end of Year 4 it's a bit more nitty gritty isn't it and we can't help that because we are judging one lot by their age and one lot by year level. (DP1)

And the other thing is we've kind of worked out—and I hope that we're right—we're kind of guessing, and I have checked this with some people on two different National Standards courses so I hope we are right—is that where we measure a child to be below, they have to be a year below. That's my understanding.... And to be well below, they have to be exactly two years below. I actually found it on the website as well, the Ministry website.... So what that does to the year 1 data is that it means it's actually impossible for you to be below until you've turned over six. So that makes that data look a little bit skewed as well. (DP2)

I think it's the fact they have gone with two different systems is confusing ... they needed to do it either one way or the other and personally I think they need to do it end of Year 1, end of Year 2 end of Year 3 because having to work it out the data by chronological age is a nightmare. (DP1)

We recognise that there is no perfect answer ... because if you went to end of Year 1, Year 2, etc the ones that are really disadvantaged are those ones that have only had five months at school ... parents who have children in that age group are always anxious anyway, they are very anxious about how their child's settled in, is their child behind. So the only way I can think is to skip that whole year one. But then ... you are going to have schools who will go 'oh well, no worries, they will get there eventually' and ease up on that year 1. (DP2)

We don't think the people who invented it have been faced with over 600 children's data and having to work it out in two different ways. (DP1)

The size of the school also made within-school moderation difficult and time-consuming and raised questions about the feasibility of Seagull School becoming involved in between-school moderation:

Even moderating within the school is a mission because in a school this size, particularly in writing, which is quite subjective, it's quite difficult to get 30 teachers to all agree that this piece of writing is a level 1iii or this piece of writing is a level 2i. That's quite massive, but that's not just the National Standards, we have been moderating in writing since 2008 at least. (DP2)

It's been interesting in the [National Standards] courses because we meet up with people who have like five classes and they say 'that's fine because we moderate this and do all our OTJs and that' and it's like, 'wow, try that with 30 teachers!'... We've tried to be open-minded. (DP2)

We are thinking about [more samples] but the time [moderation] takes is problematic because to get agreement on the levels, once a term they do their sample, the entire teaching staff turns up here with their writing samples all 600 of them, we lay them out

in a row in their levels then they challenge each other. So I'll walk through and go, 'that doesn't seem to fit there' and talk to the teacher ... so we do all of that. Even after doing that we weren't finding it was exactly right because there are still so many different opinions on little parts of how you judge a sample [gives examples].... So then we collect them up and go through them and that takes us hours. (DP2)

asTTle writing suggesting teachers moderate once a week, that's ridiculous, you simply cannot do that ... you only have to see [us] with all these samples. (DP2)

There were also concerns amongst the SLT about the labelling effects of the National Standards categories, including the way the school had already used them in its reporting and concerns that the strengths of those 'well above' would not be acknowledged.

Say you have a child who might be well below and they get 'yeah you're well below' in everything. What's that going to do to their learning and their whole feeling about being part of a school and being a learner? Whereas if you showing that same child who is well below and ok 'they were here at the start of the year, at the middle of the year they are here and at the end of the year they are here', movement, the parent can see they are well below but the child can see and the parent can see there is actually growth happening. And we just thought that could damage some children and we still think that, that it could be potentially quite hazardous. (DP1)

The end of year report last year, achievement against National Standards, that's just the end of the year and that was because the only requirement was that we had to report to that once at the end of the year, so that's all we did because we don't want to do more than we have to because we don't actually agree with what it does to children, putting them in a box like that. (DP1)

We did talk at length the three of us on quite a few occasions about whether to put [the four-point National Standards scale] on [the continuum part of the reports] ... and then we decided that actually if you look at the data you are getting from here and here [other elements of school reporting which show specific assessment results], this is so much more useful, so much more specific. And the parents of our community are so with it and we know that [from our surveys], they just rave about it so we decided to keep it separate. Because the other thing is you can have a child who is not there [on the National Standards] but very close ... and we were worried about how damaging that can be... so we made a conscious decision to keep it separate and so if parents didn't want their children to have to see it [the section with the National Standards] then they could get rid of it. (DP1)

Most kids will be at or above but it's horrible where there are some kids who have worked their butts off and they are just below, it is a horrible thing to be labelled. I've been waiting for feedback on it; I haven't had anyone come talk to me about any of it. So ... I don't know if we will do that again. (Principal)

In our school because we have GATE classes, why not recognise a child that is achieving [well above], we understand that [well below] is the area the government is worried about but that doesn't mean you don't acknowledge a child that's tried very hard and is achieving. So we had a lot of discussion because we used to recognise 'well above' children, you could see they were way up there. (DP1)

Training in the National Standards was inadequate and this was frustrating, a waste of time and to some extent demoralizing. The SLT found the earliest training sessions pointless while the later subject-specific ones were better but 'still definitely being made up as they are going along'. They found that the facilitators 'just didn't know the answers'. One got told by 'an expert who was involved in writing [the National Standards]' not to worry because 'it would change soon' anyway. Training had also dried up. 'I've had no outside support given since you talked to me last [five months prior].' (Principal)

I just went to the principal's things; they weren't high on my priorities to be quite honest, well especially the first ones because I heard how useless they were anyway.

Then my DPs went [to the workshops] and I guess they came back very disillusioned, they seemed to know more than the people [taking the workshops] although [in excuse of those people] it was all dumped on them at the last minute. (Principal)

We wanted to find out what other schools are doing and that's why we went to those meetings ... and it was like 'This is what's on page one' [of the National Standards booklet]. [The facilitators] wanted our ideas. This was well into the term, everyone had heard [about National Standards] and we needed to know what they were all about and what were parents going to ask us and what the Government was wanting us to do so we had [already] read that book thoroughly! (DP1)

There were also concerns that being more rigorous than other schools could lead to Seagull School being unfairly penalised in the event of league table comparisons

What we are noticing is that across schools they are not actually expecting their kids to be at the same level, we've interpreted it this way, and another school down the road will interpret it slightly differently. And what we are finding is that compared to the other schools we have interpreted it quite hard.... (DP1)

One of the things that's really worried us is because we have interpreted the Standards, how we think and we have lent on the harder side, and also because when we are marking the children we are definitely slightly on the harder side as well, when they go to compare schools we know for a fact that we are marking hard and other schools may not. If we chose STAR for instance for reading as our core assessment, we could show you that 99.9% of children are above the Standard. If we are using asTTle as our core assessment which, we have chosen because we think it's more worthwhile and more robust we are going to show that less of our children are reaching that Standard. And with our writing samples we are not giving our children help at all [with those], we know we are tough with our marking and we are not going to alter that because we don't see the point in saying you are fine and you are done until you know that really they have got it and solidly. But our writing results will often look less than a school that is saying 'well we have given them "some help"'. Which is what the National Standards says you can give but what defines "some help"? (DP2)

General criticisms of National Standards

The SLT and Board chair also made many general criticisms of the National Standards that were not so connected back to Seagull School. These included National Standards being a distraction, the need for more specificity, the need for more targeting of particular underperforming schools or cohorts of students, concerns about poor inter-school comparability, the idea that other schools dealt with so many social issues that the standards system wouldn't address, the effects of league tables, poor consultation and the direction of policy more generally. For instance:

They [teachers] only have so much time, only got so much energy, only got so much enthusiasm you don't want to be sidetracking on something that's almost a waste of time and doesn't directly improve children's learning. (Principal)

The main thing that worries me is how much money is being pushed into this and to what effect, because to me it doesn't matter how many times you measure the pig it's not going to make him grow and this is just a different 'measuring pigs' technique really. (DP2)

I don't think [parents] quite understand that part of it [the way other forms of assessment translate into the National Standards] whereas if you show them the assessments you are using, 'this is what the tests show us, this is how your child is going and this is what the next steps are.' And like with asTTle, this is a NZ referenced test here, so, you know they can see it, why do you have to find something else that is so subjective. (Principal)

It's almost an insult, it's like 'you are not doing anything, one size fits all, whether you're a good school that's [got good assessment practices] or not'.... It is an insult ... and why not just look at the schools that are underperforming? Why are they underperforming? Are they not using good assessment procedures and reporting to parents, talking to parents? Give them some help to put good practices in place. (Principal)

Going back, it would have been great if they had reviewed all the schools and for those schools with some sort of testing tools in place, some kind of standards already in place that they were using, to go 'OK guys, you carry on, we are at least going to get the schools that are doing nothing up and running and into a model that we are going to develop and then see how we can tweak the other schools into something.... Surely in the first instance ERO would have had a snapshot of schools that weren't doing much at all and they could have worked with those in the first instance and then got a idea what's going to work well and then go to the other schools 'OK this is what we have found works well, you might want to start implementing some of these tools'. (Board chair)

I understand there are some schools that aren't performing but I'm wondering if this is the way to get those schools on board or [whether it might be better] just to work with those schools. (DP1)

I think [National Standards] went out without a lot of planning and thinking about what's already there, I'm sure there were models happening in a lot of schools that could have been consulted on. (Board chair)

I don't think this is helping the huge tail in some of our Māori and Pasifika students who really do need support. (DP1)

Some of the things in the National Standards are really just silly because there is one statement [about writing samples] that says they have to be able to do this with 'some help' from the teacher. Now what you classify 'some help' as, that's going to make quite a big difference [gives examples of teachers being less or more directive]. What we do, we are tough on them ... I don't think that's equal in each school, it would be impossible. Unless someone sits there and goes, 'right these are the rules of how you do your writing sample', you'll never get consistency. (DP2)

The only way I can see the writing [sample] actually working to a degree—because I don't think you will ever get complete consistency—would be to have something published from the Ministry that says right, this is the exact procedure for you to do your writing sample and here are the samples that you have to use; which they've got with the exemplars but I think that some schools use them and some schools don't. (DP2)

In a perfect world moderation across schools would be good but I don't see how it would work, we having enough problems moderating internally. (DP2)

I led a cluster of schools and even though you might meet together and have a plan, it made me realise how strong school cultures are in developing ideas. How it was actually done when they shared with their principal and team leaders wasn't the way another school was doing it. We need to accept huge variations in how people operate. (DP1)

I hope we don't get league tables, great if you are ranked well, terrible if you don't rank well and you should be. You could have an ERO report that could say you are doing everything right and then a league table based on National Standards that says you rank really badly, could potentially be quite conflicting information. (Board chair)

In school moderation is being done but that's not national is it.... Because we are not doing it with the schools down the road let alone round the country, they [the National Standards] are still school standards really. (Board chair)

I'd be gutted if my daughter was considered at the Standard at her school and then maybe go on to high school where the standard is different again and suddenly she is below the Standard. So it's that inconsistency and I just don't think there's enough information out there at the moment to ensure it's not happening, it's not a standard ... you have to have consistency otherwise you are never comparing apples with apples. (Board chair)

They say children all come with a little suitcase and some are fuller than others when they arrive at school.... In low decile schools many of their children are never at school, they are dealing with so many issues; it's huge for them. (DP1)

There will be some schools that do have their act together, have good management and good teachers and they are not going to get most of their kids to level 12, because they come in and half of them don't speak English. (DP2)

Only way you are going to fix that tail is you need to get really tough on getting kids to school. Because if we have kids that don't turn up [the principal] is in his car and driving off and goes to their house to pick them up, put them in the car and we've done that haven't we! But that's a whole different story if you have two-thirds of your school not turning up...And if National Standards ends up doing some of those lower decile schools a disservice with publicity you won't get the good teachers staying in those schools. (DP2)

I mean we are not going to lower our standards, we will still push our kids, but the worry is that [league tables] are going to show that one school is 'amazing', this other school 'not doing so well', then you are going to have trouble staffing that school with good quality teachers. And you are going to have even more pressure on some schools that seem to be achieving well with their kids, even though we would have to be sceptical about National Standards actually signalling that. The issue of those people with resources just using them to advantage their own children is going to be even worse isn't it. (DP2)

I think it depends on what happens with the data and on how grounded the management is. There's strong management and leadership here, we know what we want for our kids, we know the community is happy with that, we know we can justify anything, ERO just came to us last time because they had a gap and they said 'oh can we come out to you' so we are not sort of scared about what we are doing, we know we are doing the right things and so we are grounded. So we are not going to drop off the optional programme. But there are a lot of schools that don't have that confidence and so they will think 'Oh my God, the children are behind in writing' and so everything's gotta go. (DP2)

The whole lot (international speakers at the NZPF conference 2011) can't believe what's happening in New Zealand you know. And the whole message is that, where we are going with the whole centralised approach, National Standards and all that sort of stuff, is just wrong, it hasn't worked overseas. (Principal)

In the middle of [the NZPF conference] the Minister of Education comes along to give her speech.... And you are sitting there with a whole group, they are not militant people primary teachers, they are not, and you are sitting there and you are made out to be. And we gave her a very good reception but it was just like something cutting across what we were hearing about trends overseas. And the big thing she announced there that she had been talking to Prime Minister Gillard in Australia and endorsed what they were doing, giving six weeks to graduates to train them and send them out to low decile schools, the TeachFirst thing, and you are sitting there and thinking 'What, we are going to train them now in 6 weeks? Put them out into low deciles—is she saying that it's easier to teach in low deciles?' Far out, and where's the endorsement, where's the research support for that? (In a deep voice) 'Prime Minister Gillard in Australia says it works'. So you are listening to that and she walks out and they close the doors and vote of no confidence in the direction the government is taking. But you have someone coming in

announcing those policies. Why because she's consulting educational researchers, with us in the education sector? No. Just something she plucked out of America or Australia, plucked out of here, 'Prime Minister Gillard said it was good.' I think it's a real insult to our profession. (Principal)

The Gazette became a propaganda tool, that's my personal view, I used to look forward to seeing things in the Gazette, it's never been in any great depth but you saw different things going on in schools, now when you open it, you can see it's written to push Ministry policy. (Principal)

Willingness to find some redeeming feature

Despite all these problems we have seen that the SLT at this school had some sympathy with what policymakers were trying to achieve and were willing to note some redeeming features:

I think it could do some good, I think there are some good things about it, they are going down the right track in a way by trying to say 'this is where they should be'. I think they need to clarify those, simplify the expectations and be really careful with what happens with the data. And I think if it was taken slower those things could have been ironed out. (DP2)

At least National Standards are focused on three core areas, it would be a scary day if we had National Standards in all other curriculum areas too. (DP1)

I can see that in some schools National Standards could be good—we have a strong reflective culture but I know there are schools that don't have clear targets and its good for that but it needed to be a lot more specific and easier to understand. (DP2)

I like the Maths chart; it lays out the big picture and where they want everything to sit. (DP2)

That's probably been helped by National Standards in some ways that's around all the teachers working together to moderate and they have had huge amounts of PD, ensuring that they are all on the same wave length, what they are thinking about. (Board chair)

3.4 'BEHIND THE SCENES' 2—THE RANGE OF VIEWS ON STAFF

This section summarises the perspectives of 21 teachers, many of the full-time teaching staff at S School. The teachers were interviewed in June 2011 and the point of interviewing such a high proportion of staff was to be able to characterise the range of views on staff beyond the senior leadership team and Board. This was important to do because the enactment literature raises the possibility of significantly different outlooks held by groups or individuals within any teaching staff and with Seagull School being a particularly large primary school, the likelihood of 'contrary' currents within the teaching staff might be considered greater.

In the event we didn't find any groups or individuals who could be characterised as having views that contrasted sharply with the SLT or the rest of their teaching colleagues. Rather we found general support for the approach the school had taken but that some of the problems and reservations the SLT expressed became exemplified and in some ways more urgent closer to the classroom. We found teachers at different levels grappling with specific concerns and like Ball and colleagues, we found new teachers to be 'receivers', less able to critique the standards system than more experienced teachers. Finally, we found many individual observations and insights that were noteworthy. The teaching staff at Seagull School may have been more unified in their outlook than the secondary school scenario painted by Ball and colleagues but this didn't prevent them demonstrating independence of thought as well.

Two features of the interviews are worth noting at the outset. One was the relatively constrained way that Seagull School teachers tended to discuss the wider politics around the National Standards. As for the SLT and Board, criticisms of government were generally muted, with the following comment about as indignant as any:

Parents are being fed so much crap, they are being fed such distorted figures, it's starting to get to the point that it's just disgusting the stuff said in the media, the statistics that are being warped. Saying that kids are failing school and it's based on NCEA level 2 and that's schooling! [C]

There could be various reasons why teachers were not more forthright in their criticisms. First, although most mentioned being members of NZEI, and one who had taught for more than 30 years recalled marching over 'pay parity' back in the 1990s, none of the teachers were particularly active in teacher politics. The NZEI staff representative was 'doing the bare minimum that NZEI requires'. Second, this may be a case of Ball's proposition 3: 'Concern and critique are reduced to discomforts and murmurings'. Third, in some cases it may have also reflected the lack of familiarity of these teachers with the interviewers. Many teachers in our schools tended to open up over the year as familiarity grew. Fourth, it must also be recognised that these teachers were interviewed at work, had we spoken to them at home over the dinner table we may well have got a more forthright response. Overall it is important to bear in mind that the teacher comments reported here were made in a setting where teachers spoke frankly enough but were hardly getting 'carried away'.

Once again some agreement with the standards system was indicated but it was generally damned by faint praise before teachers resumed their critiques. Teacher L said about the National Standards 'You can go both ways, it's good in some respects [and] will get some consistency between schools but sometimes it puts a label on a child before they have even started at school'. Teacher Q said 'I'm not opposed to it philosophically' but within a few minutes was saying that 'for parents to have been told their child is "well below" a standard, we wouldn't have said that before, it's quite a label'. And 'I don't think it's a bad thing, there are some teachers so there's gotta be something but again having children below is not a measure of that teachers adequacy ... that's a bit scary'. For Teacher R the National Standards were 'positive from a parents perspective, something tangible to go away with, I think it would have formed part of my conversation with parents anyway but mightn't have remembered all that'. Yet this teacher was very concerned about how a child's 'mindset' could be developed by National Standards labels. Even teacher E who was the most adamant that parents should be informed by the National Standards (discussed later) was raising various concerns (also discussed later) as well: 'ours is not to reason why'. In some cases the most pointed comments about the standards system came after teachers were invited to give their personal view but in most instances teachers were expressing the same kinds of outlooks beforehand.

General perspectives and concerns

We start by describing some perspectives held by Seagull School teachers as a group first before focusing on their three most commonly held concerns. It was clear that many of the teachers had followed the debate over the National Standards with interest, hearing about it both through the school—staff meetings and the like—and through the NZEI and media coverage. Many expressed concern at lack of consultation with teachers. Their stance on this was mainly that it had been disappointing and ill advised:

Teaching is such a critical thing, these kids, it's their life, you are giving them these skills, such a big thing as National Standards I think they really needed to come in a different way and definitely work more closely with teachers. (H)

If they had actually talked about it and discussed it and got the input, well then you've got a bit of buy in, then you feel like you've contributed to it, you've voiced your concerns and if you have seen a bit of change based on that, well then you are going to be more in support of something then. As opposed to 'here you go, off you go, do it'. (K)

I think it's going to affect how teachers see their job; because we haven't been listened to we don't feel valued. I think every teacher puts 110% in, we all do our best for the kids and that's all we ever wanted. If they went into some kind of consultation with us we would all be wanting the same thing. (P)

There was almost universal praise for the ‘low key’ way the SLT had handled the issue of the National Standards, not trying to defend the policy but taking a pragmatic path and trying to avoid putting extra pressure on staff:

They have just been really good, like one of the things they have stressed to us is not to make a big deal of it, not to stress out about it and think it’s going to be a huge amount of extra work. (L)

[The SLT] have been really good with us, they know it’s a big thing and they have tried to shelter us from it as much as possible, taking on a lot of extra work themselves to get the plans in place before we have to do anything. Like with the ‘at’ and ‘above’ they keep checking it for us so we don’t keep getting it wrong so they spend a lot of time doing that. (T)

I think they have tried to be fair and have put it across in a non-biased way. It’s something they have been told to do and we all know that. Some of them have been open in saying they don’t agree with it. (P)

Last year decisions [around mid-year reports] were made quite late, which put a lot of pressure on the teacher ... but apart from that they have done really well. (U)

There hasn’t been a ‘jumping on the bandwagon’ completely and hasn’t been a huge workload but neither is there a ‘we are not going to do that.’ (D)

If it turns into a big stoush and we dig in, well then we are putting a whole lot of focus on it. If we get on with it, but still keep that ‘oh this isn’t working’ [we will] make the best of it and get on with the job of helping the kids. (K)

Every teacher supported the view expressed by the SLT that the New Zealand standards system had not had any dramatic impact on teaching and learning at Seagull School, essentially because the school already did a lot of assessment and had a strong focus on literacy and numeracy. This was seen as an advantage compared to other schools and a kind of vindication of the direction of the school:

We knew it was coming and we already had good things in place that were similar to it. (B)

[Another school] is floundering, it puts uncertainty onto teachers. (C)

There’s been strong focus on maths and literacy in the school for many years now. (E)

Don’t think the school is too fazed because it’s what we were doing anyway. (E)

At this school, I’m not sure that it’s brought a great many changes at this stage. Whether as we swing into it more, there will be more that we are going to have to adhere to, paperwork to be done, more t’s to be crossed but really as a school we were already in the mode. (F)

The curriculum was narrowing anyway, it’s just added to it, for a long time we have had a focus on numeracy and literacy at the expense of other curricula, so it’s one of the catalysts but we were heading that way anyway. (J)

It’s just shown everybody that we are doing the right things anyway ... just reflects good practice on our part I guess. (L)

But it was just tagging on extra things at the end, going one extra step.... Just saying ‘against National Standards, what is it?’ (N)

I think other schools that didn’t have systems in place, it would have been a nightmare so we were lucky. (T)

At the same time, the teachers all recognised that National Standards was having some impact. They mentioned the obvious changes the school had made in 2010, the extra written report at mid-year and the extra report sheet that had gone home at the end of the year advising parents whether their children were ‘well below’, ‘below’, ‘at’ or ‘above’ the National Standards. There was also widespread use by teachers of the language of ‘below’ ‘at’ ‘above’, but not ‘well below’. Some variants as well: ‘way below’, ‘lowies’.

Teachers generally argued that writing was the most difficult area of the National Standards to get right:

Everyone has a different opinion on how they work, what fits in with this criteria and what doesn't. (A)

Writing has so many grey areas, kids writing is so hard to look at and make a judgement call on, it's a question of emphasis. (C)

I think teachers see different things in writing, I might look for grammar, you might look for personal voice, I think you have strengths in different areas, for instance I might not recognise personal voice. (J)

You and I can look at a piece of writing and you can say it is a level 3 and I can say it is a level 2 and we can debate it until the cows come home, you know what I mean? (J)

In relation to this, teachers praised the school's internal moderation processes. These were described as 'quite comprehensive' (C) and seen as necessary to get a more objective view of student achievement:

Some people, and I don't think I have a problem with this, but people they fall in love with the kids in their class and so they want them to be [up] here, you know, almost like a parent would want them to be here. So the moderation sometimes can be a bit hairy but it's actually a good thing rather than being on your own and rating them up here when actually they are not. (M)

There was also a widespread view amongst Seagull teachers that the public/parents didn't understand the National Standards. Yet this wasn't so much a criticism of the public/parents as a comment that they had been poorly informed by government and how difficult it would be to really understand the complexities of the standards system at a distance in any case:

That's why it's hard that it's been made so public is that parents are coming in with questions now, saying 'how are you doing this' but then it's like, 'well we've been doing it the whole time.' (L)

The public's perception is different than what you have when you are in the job. I know, my Dad was saying [about the National Standards] 'it's great, it's great and this is what you want' and I was sort of saying 'No it is good but how do we make sure all our assessment is consistent, that we are all saying the same thing?' And they find that hard to get a handle on because they are obviously not here and doing it and so it sounds a bit jargonish and so the public perception is that it's really good and it's what we want but then they don't understand all the nuts and bolts that go on behind the scenes. (R)

We have curriculum nights as well throughout the year and we obviously don't get every parent but those that do come they learn about the testing we do. So they don't know a STAR test like I know a STAR test but they know what it means and they have seen one before. So probably the kids results in STAR means more than my judgement [against the National Standards]. (M)

Our principal had to write a letter that went home with each report last year and it was great that he did that but it probably shouldn't have to come from us. (M)

The Term 4 report sheet represented the 'sharp end' of the National Standards policy at this school because it employed the National Standards categories. Having to report against the categories was the issue that animated and concerned the teachers at Seagull School more than any other. Nearly all teachers expressed some kind of reservation about the effects of formally labelling children, especially the kinds of children who would be identified and reported as being below or well below. The quotes below give a sense of the wide range of relevant concerns:

Some of the children were only five and they [the parents] were panicking because the other ones were six and they were at this level. So [parents] were starting to compare even though they shouldn't'. (A)

... the thing I really don't like about that sheet and I've had to explain to so many parents is that in writing your child has made so much progress within say level 2i but they still need to do this, this and this to move up to 2ii which is where they should be. So it doesn't leave *any* room to show the progress that their child has made, it's basically it's just saying 'your child is failing'.... So it's more just saying they're not where they should be for their age but at the same time it doesn't say 'you know, your child has achieved huge milestones this year.' (B)

It's almost setting them up to fail, if the children are way down here and should be way up here then they know that it's totally unrealistic for them to get to there by the end of the year and they are never going to get there and I really hate seeing children with a negative attitude towards school because it's only going to get worse as they go to intermediate and high school. (B)

It's quite blunt, it's not a 'your child is progressing a little bit slower than other kids', it's a 'your child is well below'. (B)

You could really clearly spell it out but who wants to do that with a six year old, I mean I had a six year old tell me the other day that he's going to give up on reading because it's too hard. So you know, why would I, when I do my conferences I'm going to make sure that we keep it positive, cos this kid's on the edge of going 'nah, that's it'. (C)

It's a very hard call sometimes to say 'your child is below', it's the below ones that are the difficult ones really. Sometimes a particular assessment may suit a particular child but often for children who are struggling they don't suit them, it may be a paper and pencil test that doesn't actually reflect where the child is at. And of course teacher judgement comes into that but then my teacher judgement might be different than yours.... (D)

Some of them look really bleak when you get a piece of paper that says below, below, below, but it is of concern to parents and doesn't always match up with other assessments.... [The] thing is you can't fit children in a box and I think that what the National Standards is doing and it's a much bigger picture than that, they don't all progress at the same rate and I think that's a bit scary. (D)

You have to very careful you are saying to parents 'they have to be here', parents get anxious, put pressure on kids. (E)

Those slow to start kiddies get that label, right from the beginning and we find that they can be into Year 4, Year 5, they suddenly get it and they have caught up, I mean you've always got those slow to start kiddies. (F)

The tension then becomes between the teacher and the parent because the parent is saying 'what are you doing to lift the standard and you're saying 'well he's not mature enough yet, he doesn't have that maturity, he doesn't have that focus', you know, those things that come with learning. (F)

I think that by year 5 or 6 is when you should be talking about an average, but I think it's far too early in year 1. You look at Piaget, all the work that's been done for years and years that talks about child taking time to develop and some children take longer. (F)

I always did, I guess there is that added pressure, because of how you have to report, your lowies are told absolutely you are really low, so that's in the back of your mind. At the end of the year you have to tell your kids where they are sitting. We always did but some of the terms you have to use with the National Standards, they kind of, it just lingers in your mind because it's not very beneficial at all for kids to be told that or for parents to be told that either. I think kids pick up things at different stages and just because they don't have it right now doesn't mean they won't be able to. I didn't like it at all ... they don't have to have it written down, 'way below, 'way below', way below.' (G)

I just think you have to be really careful about saying things that can brand children forever, we forget how much your words, even the smallest things, can affect a kid and so if you are then going to tell someone with low motivation that they are 'below' then I don't see how that's going to be beneficial in any way for helping them achieve later on. (G)

A lot of parents when they see 'at', 'below', 'above', a lot of parents automatically think 'oh he's failing'. He may not be where he should be but there's still lots of good things happening and if we keep working on these good things.... Bringing in that 'below', 'at' and 'above', parents do focus on 'well, where's the rest of the class?' when it's about your child's learning. (H)

When you do have those kids that are below, when you are showing the parents 'below' right there, especially when the kid's there, it sort of makes you feel like, the parents are thinking 'she's saying that's it' kind of thing. Whereas you didn't have that before, you could sort of talk, 'he is here, but we are doing this and this'. Because you sort of like to talk to the parents, 'this is what we need to do to move him forward', you lose that when you have those set labels. (H)

It labels some children as failures and it's really, really difficult when you sit in a three-way conference and for them to see they are achieving way below when they could have made so much progress that year, it's not recognised and I think that's really tough and it's really tough as a teacher to sit there and tell a child they are failing, we just don't do it. The flip side of the coin is I think parents should know if there's a problem with their children learning but I think there's a better way of telling them or getting them on board. For some children they just don't have the confidence and it just destroys them. (J)

Sort of like a 'one size fits all' and that doesn't happen in a real classroom and, of course, just because a child's way behind doesn't mean they aren't going to catch up or get a different teacher and catch up or suddenly get switched on to reading or writing. I think it's actually awful to label a kid by their age ... I think it's different for boys and girls, that they develop at different stages, that where they are a bit untested. (J)

It's made me more concerned like some children who ... are quite far away from what's expected, and you sort of feel like you are robbing them, like they have done so well, they have come along so well, fantastic. But they are still not where they want them to be. But if you looked at them ... awesome. So in the back of the mind you are going 'you've done great for you, but you're not up where you're expected to be'. And at a school like this it's probably not as big a problem as some other schools where teachers must be pulling their hair out, the kids are starting so low and probably the vast majority of the school population. Well some of these kids may never reach the Standards but they are well beyond where they were when they came to us. (K)

Especially in the first year, some are very slow at starting and then others start straight away and they have got it, others it takes a term or a couple of term to get into things. You really can't see it too clearly at the beginning of the year. (L)

It's sort of like putting them into groups and everything now, which we never did before, we just knew who our target children were. (M)

I think it's fine if you are an average kid and you are always going to go through being average ... I sometimes think if you are above average well, what do they do for you? What are they going to do if you are below average or well below average? Whether it's a friendly term or not, I kind of think to start grading young children as being below average is quite harsh ... and you don't want over-protective parents to get upset either. (N)

I have a fear too that when parents see it they don't see where the child has come from. A child might be reading at red at the beginning of the year and may not have achieved

the green as a reading level by the age of 6 but the vast amount of work and foundation that's been achieved during that time is significant. (P)

Parents often get that thing in their head that by the time they are six they must be here and if they are six and they have achieved it they are quite happy, even if they have only moved say two levels. But another child might have moved eight levels but still be below the National Standards, the parent 'ohhh no, they should be up here' and that's when there's a lot of pressure on those kids at such a young age. (P)

When parents come to me a lot of them can be quite apprehensive and kind of concerned, overly concerned, about the child not achieving which does put a lot of pressure on the child. With the reading recovery programme it works alongside the classroom programme but it is added work for that particular child so they are getting a double amount of stress. They are actually getting homework every night as well as the normal stuff from the classroom. And as much as the parent doesn't want to I think the child picks up on the fact that they are below and that can often hinder their progress too. (P)

There's a big push to include the children in their learning and then to know where they are and where they need to be and I think for some children that's a really negative thing because it does damage their self-esteem, it does demotivate them, for others they see it as a challenge. (P)

It's all very well saying this child is well below but where's the help to sort that out. It's all very well imposing these labels on children if they haven't got that background structure in place and some money to put into support. (Q)

If they are below at any age, say as an 8-9-year-old, doesn't mean to say they are always going to be below but I am always wary of giving a child a mindset that they are no good at something and they are always having the feeling like they are going to have to catch up to everybody.... If one of my children was told they were below I'd be going 'well what am I going to do to fix it.' I know my own child at intermediate was told based on asTTLe writing and he's got the mindset that he's a useless writer. Well I actually taught him and I know he's a very good writer but quite hard to change a child's mindset about themselves. (R)

Seeing below or well-below for every report even if the kids is making progress isn't that much comfort for parents because they know it already. And I suppose in some [home situations] then telling that information can mean the child goes home and gets punished for it.... And sometimes you want 'well actually don't worry about that, look at what they are doing now compared to what they were doing at the beginning of the year.' (S)

The problem is because you say to them, reporting as we are expected, 'you are below', then they start thinking that they are no good at maths, they don't want to try, and that's my biggest thing, I find kids give up when they don't believe they can do it. So it's trying to keep them positive and saying 'look you've made this movement even though you are still below'. (T)

You get parents saying 'well I wasn't good at maths', so you don't want that to get through to the kids.(T)

I have a few kids this year who were in a GATE class last year and they were told they weren't with the GATE class any more because they weren't smart enough. They were [smart enough], it's just they [can only] have some kids go in there, so I think when it gets competitive those kids start rubbing it in other peoples faces. (T)

It's not necessarily the children, it's sometimes the parents, especially at this school, they have got to have a standard, the parents at this school need to know where their child is at, it's amazing that throughout the parent conferences they want to know where their child is at in the class, are they at the top.... For instance I had this child, he was six, but reading at age eight, eight and a half, the parent was like 'oh, well, he's

achieving above but in terms of him and his reading group, well why isn't he achieving more?' And I couldn't answer that because he was only six and was already reading eight and a half. And that's that pressure and I don't think children need that. But I think that's got to do with family background too, it's not just the education system, it's not just National Standards. (U)

It can be seen that most of these are concerns about children who are being categorized as 'below' or 'well below', only a minority of children at this high decile school but this does little to allay the concerns of Seagull teachers. Rather there is a sense here of teachers being concerned about individuals in their classes and believing that any vulnerable child damaged by expectations arising from the National Standards will be one too many. The comments are also often considerably more nuanced than the policy discourses around the National Standards. There are arguments that the National Standards categories do not represent learning and progress well, that children do not progress in the steps envisaged by the National Standards and that a great deal of the impact of the categories *depends* on the particular child, parent and situation being discussed and what resources there are to respond. Children and their parents are also seen to be both the unfortunate recipients of policy and enabled by policy to contribute to the problem. Some children may rise to the challenge of judgements about their achievement but many don't and some children denigrate their peers on their basis of their achievements. Similarly, rather than it being necessarily a helpful thing that parents know about their child's level of achievement, teachers suggest that in many cases this creates unhelpful anxiety and either undue pressure on children or parents dismissing their child's educational endeavours. There is also the suggestion that parents don't just want to know that their children are doing well, as characterized by the policy discourses, but that what many really want to know is that their child is doing better than their peers. This raises a less worthy motive for parents becoming informed—that they want to use the information in pursuit of positional advantage, ensuring their child has not just a good future but an advantaged one. Finally it can be seen that Seagull teachers were often seeking to soften the effects of the categories in their interactions with parents and children. The most common way to do this was through emphasizing progress against the continuum.

There was no other issue that came close to labelling in terms of causing concern for Seagull School teachers. Nevertheless about a third of Seagull School teachers had concerns to do with workload associated with the standards system, particularly the new mid year reports. The others all said that their workload hadn't changed significantly because of what the school was already doing and the low-key way it had chosen to approach the National Standards. One teacher (I) mentioned that the prospect of another full report at mid-year had some colleagues panicking and saying they just wouldn't be able to deal with it but that the way that the SLT had managed the mid year reporting averted the problem. For another teacher: 'Teaching is always such a changing environment anyway so I personally see it as just another thing that you have to adapt to'. (R)

Yet for those who were concerned about workload, the concern was variously with the perceived increase in their workload, a perception that it was largely pointless, the way the new workload came on top of what they already had to do, concern about increasing the 'paperwork' element of their role at the expense of face to face teaching and concern about reducing time for elements of the curriculum not so closely connected to the National Standards:

It is stressful, like the reports at the end of the year, they take a whole term, so it puts stress on everything you do. [Having mid year reports] makes Term 2 really busy. (T)

Our report system at the end of year is so detailed, a lot of sentences, a lot more detailed than my last school. To do it [at mid year] and have written comments on it and put achievement objectives and stuff, it is a big thing. And the problem is it takes away from a lot of learning because our written mid year report is getting the kids to write down what they are learning and the kids portraying their work so it actually does take away from actual learning time in class because you have them finishing their work to put into their report. (T)

You hear staff getting down about it and grumpy about it, it's definitely not helping the workload, the stress levels of everyone. And during that time because we are so tired I think it affects our teaching as well, the energy you have to give to the classroom isn't as much because you have to stay up late writing reports. There's a lot of extra work for

team leaders too because the checking process is massive so it's huge on them as well. (T)

All the data we have got, sometimes I think it's regurgitating because we have it in their files, we have it on [the student management system], sometimes I think 'how much more do we need to put up' and you have to be careful there, if you are spending all your time assessing, when are you going to get any teaching done? (E)

With the reporting in the middle of the year, you have your student conferences and you talk about goals and you talk to the parents and that kind of thing so you kind of just feel like you are repeating yourself, like you have to have this down written so you are having to do that, it's extra paperwork. But [previously] parents were definitely well informed; we had the continuum sheet to show them where they were at. (H)

The way I feel it's just another thing to do. Because I've already got enough to do, in terms of paperwork, I feel that teaching is becoming more of a paperwork job than a teaching job, I spend maybe more time on paperwork than I actually do on teaching. And I just think that's not how teaching should be, I think it's ridiculous actually, how much we are expected to do. (U)

Something's gotta give and unless they give us a timetable showing how it can be done, the classroom teacher will struggle to get those expectations met ... it's a general concern amongst staff, I know last year it was a real concern in our team. To some extent things that were put on paper possibly weren't happening in the classroom, they were there so that people could say 'well it's been done' but to give the child the best chance at success in literacy and numeracy, you actually push some of those other things aside. (P)

Comparing schools was a third issue that several teachers commented on. This was a concern variously about lack of rigour in other schools, lack of moderation between schools and the effects of social inequality:

I think we are quite hard here, and rightly so, we are not going to tell a parent a kid is 'at' unless we are 100% sure he is 'at'. But I'm not sure other schools are going to be that hard. And that worries me because parents do compare schools. So you don't want a parent to say 'I've had my kid in your class and now he's moved schools and in two months he's gone to 'at' in every area where he wasn't'. (M)

It keeps me up at night, if my judgement is the same as the school down the road; judgement is such a subjective thing, that's the idea of a judgement. (I)

I have a lot of friends that are teachers, and I even know things like when I've been marking writing samples at home and I might mark a writing sample 2(i) and I've had a friend read it over my shoulder and say 'wow, at my school that would be a 4'. (M)

I did notice [at a low SES school] those that are not coming in with anything and they [the setters of the National Standards] expect them to have all this oral language and it's not there, I thought 'they are failing them before starting'. (N)

It does worry me that we are fine in a school like this but perhaps in a lower decile school, you know we are not all born equal and some don't get off to a very good start. And to compare one school with another, that's where I see the dangers. (E)

Differences in perspective by groups of teachers

The middle and senior teachers at this school were those most likely to note particular problems with the National Standards. For Year 3/4 teachers there was the complexity of managing both age-related assessment and end of year assessments.

The year 3's we have to assess them on their birthday and when we are trying to judge if they are at, above or below, that's really complicated. That's taken us some time to get our heads around that, that's crazy. (Q)

There is also a particular problem in maths where students have needed to move up a curriculum level and it is a big ask:

Year 4s they are at stage 4, or a lot of them are, and now you need to have them at stage 5 and it's just massive for them and although I can close the gap unless it's been done from day one I just don't see them closing that gap in a hurry ... it needs to happen from the start, pushing them, because by the time they are at year two they need to be at a certain level because when you are playing catch up they just always feel behind. (T)

Stage 5 is such a big stage, we are being told they have to be at stage 6 in Year 5 and it's like 'oh my gosh.' So last year it was saying to parents you know, don't panic, your child is in stage 5, that fine we are trying to push them a little bit quicker. (B)

Parents of these children were also alarmed because the expectation had had to shift from the year before:

It was definitely noticed by the parents that came through parent conferences and that kind of thing, they sort of said, 'oh well, this is where they were last year and they have sort of dropped?' And we had to explain 'Now National Standards are in, this where he should be'. I think a lot of parents were a bit disappointed. (H)

[The problem is] being able to explain to parents 'your child might have been seen as 'at', now they are 'below', the reason is because National Standards is bumping the standard up, we are trying to push your child up to that but it's not going to happen instantly.' (B)

In this case the required levels were clearly driving pedagogy:

... you have to move a little bit more quickly, have to step up the tempo, some kids are not quite there but you move on and try to come back to these kids on a more individual basis ... whereas before you might have gone another couple of sessions on that. (O)

I think it's changed that there's a bit more pressure to try to get the kids through to the stage. I take one of the lower level classes for maths so for me I'm trying to really get those kids up to where they are saying they need to be and it does put a bit of pressure on you but then you don't want to rush them, you don't know if they are going to be getting it, the end of the year will just be lost because they haven't had that time to consolidate. (H)

Teachers of junior children did not seem very concerned about getting students up to the standards. Partly this may have reflected the advantaged intake at Seagull School but the Year 1 teacher also pointed out that children in her class hadn't been at school long enough to be judged below or well below: 'With my age group [Year 1] because they haven't been at school the year they are always "at"' (N). This also made the National Standards particularly meaningless at this level:

I think it (the continuum) is good, it's a clear indication to parents where kids are at and it compares them with themselves. Although it's got an average of where the kids should be, it shows you the child has moved. Which I think is a clearer picture than the National Standards because you know the child is behind whereas if you took the National Standards they are at because they haven't been a year at school so you can't put them behind a year. (N)

Inexperienced teachers tended to be much less concerned about the National Standards because they had little basis for comparison or reflection and were more concerned with getting through:

I find that because I've just started [the National Standards] are the only thing I'm really used to or know anything about. (A)

In the first term it's just getting through it and numeracy and literacy are such a huge part of that and you want to get in a routine with those and then the other aspects will slowly follow. (A)

Reporting the National Standards to parents in three way conferences was perceived as potentially fraught even for experienced teachers and it was something one PRT practised with her tutor teacher:

‘Even though it’s on the paper you still have to word it so [parents] are not going to get stressed out that they are below’ (A).

Other observations and insights

In this section we report various other points made by teachers that add to the picture already discussed.

Teacher B was the only teacher remotely critical of the way the SLT had handled the National Standards. Even so responsibility was seen to lie beyond the school:

I don’t feel that when we as a staff were introduced to the idea of it, I don’t feel that I guess [the principal] had a good understanding but I actually think that came from the Ministry, it seems like they had asked lots of questions about it at the time but were given very airy-fairy answers so then he didn’t really have any answers for us, that’s how it came across to me. (B)

This teacher also gave an indication that the school’s specialist resources were now being used to respond to the need to move students up a level in maths

So we sort of introduced, especially with some of the kids that were struggling a bit more, we had specialist teachers come in to one of the lower classes and worked with a specific group of students and tried to move them through that a bit faster, a little bit closer teaching, well for the parents so they don’t feel their child is lagging behind all the time now that these new standards have been set. (B)

Teacher C gave a specific example of struggles around the narrowing curriculum:

There’s been a lot of talk here that this school is going to try to avoid the curriculum getting narrower. For instance we have been talking about Jump Jam that we do as a syndicate and when can we do it and the idea is we are not going to can it and if it interrupts it’s got to interrupt something but hopefully not too much. Because it’s part of the richness of the school. It’s only Jump Jam but it’s part of the richness. (C)

Teacher D discussed the loss of spontaneity and the ‘teachable moment’:

It does concern me that we have become so keen to see the children progress that we have lost something of that ‘here’s a moment, here’s something that’s happened, lets run with that’. Something that has caught their imagination and interest. That’s not *caused* by National Standards but National Standards is firming that up big time. (D)

For this teacher the National Standards also represented an opportunity cost in terms of money spent in other ways:

I feel quite sad that they have invested so much money into this and I look at children in my class who are not achieving or are not ‘at’ and I can’t see it’s benefiting them, if some of that money was spent in other ways we would see some movement ... [suggests good PLD]. I don’t think it’s going to make the changes they are looking for. They get parents ears because it sounds very good but the money could be better spent in other areas. (D)

Teacher E made a stronger case than most that there was some merit in the new National Standards categories:

The parents have now got that at, above, below, which they didn’t have. I used to quite often get in parent conferences, ‘well where is he in class?’ ‘Like they wanted to compare, well is he at the top....’ [With the National Standards] you are not comparing one child to another, but knowing where they are in the overall picture of things, yes. You want to know if your child is struggling, you want to know if they need to be pushed along a bit further. And unless the schools tell you, the parents are in the dark aren’t they. (E)

Teacher F was concerned about the advice being given in Ministry pamphlets on how parents can help their children meet the National Standards:

I do worry about what National Standards says that you have it written what they can do at home to help. Because giving homework is not necessarily going to help learning. Reading together can be helpful but I see the way parents attack maths, it's different than how we teach it and I do see far more value in having family time, whether it's eating together and talking about things and sharing the news. (F)

Teachers G and P raised the implications of performativity:

If you start comparing schools and that sort of thing you are running the risk of people doctoring results, because you want your kids to achieve and you don't want them to all be 'below' but if they are, I just think you run the risk that some people 'adjust figures' [laughs]. (G)

The teacher's job is now to get kids to National Standards not to extend from where they are. Good teachers will get kids to standard rather than anything else. There's a disincentive to take difficult classes.... If you were really smart you wouldn't be a Year 3/4 teacher. (P)

Teachers I and B argued that having such broad National Standards categories meant they were less accurate and more misleading than the assessment Seagull School had already had in place:

If anything, to me it feels like National Standards have muddied the water a little because we were doing that (using the actual tests) and now we are going to giving an OTJ and it's just that, it's a judgement whereas we used to give the parents, and we still do, the black and white data. (I)

Sometimes a student will score 'at' for asTTle and really high for STAR and so that means they are going pretty well with their comprehension but their vocab knowledge is amazing. So the [reading] National Standards will be 'at' or just above but that's not really clear. What's clear is that they're quite good at comprehension and really good at vocab. You can't just put that into one word. (I)

I see what the Ministry are trying to do but I don't think the kids fit into a mould. If you are clumping a child at 'at' well that's this big and where are they in that area.... As a parent even if you understand it still doesn't give you that much information about where your child is.... Like 'above' you don't know how far above they are, if a parent sees 'above', 'above', 'above', they are going to think 'oh my child is a genius' and that might not be the case. (B)

A number of teachers lamented how focussed on literacy and numeracy most of the school day had become and argued that neither the optional programme nor the 'Understanding by Design' approach compensated for a full primary curriculum because of the 'potential for big gaps' (J):

I love the optional programme, think they are stunning, but kids could go through here and have never done a science option, as teachers we can flag it up and recommend where kids go but they can potentially avoid some areas. (J)

Sometimes I believe (a subject) is left out and that would be for any curriculum area. Just because the focus is proper standards and so forth, we want numeracy results, we want literacy results and there are no benchmarks in the other curriculum areas. (O)

I think when you try to integrate those other things into those areas sometimes the focus is not quite as clear as it could be. You are saying to yourself 'I've got to achieve this, I'll stick it in my writing' but it's not really a writing focus and ... you've got to put a lot of thought into it.... And probably not suffice what the school wants you to do in that time, they say 'oh well integrate it into your writing'. And if you don't do that then you have to slot it in somewhere else and something else gives. (P)

Teacher K raised the concern that too much focus on the National Standards could lead to children's other particular strengths being dismissed:

Some kids may be getting the wrong impression of what important for them. Obviously, reading and writing and numeracy are very important skills but you think of some of these great artists or whatever, on [the National Standards] scale they are hopeless but in these other areas they are amazing and we are saying ‘what you love to do isn’t as important as these things’. (K)

Similarly, Teacher S stressed the importance of the social and interpersonal dimensions of schooling:

I think if children aren’t having fun, they aren’t going to want to learn and when you look back at your childhood, I would say to my teachers, ‘I can’t tell you the big idea or the WALT that you taught me, I can tell you the fun parts of school though’. And I always think that you can always learn later but you can’t change your personality or your attitude so I think we should be making sure children have those social relationships and can deal with change and work with other people rather than just trying to feed in [the 3Rs]. (S)

Also related, teacher P suggested that many children enjoyed learning for its intrinsic interest and were not particularly motivated by WALT’s, SLO’s and the like. In this way the standards system was being linked to a critique of wider shifts in primary teaching, the emphasis on competences, processes and outcomes at the expense of the experience:

They don’t want to always be told ‘we are learning to blah blah blah’, they just want to get on and experience it. And that’s where the spark comes from, where their reward comes from, it’s not from knowing what they are learning. (P)

What are we doing when we are teaching them the WALTs. To me a five-year-old knowing how to parrot something but not understand it is a waste of time, I could find a better use of time. (P)

4.0 OTHER SCHOOLS, CONTEXTS, ISSUES

In this section we discuss the other five RAINS schools. These case studies are all less developed than the one for Seagull School: we are reporting largely from interviews or recorded meetings with senior leadership team members, especially principals and the RAINS lead teachers who were mostly APs or DPs (quotes are from the principals unless otherwise stated). The key message here is that, as for Seagull School, the particular contextual features of these schools are crucial for the way each was enacting the New Zealand standards system. The cases open up a range of issues for further investigation, both by way of the teacher, child, parent, Board and other data we have already collected, through some further areas we will explore during 2012, and through returning to the schools in 2013 to repeat the raft of research activities we have already carried out (at Huia this will have to happen in 2012).

4.1 KANUKA SCHOOL

Kanuka School was a distinctive context for the enactment of the National Standards policy, both in terms of social setting and the outlook of its SLT. Some issues and questions highlighted by the Kanuka case study and discussed in Section 5.0 are

1. how existing discourses/philosophical—in this case to kaupapa Māori education and against ‘deficit theory’—may become lenses through which the National Standards become viewed in schools;
2. ‘other’ reasons why schools might support the National Standards policy;
3. low entry levels and the need for acceleration;
4. cohort change, transience and the reporting of National Standards results;
5. reporting practices: ignoring ‘well-below’ and using ‘below’/‘at’/‘above’ in other than National Standards subject areas;
6. the way National Standards interact with Ngā Whanaketanga in schools that offer both;
7. the teacher practices and experiences underlying the acceptance of the standards system in this challenging setting. Questions around staff buy in, collaboration, ‘short cuts’; and
8. student/parent perspectives in this kind of predominantly Māori and lower socio-economic setting.

Kanuka contexts for introducing National Standards

Kanuka School is a large Year 0-6 suburban school serving nearly 500 children. About 70% of the children are Māori, 20% Pākehā and the rest from a variety of Pasifika, Indian and other ethnic backgrounds. About 40% of the children are in Rumaki or Bilingual classes. The Rumaki classes are total immersion (level 1) and in 2011 started using Ngā Whanaketanga. The Bilingual classes (level 3) join the Rumaki classes for some activities but are using National Standards as they do reading, writing and maths in English. It is mainly parent preference that determines whether children go into Rumaki, Bilingual or Mainstream classes. Rumaki staff will accept children that have not been through Kohanga Reo, but because it is level 1 total immersion ‘you tend to only get certain parents who are going to want to take that option’.

Kanuka serves a low socio-economic area: ‘predominantly single parents in rental situations, we have a few professional parents’. At entry level ‘about 15% of our children have some idea about letters; so not all of the letters, just some of the letters and only 15% of them’. Most have attended some form of preschool but not necessarily regularly. Also ‘a number of children that are coming to us as five year olds have not attended early childhood or they have attended one day, didn’t like it, so they didn’t go back’. Financial stress (the preferred phrase used by the SLT rather than poverty) clearly also led to some problems within families, more noticeable at particular times of year: ‘So it’s what’s happening at home; people are getting stressed out, Christmas is coming up and they haven’t got any money’.

High transience (25%pa or more) is a feature of the intake with children sometimes coming back within the year. Māori families value whānau and when money is tight they move to cheaper accommodation, move in with other whānau or seek whānau support to raise children: 'They might zip off for two terms to see Nana, because Nana's sick in hospital and the whānau also want to go and support her.' We were struck by how school processes at Kanuka were impacted by transience: it is easy to underestimate its effects but it impacted heavily on most elements of planning, provision and resourcing:

Learning needs and children at risk are moving targets. Our special needs register is reviewed every term because of our transience. We identify children at risk at the beginning of each term. Everything has deadlines, for instance for the RTL register, it's each term so we'll look at our data and reprioritise depending on new students and emerging needs.

Like Seagull School this school had only a few ORS funded students (about three). But it had many more children with special needs at levels just below those, levels that were not as well resourced: 'we have eight children, eight to ten children at that really high level. At the next level down children were getting support from external providers: 'it might be speech therapy or teacher of hearing, deaf children, occupational therapy, counselling....' It is important to recognise that at Kanuka School the special needs profile of the children differed from Seagull School not only in quantity but in the kinds of issues children present to the school. Whereas Seagull School's special needs profile tends to involve particular conditions such as autism, at Kanuka there are also many special needs that reflect or are intensified by social deprivation. Some of these were probably caught up in the expression 'globally delayed' that was sometimes used in relation to special needs at this school.

Like most low SES schools, Kanuka struggled to get strong involvement from parents. Although shows and cultural events were popular, it had proved difficult to get more than about half of parents along to student-led conferences. In December 2010 the principal said 'We've done lots of things in the past, you know, we provide crèches, we've tried different times—straight after school, we've tried them in the evening, we've tried it during the day, we haven't seen a huge change'. There was more success in 2011—this is discussed shortly. Similarly when the school had tried to survey parents, it had few responses. The principal put this down to parents trusting school and like 'Home Advantage' (Lareau 1989), dividing up responsibility for schooling in a particular way: 'They have a philosophy that the school knows best—we're not professionals, [the teachers] are, and so if [the teachers] are making decisions they're probably good ones and so if you don't hear from me, I'm happy. But if you do hear from me, maybe I'm not so happy'. Accordingly, parents usually preferred to leave achievement-related matters to the school and teachers and were more likely to turn up at school if there was some other kind of problem, such as bullying.

Kanuka School was not very affected by competition from neighbouring schools. It was also firmly on the up in terms of local reputation. This was no accident as the SLT had been 'deliberately trying to change public perception of the school' over the last few years. The principal noted that this was being done both through obvious changes such as new signage, uniforms and property work and through more cultural shifts involving the promotion of school values, identity, learning opportunities and raising expectations around achievement. The school was towards the limits of its capacity and having to enforce a zone and hold a ballot for out of zone applicants. There were also problems dealing with a growing roll in the context of a low SES, highly transient intake and strict staffing ratios to work to:

So we've got an unconfirmed roll at the moment, which is what I'm working my budget on, and then following March 1st it will then have a confirmed roll.... We might get a roll increase but [if I] get a little bit more staffing, so how do you do that? You employ a new entrant teacher [in] the juniors and spread the load there but it's very difficult to do that through the rest of the school once [the year's set]. Because if we create a new classroom in the middle school, we skim off so many children and they go to a new teacher. It's quite disruptive ... they're better off to stay with one teacher for the year.

Kanuka had a relatively new leadership team, although they had all been in the school for some years. The principal had been in her role since about the time the National Standards legislation was passed but had been DP at Kanuka for 6 years before that and had also been principal of a rural school for eight years. Two DPs were also new into their roles but had both been at the school for over a decade.

There were also five syndicate leaders: junior, middle, senior, bilingual, total immersion, some of these were also new into their roles. The principal put much emphasis on working in a collaborative way with her senior leadership team and with syndicate leaders on the many and various changes to existing practices and new developments that the school was undertaking. In this way, 'they've developed that meaning together, there's been a lot more buy-in of course'. Also 'it's gaining that critical mass around me with my leadership team and then spreading the message out wider so it's not just me leading':

I would introduce something at the leadership team and then I would get them to take it to their syndicates, or then we'd go to whole-staff meeting, they'd already had a go at it so they had kind of this base knowledge and debate within the leadership team and people had asked questions and the what ifs. So when they were sometimes accosted by tricky questions they had something to hang their hat on.

Like the SLT at Seagull School, again there was a sense of this senior team being well regarded locally and some of them were again involved in providing advice to the Ministry at a national level.

Staffing Kanuka School had long been a problem: 'we tend to only attract beginning teachers because we're low decile, we don't tend to attract people with any experience'. However, the principal suggested that the school's reputation was improving not only in the community but amongst teachers as the message of improved standards of student behaviour at Kanuka (discussed below) was spread around other schools by way of relieving teachers and inter-school events such as local sport days. Recent advertising of four positions had led to over 100 applicants including teachers with experience.

The Board included a lecturer, an accountant and a retired local government manager. They were described by the principal as 'astute': 'they are used to having milestone reports and things delivered to them ... and they do ask questions and they do challenge me'. In line with the transience of the intake, a few board members may have turned over relatively fast at Kanuka. Certainly the chair was the only member left from the previous board and within six months of the 2010 election two board members had already moved on.

Turning to curriculum, assessment and professional development, one feature of Kanuka School is that it was in transition under its new principal from about the same time the national standards became law. Hence some obvious changes that began to be put into place from 2009–10 may have occurred anyway as part of a 'new broom sweeping clean' and this was supported by comments from one of the DPs:

I was thinking there's quite a bit of change but that also was the first year [the principal] took over as principal, so you'll see in our charters they've changed quite dramatically in their look and the principal getting on with how things will be now I guess. (DP2)

The principal at Kanuka School was keen to emphasise that recent changes in the school had also built on much hard work over the longer term especially around improving behaviour as discussed below: 'it's so hard for people to say "that's because of National Standards"; "it's because of this professional development"—it's a lot of work'. Another important consideration for the way National Standards have been dealt with at Kanuka School has been its kaupapa Māori programme and influences from this direction need to be considered as well.

At the outset it is important to note that as a low SES school with a high proportion of Māori students, Kanuka School had long been putting energy into social, cultural and educational issues that are of much less concern at Seagull School. These wider learning concerns have included improved children's readiness for school, trying to increase parent involvement, the Kaupapa Māori and bilingual programmes themselves which date back more than a decade and various other types of interventions such as Books in Schools and EHSAS intended to address pastoral and educational needs in a context of social deprivation. Kanuka has operated a pre-visit system of six visits for preschoolers to help them transition themselves into school. There were multiple efforts to meet the needs of children including using the services of two social workers from voluntary agencies and a chaplain, breakfast clubs and lunches sponsored by corporates, the fruit in schools scheme run by the Ministry of Health. Most of this happened without much fuss or fanfare, it had become an accepted part of life at the school: 'So all that happened in those early years of setting up that base stuff, I've

got Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs up there on the wall, so [we have had] all that kind of meeting those basic needs and then pastoral care'.

Improving behaviour had been another big challenge:

The last five years we ... had to re-culture the school and work on behaviour management and get systems going consistently, develop our values programme and develop identity and really promote positive leadership, student leadership within the school and work on relationships. Relationships between children and between teachers and children. So all of that kind of groundwork had to happen. Sure, we were still involved in Literacy contracts and all that other stuff, but to be honest, the culture and values took precedence and relationships took precedence because if we didn't get that right, we weren't spending the time we needed to on our core business. When I arrived here as a DP, I spent my time dealing with fires, you know. I had kids lined up from about five past nine and that was my day, behaviour management, I did my paperwork at home. So I knew there couldn't be quality learning going on because teachers were dealing with behaviour instead of actually talking about learning.

In terms of the scope of the Kanuka School curriculum in the narrower sense it was also similar prior to the introduction of National Standards as it is today. There was a strong focus on numeracy and literacy well before the introduction of the standards system:

The key foci of the school are literacy and numeracy. This reflects the views of the community consultation. Every year there will be a literacy target for the school. Currently it is to have at least 80% of the children reading at or above their chronological age (from December 2006 planning document)

Class time in mainstream classes was therefore for the most part spent on English and maths along with 'topic work' (science, social studies, technology or health), art and PE. Portfolio templates have for many years required particular samples in these areas once a term in a way that would require teachers to include all essential learning areas/strands in their programmes to at least some extent. The same is true of bilingual classes, which work to the New Zealand curriculum but with emphasis on things Māori, whereas the total immersion Rumaki programme classes have been working to the Māori medium curriculum, Te Marautanga o Aotearoa. In the junior school years 0 and 1 used learning stories and Te Whaariki prior to the introduction of National Standards and continue to do so. There have also been various types of extra support:

... we've had Reading Recovery here, we've moved away from Reading Recovery, we've run our own reading enrichment programme where we have a teacher, a trained teacher taking reading groups of around three to four children. We find that we get more bang for the buck, basically—we can get more children through the programme and therefore make a difference for a larger number of children at risk and also our children tend to like working collaboratively as opposed to one-on-one....

The school has also long offered a range of sports, music and cultural activities. These are mentioned further below.

At Kanuka School prior to the standards system a wide range of assessment tools were used at relevant levels including in English PM benchmarks, asTTle reading and STAR. Maths tools included asTTle maths, Gloss, Numpu and IKAN. In the case of asTTle this was use of some items, 'not a full-blown 45 minute test.' There was also a history at Kanuka prior to the National Standards of comparing students in reading and maths against expected achievement for their year group, graphing this visually and setting targets. For instance prior to 2009 teachers were placing children on a chart that showed which maths stage students were at and indicating by colour coding whether they were 'at risk', 'cause for concern', 'achieving at or above expectations,' or 'high achievers'. The impetus for this had come about through a mix of PD and school input:

We've always had a reading graph to track progression and achievement. This has come from PD and staff input and these tools have evolved and been refined to fit our context. (DP2)

Documentation also illustrates year-to-year comparisons of this data being used for target setting within Immersion and Mainstream. By 2008 reporting in mainstream and bilingual classes was already quite detailed, not in the way of showing lots of different formative test results as at Seagull school, but in terms of breaking down the reporting of English and mathematics into the essential learning areas and giving each a grade (along with other learning areas such as Science, social studies etc). Each was graded Advanced, Proficient and Basic and curriculum levels e.g. 1P, 2B. Parents were advised in end of year reports that 'Achievement levels indicate where your child is in comparison to similar aged students'. Also reported was effort (A, B, C) and the children's grasp of essential skills (not yet, sometimes, essentially, always). There was a student-led conference at midyear and an end of year report.

In 2008—prior to the beginning of National Standards—Kanuka changed its reading profile to a graph for each individual child that would form the prototype of its format for recording each child's achievement against the standards system in reading, writing and maths. The chart used red to indicate performance below the line of expected achievement, white in the band of expected achievement and purple above the band. It provided a very clear visual presentation of whether or not students were achieving at the level expected.

On the face of it: Kanuka School responses to the National Standards

There have been several obvious responses to the New Zealand standards system at Kanuka as well as a number of other developments that are likely to have been influenced by the demands they have created but also, as already noted, be partly about the principal stamping her mark on the school. One obvious response to the standards system was a refashioning of reporting so that it responded directly to the National Standards categories. Reporting moved from the 1P, 2B approach to essential learning areas discussed above in 2008 to a 2009 end of year report that already focussed on achievement against the mathematics standard, writing standard and reading standard and where students were rated 'below', 'at' or 'above' expectation, (no well below). These assessments were each accompanied by a written comment and by 2010 advice about 'how you can help at home'. All other areas of the curriculum where there are no National Standards now also got 'below', 'at' and 'above' expectation assessments too, including art, PE and health. The explanation on the front of the report was changed to 'Achievement levels indicate where your child has achieved in relation to National Standards.' The key competences and school values (not yet, sometimes, usually and always) now replaced the essential skills.

A second response was increasing the student-led conference to the end of every term. In 2011 there was one at the end of terms 1, 2 and 3 with portfolios used to report on National Standards and a mid year report only sent to parents who did not attend the student-led conference at the end of term 2.

And so we have the student-led conference used to be in the middle of the year and then the written report at the end of the year and now we've developed it every term we have one at the end of every term. And that happened last year in 2010 and is going to happen again this year. (DP2)

Third was the further development of the individual profiles to fit the standards system. As noted above in 2008 Kanuka changed its reading profile to a graph for each individual child and this stayed the same for 2009. By 2010 much the same format was being used for recording each child's achievement against the National Standards, red for below the band, white in the band and purple above but also pinpointing particular levels of the National Standards/curriculum levels at the end of each year. These charts are for school use but also put in children's portfolios: 'so the children know where they are [and] can articulate their learning'. The same graphs are used for discussion with parents at student-led conferences: 'our parents actually love the graphs because they've got a visual representation of where their child is achieving'. (DP1)

A fourth obvious response was Kanuka School's development of its own indicator sheets which outlined for teachers what students needed to have in order to meet the National Standards at particular ages/year levels in reading, writing and maths. More generally the standards system has raised the levels of achievement required of students, adding a sense of urgency and pace reflected in new concerns about acceleration of students:

... in some ways it has upped the ante [in maths] and the teachers have met it really, really well. I know it's a little bit harder in writing and then again in reading for them.... It was probably acceptable to be at Yellow one, at the end of Year 1. It's no longer; you have to be a whole two levels up.... Yeah, so it's heightened expectations, really. (DP2)

But for some children, when you look at the graphs we've set up and when we track children we can show that in fact they *are* making progress but they're remaining in the red zone, what are we going to do that's going to change that incline?

And my argument is if we keep doing what we've always done, we'll get what we've always got and so ... you know, that's all good if the achievement's good. But if it's not good, we can't keep doing what we've always done, we've got to do something differently and so we've got to try.

We have also within the school looked at acceleration programmes targeting the junior area, so this year we used a self-review tool for acceleration programmes to look at what programmes we're running and what, if any, difference are they making.

We need them to be progressing faster. And that's the issue with, I guess, low decile schools is that because many children start below the scale, we don't get to map progress until they reach level 1 and then they start to show up on our graph. It's those first two years that are really hard but it is important to raise achievement at an early stage so children can enjoy educational success.

Numerous new developments related to the search for acceleration. One was a 'jumpstart' programme for children once they turned four: 'For six weeks a term we offer one afternoon a week for four year olds and their families to come along and have a basic literacy, numeracy programme [run] by a teacher and the purpose of this is to raise student entry levels'. The school had previously tried this through an ECE provider but wanted something more school achievement oriented.

The school was trying to get parents more involved in the school by capitalising on the popularity of cultural and music performances: 'By having regular performances [we hope that] their children want them here and that they will want to be here as well'. In fact this and other strategies led to 2011 attendance at student-led conferences improving to over 80% of parents attending, a marked improvement on previous years.

Another area that needed to be addressed was transience as it held back achievement whereas 'if they start in our school and remain in our school, they make good progress'. While it was not always possible to do much about the transience itself, there were various ways of compensating for it including a highly visible and embedded values programme:

Children are very quickly accommodated here, so when somebody new arrives, they're welcomed in, they're buddied up, the children take on the responsibility of showing them around the school ... the children very quickly tell them, 'that's not the way we do things' or 'this is the way we do things around here'. So that's very strong in the culture of this school to deal with transience, it has to be, because it's just this constant churn of people coming into the classroom, so teachers also have that philosophy and they're quite used to, 'right, let's welcome so-and-so to our class today.'

Transience also led to the values programme being cyclical 'it doesn't matter whether you start in term two, week three or term four, week one, within ten weeks you will have met all our values.' It was more difficult to make the rest of the curriculum cyclic but some areas such as number in mathematics were continuing through the year.

As indicated above, the need for acceleration was leading to careful scrutiny of achievement data by the SLT and targeting of particular year groups and areas for additional 'acceleration' programmes:

[DP2's] got about 150 kids on the Special Needs register and running several acceleration programmes. So we're running more programmes and we're smarter about the programmes we run—we look at the data—and I also look at the money and I look at bang for buck—is this programme accelerating learning efficiently? Am I getting

enough acceleration and how much is it costing me? And yet I can run *this* programme and it's half the price and getting me the same bang for buck so I'm constantly looking at the bottom line financially—is this financially viable for me? And we've just dumped one programme last term, which was a web-based reading programme and we're putting our money into Rainbow Reading.

[One of our] acceleration programmes is the Mathletics programme, we've set aside funding for this programme and we identify a certain number of them as extension. Depending on what the data tells us we may be targeting year two boys next year or year five Māori. But it needs to be flexible [because of the effects of transience].... So all our year two children are on Mathletics this year because they're in one of the identified groups at-risk.

... we've started a reading programme called First Chance Reading, which one of my new entrant teachers has been trialling in term one and this term and it's going to roll out to the other junior teachers, which came from a low decile school and the programme was getting good acceleration at the early stages of reading.

Various other innovations were under consideration in 2011. One was running enrichment programmes in ways that bridged holidays instead of by terms, this helped to avoid student achievement falling back during the holidays. Another was getting support staff to do some basic testing to take some of the load off the teachers and also get greater consistency: 'Actually support staff *are* capable and in fact when you show them how to take a running record, they only know one way, they don't make judgements in other ways so the data is quite reliable.' A third innovation was doing exit letters—'your child was enrolled in Enrichment Reading, they started at this level, they finished at this level, they now will return to their regular classroom reading programme,' or 'we are re-enrolling them for this programme, this term'. Children also now had to be at the school for a term before being put into an acceleration programme.

There was also new emphasis on consistency

We use the [PM Benchmark kit] and the reason we do that, and while we don't think that's ideal necessarily, and it's not just coming from running records ... is that it gives some consistency, because we're a large school and there's variations between teachers and classrooms and so we try and be consistent about the tools that we use so that we're making sure that our data's valid and robust.

One of the things that I'm focusing on this year—and I don't know that it's because of National Standards—is that variation within the school; the research shows that there's more variation within a school than between schools. I'm constantly noticing some of the variation that I saw in planning and marking.

I mean, we're trying to reduce that variation and the way I've done it here is ... I've taken a real lead in delivering the PD in writing to the Mainstream so I've been delivering the call back days and workshops. At the end of the workshops we've come up with a shared agreement of what our expectations would look like, co-constructed with staff at the end of the call back day. We talked about features of a good writing programme, right down to the nuts and bolts of what will be in the structure and the timing and how often we're going to mark and how many books are we going to mark and ... so really down to that detail, and then at the end reiterating it in a booklet. So we've got the shared understanding, you know, having this conversation together. And so there's no surprises, so when I come in they know what I expect to see because we agreed on it.

I keep thinking about not systematising everything but having systems in place that ensure things happen, you know. At the end of our PD we have a shared agreement on what we would expect to see; we have assessment timelines that clearly show people for the term what assessments are expected at the different levels and when they are due. So everyone's very clear about it and [we are] making sure that we have structures in place to achieve lots of things within that calendar as part of what we do, rather than layering.

Kanuka was involved in a maths contract in 2010 and in 2011 the school was involved in a literacy contract with writing as a focus:

I mean, it's come out of our data—we know that they're not achieving as highly in writing as we want them to be and I can see there's a professional gap there as well or a weakness within the professional knowledge of the staff and we saw writing happening at a very high level [on a visit to another region] so it's generated a lot of excitement as well.

'Behind the scenes'—Views of Kanuka School senior leadership team

The principal at Kanuka argued, with some support from a DP, that the main changes the National Standards had brought to the school was improvement of teacher knowledge, better responsiveness to special needs and some changes to assessment at the margins:

The difference is that people have improved and increased their professional knowledge and their ability to articulate teaching and learning. That's been the difference that it's made. People have pulled their literacy learning progression folders off the shelf, blown off the dust, opened them up and said, 'what does this say again'?

For me, the unpacking of [the literacy progressions against the National Standards], if anything, has developed knowledge of reading and writing. (DP2)

If anything we're doing probably our special needs a little bit differently than we have in the past and it's a lot more responsive ... we keep going back to the data in different ways as a leadership team, looking at the big picture—you know I'm always looking at the big picture and looking at trends throughout the school and our targets; but we had targets before National Standards.

I guess we've had to think about perhaps timing [and frequency] of when we do those assessments.

In terms of problems that were likely to be caused by the National Standards, the principal mentioned staffing junior classes in low SES schools because of the demands on them to get children with very low entry level attainment up to the new standards: 'I guess the danger is that—and I've already seen it—staffing low decile junior teachers is going to be an issue'. Another problem was that transience made reporting against targets difficult:

I think there needs to be more flexibility in schools like ours where we have a lot of transience so yes, we analyse our data at the end of the year because that then goes to our variance report for the Ministry in relation to the targets we set, but then assessing children at the beginning of the year it's more valid for us. [Achievement levels drop off over the holidays] so it's more valid for us to collect data again in February and then analyse that data and set targets then. And the reason we do that data collecting is because then that informs all our special needs programmes and we might have lost or gained some students and so now from that data we do a whole lot of things with it. But if [the Ministry] insist that we use end of year data to then settle those things [it doesn't work]. What I end up doing is double handling. I then do all that data collecting, the variance report, set targets that we have to send to the Ministry before the first of January, and then we do more data gathering in February and we identify all our hotspots and get those off into special needs groups etc, but I've also got these other ones that were set from last year that might be slightly different for the ones that we've set this year that I have to report on all year long to the board and at the end of the year do my variance report on that, not on who was actually in my school.

Reporting against targets was also not being helped by the student information software, some calculations had to be done manually because the software was not yet up to speed. And: 'I would like to know when they are going to sort out the 'after three years at school' and 'at the end of Year four' because that's a real problem area, I mean there's minor things like that, that if people sat down and talked about it they could come to some reasonable solutions'. DP2 also raised a concern about having

to report the 'below' category: 'after having seen your kids, you know, they are coming through with 'belows' in all areas, it can be a little bit depressing for them and their parents'.

Yet overall the SLT stressed that the standards system had brought little change to the school. The principal argued it was business as usual:

We've incorporated our mid-year report as one of our student-led conferences so it's already happening.

So it's just again, fitting into what we've already done.

We're a lot further down the track than some schools and I'm not talking about National Standards, I'm talking about assessment and reporting.

The targets might have changed slightly but we've reported on targets and we've talked about percentages and we've analysed data and we've looked for hotspots, so none of that has changed for me.

I think it hasn't changed the tools we're using and hasn't narrowed anything that we're doing.

[Parents] like the portfolios where they've got work samples and the whole plain language reporting. We've always done that here because we're a low decile school and they wouldn't be able to read it otherwise.

I think for most of our teachers it hasn't been a big deal because we already had things in place and it was just making adjustments.

I don't really map my day by National Standards to be honest, we just talk about business as usual and as anything how's the year gone.

DP1, who was in charge of the Rumaki programme, and DP2 in the mainstream also stressed continuity over change:

Standards are not a new thing, we've had our own standards across the whole school for as long as I can—you know, since I've started here, and without a doubt long before I even started here. I see the National Standards as just having somebody else's benchmark now given to us and to be honest, we didn't have to do much juggling to actually make them align, close the gap between our expectations and the national expectations. So for us I don't consider it to have been an issue—it's just some minor adjustments. (DP2)

We've always been goal-setting since I've been here, we've always had learning intentions and success criteria but it's just different ways, I guess, that we're showing that. (DP2)

I think we're active in probably doing National Standards, if you like, but we've also at the same time tried to marry it into what we hopefully have already done and made adjustments but also taken advice from other areas. (DP2)

So the tools we've tried to create have been tools that we want to do lots of things; like our graphs—we developed them so we could track progress, but not just for me to report to the board but for teachers to be able to identify at-risk so that they could then take that to the [...] Special Needs Coordinator and say 'I need help with this child because look, look where they are' and to create my guided reading, maths and writing groups.

But there are some tensions here too with recognition that there had actually been a lot of work and change:

I mean if we look at the graph all we've done is add in a little indicator thing where the National Standards are.... But then I guess that's a simplistic way of looking at it. We've actually done quite a bit of work on overall teacher judgements and all the different places we could get information from, and moderation. (DP2)

... we've actually changed our writing programme quickly, because we've actually changed a lot in one term. It's completely different.

We've always set targets around here but I was more transparent about it last year, in that all the data was shared with all of the school.... We rotated the information around and we looked at strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. That was a bit of a challenge for one syndicate in our school who didn't like the fact that people saw their data. They felt threatened, there's no doubt about it. And that was never my intention and other syndicates didn't feel threatened but then again their data probably didn't look as bad.

The Kanuka principal spoke favourably about the New Zealand standards system including training and resources:

The full leadership team attended the first workshop and then different groups of us have gone to the maths and the writing. It was informative, it showed that schools were all doing different things, developing these tools in different ways so we just grabbed bits that were relevant to us.

Our staff really like the Ministry pamphlets, 'How you can help at home' for the parents. So next year we've already ordered them and there are pamphlets at different year levels, we'll give parents one at the first student-led conference.

Problems with the impact of National Standards on the wider curriculum, workload, labelling or alignment were largely dismissed:

I was lucky enough to get funding for the last two years so we have private sports instructors that come in and teach sport. The teachers are still involved but we have experts that come in and teach PE. And we have a Music teacher so she takes all the music, guitar, drums, we have school band, we've got violin, we've got all sorts. So there's lots of really exciting things happening in the learning areas. Teachers are still teaching [topic and] Science and Social Studies—Science is going to be a focus as well next year. And we have Science Club, Newspaper Group and the Green Team, so there's still lots of exciting learning going on, none of that's stopped.

Anything new creates work because you're creating new tools. However, it's just been incorporated as part of our professional development.... It did generate some work for us, but they were priority areas of our charter anyway so we have a priority for literacy and numeracy so it fits.

We have the student-led conferences so regularly, there's no surprises. That's the key. They don't get to the end of the year and think, 'oh! I didn't know that. How could my child be at this level?

I think there's some bickering [amongst teachers] over levels and particular expectations at particular year levels, people have debates about that.

At the heart of these views was the belief that schools can and must make a difference, particularly for Māori, and a rejection of 'deficit thinking':

I think National Standards across the board are a very positive thing because while people do think that we have a world class education system, if you have a look at the data, the tail end is far too long and is far too populated with Māori and Pacific Island students and it's not something that we haven't known for a long time but there hasn't been a lot done about it, apart from the work with Russell Bishop and Kotahitanga, working on relationships and building relationships and knowing that what works for Māori also works for non-Māori, but the reverse is, you know, [...] doesn't always work out. So in that respect I think the Ministry are taking the right tactic and saying to schools if their Māori and Pacific Island population aren't achieving, then the school is not achieving. (DP1)

So it's not throwing our hands up in the air and saying, 'oh, this is how they come, what are we to do about it? There's no way we can meet these standards. So we very much come from that approach. It's about knuckling down because at the end of the day if the

kids aren't learning it's my responsibility. It's not the parents, it's not anybody else's, it's my responsibility. That's my job. That's what I'm paid to do. (DP1)

I think also we had a board—we had a new board that also challenged me and said things like, 'so you're accepting that 40% of your kids are going to fail?' 'Is that what you're really expecting, 40% are going to fail?' And it kind of dawned on me: well actually, that's not good enough, is it? It's not good enough. Actually all our parents send their children to school because they want them to achieve, they know in our area that the best people to help them get there are the professionals so they place a lot of trust in us.... We don't have sort of high decile parents marching in to say this, this and this.

And the thing is our data tells us that ESOL kids that start as new entrants at our school do quite well after a couple of years, they're fine. By the time they leave here they're usually at or above. It's Māori that are underachieving, *still*, you know? Māori boys.

There was a related belief that a group of teachers in the school needed to raise their expectations and that the standards system was a way of requiring this:

The data tells us they come in at low levels and we all know it's going to be hard work but I personally come from a philosophy that we're going to make a difference. We don't know how much difference we're going to make sometimes, but we're going to keep aiming higher and some of those conversations that I've had this year have had staff saying, 'well actually, they're never going to get there, they're always going to be in the red zone' and for me that says deficit thinking, you know, so I challenge that.

I think most people just want to get on with it.... Initially there were a particular group of staff that I would say have more issues with it than others because there's more pressure on them.

I guess it's that ... there's always been this philosophy that, you know, [the children] will get there. Give them a few years and they'll get there. And so there hasn't been the pressure on teachers to get them to a certain reading level because they come in at low level ... as opposed to now, there's a very clear target to say at the end of [a year], they will be reading at [a certain level].

And no, we're not going to get them there if we keep doing what we're doing, so we need to do something differently in our classrooms perhaps but also what acceleration programmes can we provide to give them a boost so that they can make their level.

Targets had been raised after discussion amongst staff:

... in previous years syndicates set their own target so the data was analysed and targets set their target and syndicates said, 'all right, I think we can achieve here' whereas last year we ... agreed really as a staff, as a whole staff, what the targets were going to be, realistically. So we still acknowledge that some people aren't going to hit the mark but National Standards immediately increased pace and built a sense of urgency.

The principal and DPs at Kanuka School were not interested in getting involved in the campaigns against the National Standards. Two of them drew a distinction between the arguments around National Standards and those around league tables and performance pay internationally, which they were concerned about:

I receive emails every day ... I don't have time. I don't have time to discuss and I just feel like we're going around in circles and kids' learning is moving on and I've just got to keep moving with it and so far I don't have an issue. When we start talking about league tables and performance pay, then I will have something to say but at the moment if we're talking about National Standards ... I don't have an issue.

When I was in England] I had a head teacher say, 'if I can give you guys any heads up, it would be to stay away from national testing and league tables', because I saw firsthand the narrowing of the curriculum, I saw eight and nine year olds that I had to actually teach them how to jump a rope where our kids at nine are doing Double Dutch.

It was very, very scary...[But] I believe—I speak for my school—that we do produce well-balanced, well-rounded graduates, so the same kids that do well academically are the same kids that are in the sports teams and the kapa haka. (DP1)

I do worry about league tables and I do worry about performance pay. I worry about it as a low decile principal. Because those two things will not be good for achievement in low decile schools, those two things. National Standards don't worry me—league tables and performance pay worry me. Because is it value added or is it end of line data? You're saying so many children have to hit the national standard? Then, you know, we're going to struggle compared to a high decile school that have already hit the standard when they started the year. But if you're saying it's value added, growth wise, how much value has your teacher added, I'm totally confident.

The Kanuka School principal argued that resistance from teachers just put the Government in a defensive mode and made more problems for teachers:

What I'd like to see is more celebrating what schools are doing well instead of fighting and negative talk. We should be celebrating more what we are doing well and sharing the variations on how we're doing it and why we're doing it so that perhaps the Ministry will relax a little bit.

4.2 JUNIPER SCHOOL

Juniper School was much smaller than either of those discussed so far. Some issues and questions highlighted by this case study and discussed further in Section 5.0 are

1. National Standards being enacted in a highly favourable staffing situation;
2. the pros and cons of a very small roll;
3. where the impetus for 'going with' or contesting the National Standards comes from;
4. pressure in small schools to meet the demands of particular families;
5. artefacts that are 'in development';
6. processes and relationships being damaged through rigid adherence to managerial directives; and
7. alternative policy approaches.

Juniper School contexts for introducing the National Standards

Juniper School was a Year 0–6 school in a rural, mainly dairying area within an hour's drive from the nearest city, 'not in the boondocks' but 'out on a limb, geographically'. It was a small school of less than 60 students and this came through in interviews with the principal as she recounted anecdotes about particular families and children, interspersed with using percentages for subgroups within the school even though the actual numbers being talked about were necessarily very small. It was described by the DP as a 'school in a bubble' with 'lovely kids', where 'learning is cool, there's no behaviour issues':

I've come from a school on the other side of the tracks where in the afternoon all you did was sort out what happened at lunchtime. In this school all you do is teach. And because all you do is teach, you've got the achievement. And the kids are expected to achieve and they expect to achieve. So there is a real culture of learning in this school. And you just do the best you can all the time. And that is a credit to [the principal] who has put that culture of learning into place. (DP)

The school had had up to 100 students in the past but as its new entrant intakes had all been relatively small for the last five years, the school was declining in size over time. It had a mid decile rating and more transience than might be expected (around 23%), essentially because Juniper was catering not so much for the children of local farm owners—who were typically an older demographic anyway, but

those who came to work for them as sharemilkers or labourers or just to rent in a rural area: ‘very few [of our families] own the land they work on and there’s a few in rental properties’. Juniper School was also caught up in changes in the rural sector as local farms were amalgamating, becoming more automated and employing fewer people: ‘Somebody just said to me the other day ‘gosh we used to have 11 working on our farms, now we have two’. The recession may have also had some impact:

The June farm changeover, June 1, that can be up or down for us, it’s a bit unpredictable. I would say the last two years have been deficits and I’ve noticed with the recession there have been more farm owners that are either working themselves or employing a single labourer, not families so much. So I think seven of our children left and five arrived [after June 1 this year], I think there’s only been one year since I’ve been here that there has been a gain.

There was no easy way for Juniper School to gain more students by competing with other local schools. The school had lost some children because new transport entitlement arrangements meant that their families could no longer send them to Juniper by school bus although the school had successfully appealed to have part of these new arrangements overturned. The principal described having to battle Ministry funding rules around transport to try to keep the school viable:

It’s the bottom line, totally the bottom line for them. I mean we had four or five kids up one road and they said ‘oh no’. I said ‘Excuse me, with the size of our school, four children is a lot.’ And they did actually come back but they tend to be fairly non-negotiable.

Another possibility was becoming a full primary but it was not being seriously discussed as ‘we have [schools with] Year 7 and 8 20 km that way and 20 km that way and I know [another rural school] looked into that and were declined’. So ‘we do the best that we can, we have a good reputation’.

Children from farming or sharemilking families tended to come to the school ‘quite well prepared’, those who came to live in local rental properties and were more transient: ‘generally those children are less well-prepared, they tend to have flitted from one place to another, but its variable.’ It was a mainly Pākehā intake with about 10 Māori children. Small schools can be particularly affected by gender imbalances, and while Juniper School had just a few more boys than girls overall it had been more imbalanced in the recent past: ‘at one time we only had two girls out of about 15 in the junior classroom’. This school had no ORS funded children but one with a few hours RTL support and two children with speech language difficulties.

Although parents at Juniper School apparently valued the personal approach their children got at a small school, it was a busy farming community and teachers often struggled to get their involvement: ‘The only reason we are going [on a tree planting trip] is because at one o’clock in the morning I gave my husband a nudge and said “can I borrow a farm worker” because I have no parent help’. (DP) Sporting or events such as calf day worked better for getting parents involved than more academic events such as open days. But for parent interviews ‘we expect 100% [turnout] ... any that don’t make a time we ring up and follow through so we get very close to 100%.’ The principal noted differences within the parent body served by the school:

The people who have had good school experiences themselves tend to get right in behind and support their children and they *drive* their children quite a lot, so we have the ones that are really active, they do their homework, work with [their child] fastidiously and they help around the school and they are very much engaged with the whole learning process. And then you have the other ones and their kids come and they don’t have any stationery, and they don’t bring this and they don’t bring that, lovely kids but they are starting on the back foot and you know you have to try to chase the parents to get them to come along to interviews. So we do sort of have the two extremes.

Student numbers at this small school were always a concern. They affected how many teaching positions remained viable and whether or not the principal would need to be a teaching principal:

The roll is always on the back of your mind; it’s a big thing for a small school. Next year we are dropping a U grade, they are funding us on (less than 50). Obviously we

know through the year we will get some more students but it's a big impact on the board, they have to decide whether to fund that third classroom teacher, they don't want to go to two teachers and they want me to stay in the capacity I am, [a non-teaching principal], you know, getting into all the classrooms on a regular basis.

The effect of this principal having to go back to the classroom some of the time is that she would be unable to 'do the extras': 'You do a lot of extra things you wouldn't normally be able to do and things would have to give and we don't really want them to give'. The school's fundraising committee was committing the money needed to retain the status quo: 'so we are fully funding a teacher and a bit [in 2011], obviously we are hoping the funding will come as some students arrive'. On the other hand being in a small school meant the principal and others were closely involved in community activities including in this case fundraising activities to very directly improve their abilities to teach and lead.

The Principal had been in place at Juniper School for five years, the DP for three. Both were very experienced teachers who had had little involvement in teacher politics. The DP had taught for over 30 years at a variety of schools and described herself as 'a big advocate of parents knowing where their children are at'. The principal had previously taught at a much larger school for 15 years, where she became head of maths and GATE. It would be fair to say she had a great enthusiasm for assessment:

I'm very into formative assessment practices and evidence-based teaching and learning.

Assessment is an area of strength; you know the folders up there (sweeps arm across shelves) are just full of it.

I like kids to own their learning, I think kids need to be engaged in their learning and I was astounded when I came here, I think also my background [at my last school], we did do a lot of assessment and we did share that with the students and they did goal set ... when I came here the kids never knew where they sat, they never had conversations about how they were achieving. So I needed to change some teacher perceptions too.

Because I had the gifted class [at my last school], I think the parents I was dealing with, they wanted to know where their kids were at. Absolutely. Absolutely. And I believe that was their right as well. I've been a parent, I want to know how my children are and I've been to a parents evening where I've felt the teacher had no idea what was going on with my child's learning. So I'm passionate about it. I'm passionate about it. But that was also one of the things the Board said when they appointed me. 'The school is set up, in structure and in policies and all that sort of stuff, we want you to develop the learning and the culture'.

This principal explained how she had set about to shift the climate of the school towards more regular assessment and sharing of data;

I actually went in and modelled and I thought it's got to be something short and sharp and they got almost instant feedback. So I went in and administered a Schonell spelling test and I had conversations with the children about, you know, 'was it important for them to know how they were achieving and where they wanted to go and so on?' and oh yes they did [want to know] and so I shared their results with them and then we talked about goal setting and I said 'And is it important to know what Johnny B got or what you get?' and they said 'Well it's important to know what we get. 'So if everyone knows what everyone got here is that a big deal?' They said 'Well no it's not because it's about personal progress' so I said, 'Everyone's at different rates, it doesn't really matter but it matters what you do for you.' So it really motivated them and then the teachers started taking running records and sharing with the children how they were achieving.... So all of a sudden the climate shifted a little bit as they could see how it motivated students. [Although] there's always that fine line because you've got those students who aren't going to be achieving highly but that's why we are trying to create the climate where it's about personal progress.... So we do discuss all of that [achievement data] with children but we are also very mindful that it's not going to be a negative experience.

There were some advantages to being a small school with very favourable staffing ratios: ‘you can get to know the children very well as individuals and you can provide individual programmes’:

I suppose the advantage of being in a small school probably is that I really know each child as an individual because I’m handling the data whereas at my last school. I was handling the maths data, I saw the school-wide maths data but then the principal ... because I just handed her the bottom line, how well did she know the children as individuals whereas here they [the teachers] input their data and then I suck the data out and I manipulate it. When I say I manipulate it, I determine who is below, at and above, we all know where the benchmarks are, obviously. And so I look at each child’s progress sometimes 3 or 4 times a year so I get to know the kids very well. The teachers do too because we sit around and look at the data, so ‘what are we doing well as a staff?’, ‘what could we be doing, oh it’s thrown up this anomaly here’.... Big schools will see a trend rather than individuals; I see it on a more personal level. So I can talk to children too about their learning ... and I know the parents really love that I know their kids well.

Staffing at Juniper School had been fairly stable, with two teachers earlier leaving on maternity leave and two to do their OE. Most advertised positions attracted beginning teachers but it was more difficult to recruit experienced teachers. Nevertheless, two of the current teaching staff in this three-teacher school had many years teaching and had both been at the school about four years. The other teacher just started teaching in 2010 but had been involved with the school as a parent and board member in the past. This teacher was on a fixed term contract reviewed year by year because of the declining roll situation faced by Juniper. Like many rural schools Juniper School had its own house, which a teacher had lived in until recently but it was now rented out to someone unconnected to the school. Staff relationships were close and amicable in this small school: ‘I think we have a very professional environment and I don’t think we necessarily need to agree with each other but we thrash things out’ (laughs).

The board included two sharemilkers and two mothers that didn’t need to work fulltime. The chair and treasurer were in their second term. The principals noted that generally when it came to educational matters such as charters, targets and the like, the board invariably took her advice: ‘Yeah, that’s your area of expertise really’ and the DP also noted that the board relied heavily on the principal because of limited educational expertise and time.

Turning to curriculum, assessment and professional development, the principal noted ‘we have always focussed heavily on numeracy and literacy’ and later, ‘we have a big ICT push but underpinning that has got to be numeracy and literacy’. Other areas of curriculum were included as topic studies and like Seagull School, Juniper also employed a ‘big idea’ around which curricula were organised (Understanding By Design). As in many schools, Mondays to Thursdays tended to have a greater focus on literacy and numeracy and Fridays most often used for other curricula activities such as kapa haka and trips out of the school.

In line with the principal’s enthusiasms, assessment and reporting at Juniper were already very developed prior to the standards system being introduced. For instance the front of student portfolios displayed a lot of hard data—about 10 pages of charts and comments. Portfolios went home once a term with parents invited to make comments. Juniper School used STAR, Schonell spelling, asTTle just a little because of computer issues, PAT maths (using the online marking service), Numpu, Probe and PM Benchmarks. They also developed their own writing benchmarks, working with a literacy consultant contracted for two years, meshing these in with NZ curriculum exemplars and asTTle. There was a school entry assessment including key competences and the 6 year Net, Overall the school had a very comprehensive assessment plan:

We gather data usually in February, then sit round the table as teachers, we identify the strengths and next steps and our targets. And we have always done that, way before National Standards, it’s been a collaborative thing. Because then teachers own it and then we get children into goal setting, e.g., here’s your STAR reading and we printed out a report that showed where they sat against the national benchmark anyway.

Juniper School report formats in 2009 and earlier advised parents that they were to be ‘... informed about where your child is achieving according to expectation against national curriculum levels’. Also that ‘[e]mphasis in this report is given to literacy and numeracy as the core curriculum areas’ delivered at school. The reports provided beginning and end of year scores in STAR reading texts, unassisted writing samples, spelling ages, PAT maths, maths basic facts and mathematic strategies (with some differences for juniors, e.g. using running records, not using PATs). National expectations were also provided in the form of stanines, levels, stages or an explanation of how chronological age should match spelling age. In other words, as at Seagull School, parents at Juniper have been given a quite specific indication of where students have ‘sat’ in relation to both a series of nationally-normed tests as well as the more global curriculum levels and stages that indicate achievement in NZ primary schooling. In this case beginning and end of year scores have been used rather than continuums but this has still allowed reporting of both achievement and progress as teachers have been able to indicate where students had been at the beginning of the year and how they have usually made some gains by the end of the year. The rest of the reports included detailed written comments about numeracy and literacy and the key competencies (not yet, sometimes, mostly consistently) In contrast to the attention given to numeracy and literacy score and national attainments, ‘Topic Studies’ (ie Social Studies, Science and Technology), Health and PE, the Arts and Te Reo Māori were all reported through a written comment only.

PD over the last few years prior to National Standards had been in reading then working with an RTLit who helped to identify writing as an area for development. Juniper School then combined with another school to employ a well known facilitator to work on formative assessment practices in a writing context, working in the schools one day a term over two years and working with both whole staff and individuals.

Prior to the standards system, charters and other reporting documents like analysis of variance and annual report targets were based on ‘hard data’ (for reading spelling and maths and recount writing for writing), providing percentages of students ‘above’, ‘at’ and ‘below’ the benchmarks.

On the face of it: Juniper School responses to the National Standards

Juniper School made a number of obvious changes in response to the standards system. There were new notes added into school entry assessment and 6-year Net that stanines 1–3 are below national expectation, 4–6 are at national expectation and 7–9 are above expectation. Rubricks were changed to align them to the National Standards and show indicators in reading, writing and maths in more detail than previously.

There were also some changes to the portfolios. There was more emphasis in a ‘reading rocket’ on the expectations for children at particular years. A ‘mathematical strategies’ chart carried the caveat ‘as part of our numeracy professional development, we are currently reviewing our numeracy learning progression to align them with the National Standards’. This was because a maths advisor had told the school their expectations were ‘perhaps a little bit high’:

Some of the classes still completed it, it was fine so long as they didn’t look across here (part of chart that shows expectations at particular years)... It had Year 6’s should be at stage 7 and they shouldn’t be. I said to the teachers you can still complete them if you choose to because it is still a learning progression but it wasn’t beautifully aligned with the National Standards.

From 2010 a new one page interim mid year report describes making an ‘overall teacher judgement ... [about] your child’s best fit achievement on their learning journey at this point against the national standards’ (all lower case in original), assessed as ‘needs further support, developing towards standard, at standard, above standard.’ The layout and content in the end of year reports was also changed. Most of the underlying test scores and the stanines, levels and stages were still there but less space was given to them. More emphasis was now given to a written description, which concluded with the sentence ‘Overall in relation to National Standards [child’s name] has achieved a year X standard and is working towards Year Y’. Also new were sections on ‘next learning steps’ and ‘how you can help at home’. Parents were also now pointed to various websites, including the Ministry and

NZmaths websites and parents were also advised to look at their child's portfolios 'for further hard data'.

The Juniper principal did hold a meeting for parents about the standards system: 'I got a handful of parents to that'; A feedback form about the end of year report asked whether parents wanted more information about National Standards. Only one was returned and 'that was from a board member too might I add' (they said no to more National Standards information).

Finally there were some changes to reporting in analysis of variance and charters to incorporate reporting against National Standards. Some National Standards assessment charts were added in to what was already there reporting directly against formative assessment items. Points of interest here were the standards being referred to as 'New Zealand curriculum standards' and some very small numbers, for instance 6% 'well below' equalling three children, 25% of Māori girls not achieving 'at' or 'above' equalling just one child.

Juniper School's 2011 charter with National Standards targets included was submitted to the Ministry in early February. This was later than the initial request from the Ministry (January) but well before the eventual final deadline in July and it was also accepted before the Ministry became tougher around the wording of the targets. Juniper School was also reviewed by ERO in early 2011 and the report was highly complementary about the school including the way it had 'fully implemented' the National Standards.²⁴

'Behind the scenes'—Views of Juniper School senior leadership team

The Juniper principal described her initial reaction to the announcement of National Standards as 'gosh, OK' but that she didn't form too much of an opinion. She didn't find the National Standards training very illuminating:

Didn't really come away [from the initial standards system training in 2009] knowing that much more to be perfectly honest, because of course we can all read....

... they were only one step ahead of us and they almost keep saying that to us as well, you know 'we are just feeling our way', wasn't great, didn't give people a lot of confidence, to be honest.

The Ministry were only half a jump ahead of where we were, and they were even saying that in their presentations, 'well we only got this last week' so they were sort of learning on the trot as well.

What was much more useful was numeracy PD provided by a Ministry-funded advisor, this had a focus on the standards system and moderation: 'Just getting our heads around the whole philosophy, it was really helpful having [the maths advisor] working with us ... better than going to the ones offsite'.²⁵

Other sources of information over 2009/10 had included TKI, the Gazette and a huge amount of email correspondence: 'all the bits and pieces [from NZEI and NZPF], so I read all of those and just get the different stances ... have discussed some at length through the board, some are quite controversial I suppose'. The local principals cluster was divided on the matter: 'some are more anti, some are more "we have to do this, how can we share and support each other"'.

The Juniper principal described having to come to the point of 'well do we support them, do we not?', having to present a fair view to the board and also being misunderstood by some board members:

They [the board] are not involved in the day to day stuff all of the time and so I've got to sort of convey, without putting a bias on it, 'and well gosh we have been doing that for years, gathering data and sharing data and setting targets so is it a big deal for us?'

²⁴ This was early in term 1 and the discussion of National Standards with ERO was 'very minimal'. We will discuss ERO's reviews of the RAINS schools in a later report.

²⁵ Because it was hard to cover all the maths strands, the school had been looking for rich, open-ended tasks where children could demonstrate their potential.

We have had a few heated debates I must admit.... You know like I am not against National Standards, if I was would I be doing all of this? But I presented a powerpoint from the Principal's Federation I think it was and there was a resolution sent out to schools and they wanted you to sign you were against National Standards. We weren't against National Standards, what I was saying, my personal view was 'I feel they need refinement in their current format'. And this Board member couldn't get past a certain point in the writing, it was like she was putting a full stop there and it was 'look, please read the rest, "in their current format"'.

The Juniper School principal thought there was probably some justification for concern by government and that that the requirement for assessment after 1, 2 and 3 years at school was because schools weren't doing enough assessment in those early years:

The impression I get is that perhaps schools don't monitor hugely at certain parts of schooling. I hear the other day from an RTLit that she went into one school and they didn't even do 6-year Nets. And you think, really? 'Oh well nobody here knows how to do them so we just don't do them'.

Nevertheless she described the standards system as 'another layer' and one that would take a while to get to grips with:

... it is another layer to what we have to do and the fact that it doesn't align beautifully to all these other tests necessarily. I've got a meeting after school with a parent purely about that.

You can't just get a document and expect to apply it, it takes a fairly lengthy period of time to know what's in there and have it become almost [second nature].

I think if there was a trial last year it would have alleviated a lot of tension and in essence they were a trial last year because if you have never used something and you are learning as you go....

An issue was not just making OTJs but having the evidence to back them up:

I know for teachers they deliberated over these OTJs hugely to the point where they are saying 'you know it's taken me almost two hours to write this report' and it's like, 'oh, ridiculous', we know our children and we know what the hard data is saying but yes you also have the soft data. You see what they are doing in class, you have the conversations, what's the National Standards saying from the PD, that you should be making your OTJ on what children are doing independently most of the time. So consider the [hard data] but where's the bulk of it coming from—what happens in the classroom. But on the other side of that, you better have evidence to back that up. And this is where I'm finding what one person considers evidence compared to another, does evidence need to mean 20 pieces of paper? And this is where we are learning to be more discerning and it's been good professionally even though it's been a bit burdensome.

Occasionally teachers have bought me something and I've said 'so what evidence is that against the National Standards, what is that giving you evidence about? I'll get a 'hmmm, not really'. So was it actually worthwhile doing it and if they say 'no' then it's given them a bit more growth in being discerning about what they are using in the classroom.

We did have one hiccup with making an OTJ when this particular teacher thought that to put them in the above they had to be beyond a year. And that was a misconception and I dragged out the piece of paper that I had given to them and said 'well to be well below it has to be more than a year below but to be above is best fit, best fit more aligns with the next year level than the current one' it doesn't say they have to be [a year above]'.

This word 'evidence', you know I think some people have been a bit over-zealous, maybe. They are quite anxious about making that OTJ and not wanting to get it wrong ... you can understand that because you are accountable for that decision.

The DP, who taught the Year 5–6 class, agreed that having evidence was foremost on teachers minds:

Day to day [this child] was a lot better than what the testing actually showed ... [but] you have to have the evidence. If someone says to you 'show me' then you must have the evidence [otherwise] you're up the creek aren't you?

She noted a 'superficial' lack of alignment between the school's writing continuum and the National Standards but described the reading step from 6–7 as a 'chasm' requiring a lot of maturity so that while she had 'good readers' in her class she had only a couple who were 'above':

I have to be majorly comfortable in my head to put them there ['above' the National Standards in reading]: So how do you say to a parent when you've got a child with a running record of 10 or 12 and a STAR stanine of say 7 or 8 but in your head you think 'no they're not there' ... it's a maturity issue, that's what it comes down to. So if you think about it there are going to be a lot of Year 7 boys because they are not maturing enough they are not going to get to that Year 7 standard because the hard-wiring is not complete.

The DP did not however think the standards system had had any impact on workload, morale or relationships amongst teachers, arguing that teachers at the school were 'doing all the data anyway'. Nevertheless: 'sometimes our assessment is over the top ... and possibly we are testing more frequently than we need to'. She gave the example of during running records every term when the records went up in six-month bands. The Juniper DP also noted how the National Standards were creeping into her discussions with children:

It's interesting because I'm just starting to mention it to the kids because I'm conscious they have to reach the National Standards so ... I'm kind of verbalising it to the students. So 'we need to do such and such because we need to get you to the standard'.

Despite staff having some problems with the standards system, the Juniper principal noted that staff were not critical of her for promoting National Standards because they understood it had come from beyond the school: 'I'm accountable to someone else who is requiring this and so it's not just [my] initiative'. She also recognised that Juniper School's size and staffing was making National Standards relatively easy to introduce: 'it would be difficult if you had 30 something 8-year-olds but because we only have a small school and small class sizes, it's probably a bit more manageable to come to grips with it'. There were numerous examples that again the small size of the school was allowing the principal to get quite involved in teachers' National Standards assessments:

I was just going through to have a little crosscheck just to make sure it was all [ok].

And we have the odd discussion about the odd child obviously, so you know, 'what informed, how did you make that decision?'

And [the teachers] are saying 'but there's some things I haven't taught so I can't really say they are going to be 'above'. 'No but remember it's "best fit". So if you have only done half the curriculum at this time of the year are they more "best fit" in that column or that column, where are they most "best fit"?' Those are the kind of discussions we generally have, some of them around the table. Some just one-to-one, which we can do because we are a small school.

There were few queries from parents about National Standards over 2010–11 and the DP noted that in most cases parents had to be asked at parents evenings to sign in the space provided at the bottom of their child's National Standards report sheet—as if they had not bothered to read that far. Nevertheless there were a couple of specific concerns, which the school had to respond to. One parent's concern was around the phrase 'Developing towards standard' in mid-year reports because she saw 'developing towards standard' as a euphemism that her child was 'below' whereas the school meant it to signal he would not be 'at' until the end of the year:

So we are really happy for our children to be 'Developing towards the standard' when it's only part-way through the year so again it's just making sure everybody has got the same understanding and I wrote that in newsletters and things.

Eventually the school agreed there was ambiguity and changed the wording to ‘Achieving the standard as expected at this time’. The DP commented:

They didn’t understand where we were coming from. Even though [the principal] had put it in countless newsletters, parent actually didn’t understand where we were at. They expected them to be there and at that mid-year conference I spent my whole time explaining the National Standards.

Another parent was also concerned about her child being ‘at’ rather than above:

We just had a discussion around, well really, the best fit for that child, is it really at or above. And the teacher in the end said, ‘actually I think it probably is above, you are probably quite right, I’m being a little bit conservative’ ... this particular parent comes in very, very regularly and everything’s about stanines and so on with her. Which you know, there’s a place for that.... She’s more concerned about the hard data and she asked us to duplicate in the new report forms some [hard data] that was in there [the old reports] because that what she wanted to see.... Well it’s no skin off our nose to write a comment about that, she wanted to send that particular report away to a family member or something.

While in both of these cases the school responded to the concerns of parents, in general it was necessary to take a conservative approach to reporting because ‘[w]e don’t want to give parents the impression that [students] are beyond [what they are]’. Apart from anything else, this would lead to future problems if the school had to backtrack on its judgements. The DP thought that teachers had been particularly conservative the first time they reported against the National Standards but would become more willing to ‘stick their necks out’ and more realistic over time.

This school was trying to report in ways that did not use the National Standards four-point scale and had picked up on an example from the Education Gazette (“Reports to Parents”, 2010) of how to avoid doing this discussed later (Section 5.0) and also gave some of the same rationale:

We try to say it [student achievement against the National Standards] in a nice way, that’s why we have tried to in the new report form rather than say they are below, we got it out of the Ed Gazette, they had some examples of reporting to parents, Example A and Example B and they just phrased things slightly more subtly but still getting the same message.

If you open a report and the first sentence is “Joey is achieving ‘below’ or ‘well below’ the National Standards” how motivated are you to move on and the intent of the New Zealand curriculum is to try to motivate students to be lifelong learners not switch them off. So if you put the National Standards at the heart of your reporting I guess you are not really aligning with the New Zealand curriculum either. That’s why we are concentrating on writing progress and strengths, you know, build them up.

The principal of Juniper School suggested that the main positive of the standards system was professional dialogue around learning:

The one thing I suppose that the National Standards has done, it has encouraged a lot of professional dialogue and discussion around actual learning, you know, so that can’t be a bad thing, it’s got to be a good thing.

Against this she often questioned the value of the New Zealand standards system despite (or perhaps because of) being an assessment enthusiast:

I think what we were doing already; the parents had a very comprehensive picture of where their children were at, they will tell you that, the bulk of them.

[There] are issues that need to be addressed but I don’t know that they are going to need National Standards—I would have thought they would be identified maybe through ERO.

These SAFs that are being appointed, these new Ministry positions, really they should have been put into schools well before now, well before National Standards, for those

schools who were failing under ERO anyway. And so why does the whole country have to change processes just to satisfy those underachieving schools as such?

See one of the questions ERO was asking was ‘Are the National Standards helping you to identify these children?’ Well, no, of course they aren’t, the data had already told us that, we know those children!

The DP also pointed to the New Zealand standards system being ‘rolled out’ too fast, comparing it unfavourably with the New Zealand Curriculum which was much more gradual. There were also complaints around some specifics. One issue was overlooking obvious problems that affected the accuracy of how achievement in the school was depicted: the ‘craziness’ of having to set targets against the previous years National Standards achievement when the cohort had changed by a third whereas if December data had been compared to February data of the same year ‘that to me would be comparing apples with apples’. There was also the ‘frustration’ of having to include ESOL students following the change of Ministry advice in 2011: ‘I thought how ridiculous you know putting those students in my data that are newly enrolled in our school, we’ve hardly had any chance to do anything with them and yet that’s going to reflect our school’s progress and achievement?’ Juniper School dealt with both of these issues—and a number of others—by including covering notes in their analysis of variance that pointed out the problems: ‘Because this is supposed to be a document for our community and so if we want our community to understand this then surely it is reasonable to put [those explanations] in there’. ‘It’s the reality, it’s the picture of our school and surely that’s fair.

A second kind of concern was some of the pettiness around the policy. The principal quoted an explanation given by a Ministry official as to why the wording of Juniper School’s charter got through but wouldn’t have eight weeks later): it was, in his words, ‘bureaucracy gone mad.’

Pointlessly demanding timelines were a third concern. The Juniper principal agreed with the Ministry that June or July was too late in the year to get charters in: ‘... my personal belief is that if your charter is your guiding document and you are only submitting it halfway though the year then half the year’s gone really’. On the other hand, deadlines at the beginning of Term 1 were quite unreasonable too. The Ministry initially wanted 2011 charters in January 2011 but this deadline was relaxed and the Juniper School board was able to meet in February 2011 about it. But when the matter came up again for a February 1 2012 deadline, the principal gave the board the option of meeting in late January or emailing her any feedback. They chose the latter as they were not keen on a meeting because many were still on holiday. Several issues are raised including diminishing the role of the Board—a group of volunteers after all—in the process of agreeing the charter, putting unnecessary pressure on principals over the holiday period and a rationale which the Juniper principal described as ‘astounding’:

It was like you were talking to the lowest common denominator really because they said ‘If you don’t have your charter to us, that’s your plan for the year. If you haven’t got your charter done by 1st of February it means you have no planning in place. I thought how ridiculous is that, really do they think we are that unprofessional?

Local principals had been told to expect a phone call on February 2nd but that they could put in a charter with a covering note to say it was an interim one. Again the Juniper School principal was unimpressed, asking why the Ministry felt the need to ‘raise the temperature’ so much around charters, if indeed there was going to be some leniency. She pointed out that the Ministry itself was in a certain amount of disarray with resignations meaning that the ‘senior advisors’ being appointed to schools were already having to change when schools had only just been advised who their advisor would be.

It was also apparent to the Juniper School principal that it was almost impossible to work with data in a small school and not have particular students being identifiable:

You can recognise it with this one [Analysis of variance table] because there’s the year level data. Like my Board sit there and they can pretty much figure out who we are talking about without any names.

Another conclusion of the Juniper principal was the need for wider professional development:

If they are trying to raise student achievement then what are they doing to enable that, it really comes down to professional development in my opinion.... The professional development around National Standards I think has been quite ineffective. They need to

be putting more emphasis into not just the Standards as such but increasing teacher pedagogy ... which is what I suppose they think they are doing but most of it seems to be around moderation.... The whole purpose of moderation is to enable you to get a picture of scaffolded learning and where to next but is it giving teachers the skills I suppose to do it.

There are a lot of question marks at the moment but you would expect there to be a flow-on effect, here's what the data's telling us, what are we going to do, what will we put in place in response to the data. And ideally, if I was Prime Minister [laughs], you'd be thinking professional development into those areas of need.

4.3 MAGENTA SCHOOL

Magenta School was another rural school but larger and more affluent. Like Kanuka School it illustrates the way the National Standards provide an avenue for reform in schools undergoing transition and like Juniper School there is the issue of responding to community in a rural setting. Some issues and questions newly highlighted by the Magenta School case study and discussed in Section 5.0 include

1. connections and tensions between the National Standards and the New Zealand Curriculum;
2. school leaders feeling increasingly directed by the National Standards policy;
3. 'rogue' cohorts; and
4. concern about wider policy developments around schools.

Magenta School contexts for introducing National Standards

Magenta School is a Year 0–8 full primary school of about 150 mainly New Zealand European/Pākehā students (about 7% Māori and 'probably less than one per cent of other ethnic groups') in a rural location about 30 minutes drive from the nearest city. It has a mainly high SES intake comprising both the children of local farmers and professionals who have bought lifestyle blocks in the area. There is little transience: 'we have very few [on farms] that move on mid-year ... most of our children start and finish with us.' Nor are special needs a big feature of this school, it did have a learning support programme but in general the issues such as dyslexia and hearing loss were not severe enough to hold back achievement, partly because there was usually 'strong parent support, either within the school or a number of parents do pay for additional programmes such as SPELD which they send children to, which support what we're doing here.'

Magenta School was a focal point for the local community and this brought particular responsibilities:

Although we're not the be all and end all of the community, we certainly see that we are a magnet that attracts the community to activities. So we see our responsibilities as not only on a day to day basis with the students, but bringing in the families and doing activities with families, which may include social activities, and also maintaining some of the traditional country school activities such as Agricultural Day and we see that that's an important tradition to maintain.

Parent involvement in the school was considerable. Parents helped out by involving themselves in support groups such as the PTA, on the board, or just getting involved in working bees, which were held regularly. For parent interviews the aim was 100% attendance ('on the evenings we usually get around 85% and the rest are followed up with phone calls'). More generally:

Parents are willing to come in and talk about their successes and their concerns, and having that openness is something we hold onto dearly because we know that working together gets the best results.

At same time the willingness of parents to assert their views did pose some challenges for the leadership of the school:

Every year, especially around [the end of the year], we have the same concern of ‘which teacher will my child have next year?’ and there’s a perception ... for instance, in the upper end of the school we have a combined class of Year 7 and 8 and our next class is combined Year 6 and 7, since we just don’t have the volume of teacher. So parents who see that their children are being ‘left behind’ in Year 7 are not as well off as those who are in the ‘top class’, so that is an issue for us every single year. Most we can work through and after a short period of time they can see the benefits of being in the Year 6/7 class for instance, you get leadership roles that might be hidden in the 7/8 class.

There’s a very traditional perception of what [education] should look like and as part of developing our school curriculum we are sharing with the community how those changes are taking place.... So teaching in 2011 as opposed to when they went to school.

One example of where this traditional perception was having an impact was that we noticed one classroom we observed in was particularly small but the board was hesitating to buy the kind of tables that would have allowed better use of space because they felt it was important that each child had a desk.

Magenta School does not really have to compete with other local schools, as they are far enough away to make them less attractive to local parents. Relationships have long been collaborative with a local cluster for staff PD and student exchanges both sporting and academic. Where Magenta School did lose a few students was at the Year 7 and 8 level where some parents chose to send their children to the closest intermediate school, or more often, a private Year 7–13 secondary school, both within about 30 minutes driving time. The size of the roll was important to the extent of usually making the difference whether or not the school could employ an 8th teacher, albeit always on a one year contract:

151 entitles us to an eighth teacher, which would give us seven classrooms that we can open and that seems to be a point that influences how we organise our school structure on a yearly basis. So this year we had guaranteed staff and that allowed us to have the seven classrooms—next year we just fall under it so we will start with six....

As at Kanuka School, the principal had only been in the role since about the time the National Standards legislation was passed but in this case had come from being DP at an intermediate for 9 years: he had about twenty years experience overall. The DP—responsible for seniors—had also come to the school recently whereas the AP—responsible for juniors—had been there for more than a decade. Despite these recent changes, Magenta School had a generally stable staff: ‘I don’t think there is a great desire to move on, other than for ... promotion’. There were few problems with recruitment—one recent position had seen 60 applicants. The principal put this down to Magenta School being a ‘great place to work’: ‘one of our newest appointments in support staff said the school she worked at before was great, but coming here she’s just got a new benchmark as to what great looks like!’

The Magenta School Board of Trustees was described as ‘very supportive of the direction that we are going in ... they recognise the need for strategic planning’. Apart from the principal and teacher representative, the Board comprised a farmer, an accountant, a nurse, a teacher and a business manager. Stability was the norm rather than the exception for the Magenta Board: three had been on for the previous term and the previous Board chair had been on the Board for 12 years.

Turning now to curriculum, as will be clear from the discussion of reports below it was very much a broad primary school curriculum rather than a narrow one and by 2008 reflected growing interest within Magenta School in key competencies and values education. At this school much was made of the local response to the NZ curriculum. This was an area of focus for the new principal on arrival at the school: ‘prior to my arrival there had been a fair amount of work around its implementation, but probably not a lot of hard copy elements to it’:

We’ve done a lot of work on developing our curriculum.... We looked at what a Magenta School graduate would look like when they left here; we asked the parents what they wanted their child to have when they left [the school]; and we’ve kind of worked backwards from that, really. We had an implementation folder that was ancient

and we've started looking at rewriting, changing, implementation plans to fit the national New Zealand curriculum, but making it pertinent to Magenta School. (AP)

Assessment had been centred on a five-point rubric but this too had been getting fresh attention since about the time the National Standards legislation was passed: seemingly another case of a new broom sweeping clean:

When I came into the school I identified assessment as being one of the needs for professional development. I didn't believe that we were using it formatively or using it to progress learning and that there was a lot of summative conclusions that may not have fed into further improvement. So we revamped how and why we gather data and we recognise that assessment tools are a key component in it, but it's what we see every day children doing that really gives us the nitty-gritty and the context of all judgements that we make about our children.

Overall teacher judgement has always been in place in Magenta School; our ability to describe how we get the evidence for it is the difficult part. We've always had that knowledge in our heads but how to describe it is the hard bit.... Moderation is not a new word either, but it's that common understanding....

The children had portfolios ('learning journeys') that were re-oriented 'to reflect learning.' With running records it was a case of 'moving away from "there's a number that you get at the end" and using it as an observational tool, which is what they were designed for in the first place'. PATs were dropped, STAR retained and asTTle became the main new assessment tool used by Magenta School:

I immediately got rid of a couple of the assessment tools because they weren't used formatively, and not that I dislike those tests particularly but they were in association with 'this is how we've always done it', so therefore it's easier to remove it and put in something else in place so that we had a fresh start and could have an understanding of the new tools that would fit in.

Another change at this time, prior to the introduction of the standards system, was target setting at the level of each class rather than the school as a whole:

We started looking at class targets and teachers setting those for their children using the results from the beginning of year testing data; which was more meaningful and far more powerful for you as a teacher and for [the principal] to see that actually student achievement, we are making a difference, yeah. (AP)

Some of the target setting in the past at Magenta School had been controversial:

The previous principal had something and he had multiple conversations with the Ministry, they were saying, 'you can't have that, you can't have that as a target, that's not right'. And he was saying, 'that's what we're doing' and it was about [delivering our] enquiry or ... there was nothing specific that you could actually measure, yeah. So [the current principal] and rightly so, probably—saw a need to have 'specific-ness' [laughs]. (AP)

By 2008 there were two parent interviews centred on goal setting: 'We looked at curriculum, literacy, numeracy, because that was our focus, and still goal setting; but children setting specific goals for them, pretty much' (AP) There was also an end of year report that used the attainment scale 'Novice', 'Apprentice', 'Practitioner' and 'Expert' across a wide range of curriculum areas (English, Maths, Social Studies, Science, Technology, Music, Visual Arts, Drama, Dance, Health, PE and Languages) and also gave achievement against levels for all of these areas as well (level 1 by the end of year 2, 2 by the end of 4, 3 by the end of 6 and 4 by the end of 8). English was broken down into reading; written language and information skills; oral language, listening and communication, spelling, handwriting and presentation. Maths was broken down into knowledge and strategies. There were further assessments of effort and aptitude (excellent, meeting expectations, improvement needed). Key competencies and values were also graded Novice, Apprentice, Practitioner and Expert.

PD in recent years before the introduction of the standards system had included an ICT focus for three years, integrated planning and shared planning. The ICT PD was really about developing enquiry:

Because we as teachers had to do a whole lot of un-learning and then re-learning of how we teach, and letting the children—not ‘letting’ them but you know—helping the children develop skills so they’re in charge of their learning. So developing questioning so the children are then able to ask really meaningful questions, wanting to find out their own learning and like if a little boy was into tigers then you would take that and you would try and integrate that into the topic that you’re doing. And also for teachers too, you know, using the technology to enhance our teaching and to hook children in, and open our classrooms up to the world more than they ever have been. (AP)

Another emphasis was ‘childspeak’:

... children talking about their learning and that comes with enquiry; we were starting to develop yes, that samples of work and the teacher assessment or talk was there, but also what the child thought about their learning and what they thought they needed to do next time, yeah. And we’ve been working hard to develop that even further, you know, with the goal-setting conferences and children scaling themselves and then revisiting where they think they might be and how they think they can get there.

On the face of it: Magenta School responses to the National Standards

We will see that Magenta School more than any of the other RAINS schools chose to regard the National Standards as just another part of the New Zealand curriculum and so its primary response was to keep working on the Magenta School curriculum:

... we have curriculum update each term and look at a facet of the curriculum and try and inform. And we’ve had quite a poor turnout with it, and to me I’ve interpreted that as they’re happy with what we’re doing and feel informed through the various other methods of communication, ‘cause otherwise people would come down and ask questions about National Standards or things we’re not doing.... I have not had a single parent ask me about National Standards who is not on the board.

... this year (2010) has been a consolidation of putting all of those different pieces of jigsaw into one so that all the pieces lined up and have developed our Magenta School curriculum so it gives us a common understanding of curriculum delivery and processes.

[Changing the curriculum] was big enough to do without having [National Standards] come in as well. But I think that they sit in the back of your mind, and as you’re developing stuff—because it’s always changing, still, you know—you’re conscious that they’re there and that you have like an implementation plan [for it] you know. For writing, we’ve got— or an action plan, I don’t know—somewhere in there you have to say about our assessment and what we’re doing for it, or how we’re going to develop it, and then so the National Standards will just come in, I think, naturally. They might not be stated as National Standards but I think, you know. (AP)

... where we’re at now is aligning all these tools so ... we have common understanding, common terminology and are able to reference it to evidence.

... we looked at what our targets might be in relation to National Standards and the junior school said ... well, they noted immediately that the targets they [set] were very similar, if not the same as what the National Standards were. So that was our initial bite into going ‘well, could they work for us’?

One area of the curriculum that was being reconsidered because of National Standards was the use of PM benchmarks in junior reading rather than the Ready to Read series:

Well, we’re just at the stage of thinking about that because the literacy progressions are based on the Ready to Read series and that’s what ... you know, the Ready to Read series is based on this colour wheel here, which the National Standards are based on. So why would you use a PM benchmark to do a running record that’s based on that?

The junior school had started to use the colour wheel displayed on classroom dashboards during parent interviews (in the senior school it was e-asTTle). Hence in 2011 it seemed National Standards will have prompted the school to shift from PM Benchmarks to the Ready to Read series: ‘Yeah, that’s the plan in the holidays [...] get a Ready to Read box happening’ (AP).

Maagenta School put in a new mid-year report in 2010. This mentioned ‘progress in relation to national standards’ and within the written comments for literacy and maths only (and with literacy strands now simplified) mentioned whether the child was ‘working towards’ the expected level, ‘working at’ or ‘working above’. There were now also next learning steps and ‘how I can help at home’. Key competencies were now graded beginning, proficient and advanced in line with asTTle and values were not longer included. The end of year reports were changed along the same lines and parent conferences also changed:

Now we’re more focused on informing parents of where their children are at and what they need to do to get to here, and using the curriculum levels and having those out on the table and showing the parents where they need to be and how they can help at home to get them to here, yeah. So definitely more specific...

Class target setting now started to be related to the National Standards:

And with that, if we can jump to 2010 with those class targets, we’ve put ... if I just use my classroom example, the target where I wanted the children to get to, I used the National Standards as my target to get there; so at six I’ve got them ... *[pause]* ... there they are. So for reading, at six years each child will be reading at PM benchmark [...] level twelve or above. At the start of the year 6% were, and at the end of the year 90% were. So my target was based on meeting, getting the children to meet the standard. (AP)

Magenta School worked with the local cluster of schools on moderation of writing samples and maths. PD for 2011 was literacy with writing and leadership in assessment, both with external facilitation, these are discussed further below.

‘Behind the scenes’—Views of Magenta School senior leadership team

Given the considerable focus on the NZC at Magenta School, it is not surprising that this framed the way National Standards were initially seen by the SLT at the outset:

I think my initial reaction was, oh no, here’s something else we’ve got to fit in, we have not implemented the NZC in any way that we really wanted to, and how is this going to dilute the process that we’re trying to put in place with that.

... we felt that we still needed to focus in on our assessment and on implementing the NZC and where would that [the National Standards] fit in without muddying the waters and diluting everything with it. So we could see that there are benefits to setting benchmarks for our school, or targets; we could see that within National Standards there were criteria that could be useful if aligned with NZC; and we did have concerns about where it might end up because the reports [on the National Standards] from all sorts of angles were saying, ‘don’t touch them’ or ‘they’re wonderful’ or ‘actually we don’t know where they’re going’.

There followed a period during 2010 of unsuccessfully trying to get answers about the standards system:

... when the draft National Standards came out there was all sorts of meetings about that but really it was like, ‘so here’s a document’. It wasn’t like a clear view of where it was going or what we were meant to do with it.

... the providers seemed to be regurgitating what they had been told from Ministry, and they were unable to answer the key questions about, ‘so where’s it ending up?’ Because a lot of us work on the premise of you need to have a vision in order to know where

you're going and there didn't seem to be a clear vision and they weren't able to help us in that in any way.

There was one lot of PD that came out after the initial round, which we didn't involve ourselves in because it didn't seem to help in any way and what was described we were probably beyond it anyway and the first seemed such a waste of time and it was the same provider.

It was lack of information that in some ways empowered Magenta to take its 'Magenta School curriculum standards' approach:

... that led to more anxiety and it also gave us the confidence to then say, well, student achievement is our core objective, we will utilise the parts of the National Standards that will help us in terms of improving student achievement and we will have a 'wait and see' kind of attitude.

... we are a self-governing school, that's why Tomorrow's Schools were put in place, so we take that philosophy. If it fits our vision, if it fits our viewpoint and the direction we're going in, we will take it on board. They are a supporting document to the New Zealand Curriculum and therefore you treat it as such. It was never going to drive any aspect of what we were doing. We were taking the paths that were beneficial and would focus on those and we would do less of what we didn't understand or was going to be harmful to our children. So this year we set targets for every class, and they are the targets that are in our charter and they were in consideration or in reference to the National Standards but again, based on Magenta School standards; so that's really how far we've delved down into them. And at the moment we're sort of aligning where they fit in with the literacy progressions and so on.

... the resources that have floated around them have been increased and some of them are very useful but I don't see them as National Standards resources, I see them as curriculum resources. If you've been able to tap into the right people—so for instance, I've got one of the National Standards facilitators, I see eye to eye with her and her input into my understanding of what we've been able to do has been funded by National Standards implementation but has really been about improving our curriculum development.

... at times I've questioned have I sold out by using the [National Standards facilitation], because ultimately I believe National Standards will not change the outcomes for students but will the contributing factors around it, and the resources that surround it, will they? Yes. So...hey, if that benefits Magenta School then I'm prepared to go there.

National Standards on their own will not change student achievement. Setting targets that are high but attainable, will change student achievement; that needs to be done on a school by school basis ... the initial selling of them as National Standards was the biggest issue of the whole lot, because in reality they are New Zealand Curriculum standards and if they had sold them as that it would have been less of an issue. And if they were sold as, 'these are the benchmarks that we're setting and these are the reasons why,' again, it would be perceived as a lot different.

... we've consciously not gone down the track, which some schools have, of only talking about literacy and numeracy because that's what National Standards are about. We cover the full curriculum within our reporting process.

The principal of Magenta School recognised that the National Standards agenda had in some ways helped him as a new principal reforming the school

[When I came to see the school in 2008] that was the first thing that struck me was the assessment was not where it needed to be and therefore if that wasn't [in place] the reporting process wouldn't be correct either. Also the fact that our reporting was not in the student management system meant that everything was already needing to be

repackaged anyway. So have they helped support some of these things? I suppose the answer is yes.

The AP also thought that the standards system had helped in terms of informing target setting:

And for us, getting used to setting our class targets it was quite good to have a benchmark that we knew that we needed to get the children to, because before then it was like setting our own school target of, you know, where do you think a year one child should be or year two child and then making our class target to that. So actually the National Standards helped us a bit to have a target to get to, because we knew we could with our cohort of children! (AP)

Despite all of this, it was clearly very important to the Magenta principal that the New Zealand standards system not drive the Magenta School curriculum or associated assessment and in some respects it was feasible to argue that the National Standards were supporting that curriculum:

National Standards have not changed our curriculum and teaching delivery. The only thing that it will have had some influence in is setting our targets—we have used them as a reference point for setting our own benchmarks.

We're still focusing on curriculum development so the National Standards fit as a supporting document to the New Zealand curriculum and we still maintain that stance, so their value in creating benchmarks has been there, we've aligned them with our data and the reality is they fit fairly similarly, so the trend within the National Standards pretty much marries up with what our trends are in terms of curriculum level and where you would expect a child to be at, at the end of the year is fairly close.

Yet framing the National Standards within the Magenta School curriculum did not prove straightforward. One problem was the requirement to incorporate a National Standards target in the 2011 charter. Magenta School didn't get its charter in as early as Juniper school and as a consequence faced a request to incorporate the words 'National Standards' in 17 places:

Concerns: a big one around charter. We've revamped our whole charter this year, which was a massive exercise in itself.... We had feedback to say that as it stands it would be non-compliant because it doesn't mention National Standards constantly all the way through it. And I was a little bit upset and said well, we're fulfilling all of the requirements, you can see that we've done moderation work and OTJ work and curriculum development, we've even looked at the National Standards and have created our Magenta School standards and we have married up all the different pieces and the National Standards are still a supporting document to the New Zealand Curriculum so when we're using the New Zealand Curriculum, we are using the National Standards in a way, so what's the issue? And I was informed that it is compliance and a requirement from the Ministry and that's the feedback.

I didn't have an issue because all the good groundwork of curriculum development was all there ... and we had good discussions in and around what would our target be and what was the supporting material for us to have, all of that sort of thing. It's only the feedback to say, 'we want explicitly National Standards and that's the only thing we will accept.' So are we a self-governing school or are we [in] a dictatorship?

If National Standards continue to be pursued the way it is, are we going to be strong enough in order to pursue the whole curriculum? Or are we going to go, 'never mind the curriculum, we're just going to have literacy and numeracy so that we look good as a school' because we'll be judged upon the data that gets sent away to an external agent who doesn't know our context or our population or what is important to us, and rely on that and that's compliance.

Another problem was the pace of change required, both with the charter and more generally around the standards system:

... we've talked about how we can become compliant and we will take it to the board meeting on Tuesday, get it signed off because we've only got about three days to get it

in so we don't get a hand slap as a result of that. So the timeline has been an issue for us—we had our targets all set after our first lot of assessment at the beginning of the year and we've built up; so having a threshold of July the 1st has meant, you know, it's good to work to a timeframe but it's come across a few issues on the way so we're stuck with that, an external timeframe rather than an internal one. We have a charter, it's just in a draft form, we're working from it—why is there an issue with that?

So although we didn't make a muck-up of it as I think some schools have, we have certainly rushed to do some things and put them in place very rapidly and they will change again as we get a greater understanding of what it really should look like.

There were also some pressures from parents that were keen on the National Standards, although there were also parent demands that the Magenta principal was not willing to endorse:

To do no harm is what assessment and reporting should be about, and although we've probably moved to use those three 'labels', for want of a better word, it probably has been because of parent input saying we really do want it, and we haven't worked out another way of delivering that as yet.

And some parents have said, 'we want to know if our children are well below', and I have expressed firmly that 'is that going to benefit your child?' And if you want to know that your child is well below then you want to know how you can help and we will focus upon their next steps in learning ... because in all honesty, if they're well below, they'll be well below next year or they may be below—because there's no way you can move a child that quickly with that kind of identified label.

A further problem is that while the standards system brought resources in numeracy and literacy that were often welcome, resources have become less available in other learning areas because of the shutting down of curriculum advisors in those areas. Nevertheless 'we still need to focus on the arts and technology and everything else. So if we can't access outside support and we've got to do it ourselves, that is an issue'.

The Magenta principal acknowledged a range of views about the National Standards on staff including those who were clearly opposed, but: 'I don't think there's been any heated debates or discussions where any of us have stood up and said, you know, 'this is wrong' or that's going to negatively impact on anybody'. There had been some staff debates about the new reports and whether or not to include some percentages as well as provide the labels. The Board were 'probably on the fence' in relation to the National Standards having heard both sides of the debate:

They know that if these certain things happen, and it's detrimental to students that I will not be in support of them. They are not willing to sign one of the NZPF [agreements] to say we're not doing [the National Standards] whatsoever; however, they would be willing to do that if it was shown that it was going to be detrimental to student achievement.

Looking beyond the school, the Magenta principal was supportive of 'some of the staunch perspectives and reasons behind that.' He suggested that it was lower SES schools that would be hardest hit by judgements around the National Standards although a 'rogue' cohort in a high SES school like Magenta School could also lead to the same problems:

I think the ones that will suffer the most are from low socio-economic city schools; and if ... yeah, because they are going to be further below the Standards, as a generalisation, than anybody else. However, if we get a cohort—because we do have an interesting cohort [this year] that is achieving below the National Standards and below what everyone else is, and they were identified all the way through, so if we, you know, were judged upon that one cohort then we would have problems as well. And if ... the information we passed onto the Ministry went out there and was interpreted in that way then we would be very anti-National Standards. Because again, everything should be about doing no harm, it should be about improving.

Performance pay and changes to the way RTLB were also a concern:

With performance pay, who wants to have a child that is performing lower, who has a behaviour issue? Who wants to share their [...] work with their neighbour because then they might get the credit for it. Why would you share anything with another school?

The Magenta principal recognised there was a risk of being too alarmist:

So the league table thing is a real concern to us, but until [the league tables] go out ... this is that wishy-washy business of 'are you a pessimist or are you a half-full kind of person?' And if anybody put them out there or the media got hold of them which they are entitled to, by that point in time, one would argue it's too late, it's already out there. And therefore we should have taken a strong stance now. [On the other hand], one can argue why worry about something that might be, rather than what is.

Nevertheless by the middle of 2011 with, the charter issue hanging over the school and many other schools, the principal of Magenta School was coming more to the view that there were good reasons to be concerned about both local developments in the MoE, support services and other support for schools and the national situation:

The literacy [PD] we got pretty much straight away at the beginning of the year, we started, we had two sessions with them and we were told we were a successful school and therefore we had the light touch and that was it. Now, I'm assuming from that, that we were doing moderation and OTJs, so therefore we were deemed yes, we're going to be compliant. I haven't had the charter in; I yesterday received a letter from someone at the Ministry saying we will now be taken on for the leadership [in] assessment programme for PD. Now, I might be cynical but it's interesting I don't have the charter in so we need help.

I'm trying to get hold of [the MoE] property person for other work but all year I have been unable to get hold of them for a reasonable meeting to set up the expenditure of what we want to do with the property and long term planning from it. So we are being blamed for not doing our job and saying we're not doing a good one because we don't have National Standards in our charter, but yet I can't get hold of Ministry people to support me in other areas; the balance isn't there.

It seems that [the RTL reform] is a model that we're moving down and it's a business model so, you know, the belief that national procurement will mean the cheapest thing for the Ministry or for the government. A centralised thing, so have a cluster [of schools] so instead of having a small number in, you know, one region where there might be ten schools, you might have twenty or thirty schools in the cluster so you're reducing ... and it's a money game. And the buy-in to it is not there, so why do it? and it's been rumoured that we won't be self-governing and have boards, we'll have cluster boards, you know, the whole uncertainty of it is mind-bending.

The general feeling from the principals was that [it's a] fait accompli, basically—'we're stuffed', was how someone said it. [The National Standards are] in, they're going to be actioned upon, there was some inside information from the Ministry that would suggest that so much has been planned for beyond the election as, you know, it's just going to happen; the media have not supported the teachers or NZEI or NZPF in any way and they've just looked for ... the bad news, basically, like every other bit of news we've got. So resignation of the fact that it's in, what can we really do other than do what we always do, which is look after children, work towards student achievement, and we may have to do ... run the compliance gauntlet just so that can happen. We'll just get on with it. So it's not positive at all.

4.4 CICADA SCHOOL

Like Kanuka School, Cicada was a large school in a low socio-economic area but unlike Kanuka, the SLT at Cicada was hardly embracing the National Standards agenda, indeed Cicada was a BTAC school. Once again we are seeing Cicada School from the point of the SLT (in this case the principal

and AP were interviewed) with other practices and experiences in such challenging settings to be further explored. Nevertheless the Cicada School case study particularly highlights (see Section 5.0):

1. being ‘civilly disobedient’—the reasons behind becoming a BTAC school, experiences with the Ministry over 2011, and the energies used;
2. the use of 78J letters by the Ministry;
3. the importance of local politics in supporting overt contestation of the National Standards;
4. that schools overtly contesting the National Standards may nevertheless be putting a lot of energy into targets and assessment and may also be working hard to shore up their position;
5. that schools overtly contesting the National Standards may borrow National Standards concepts or use a variant of them;
6. the shifting situation around ELLs and special needs students (there are a lot of both at Cicada School); and
7. NZEI supporting competence procedures rather than just being ‘a union protecting their members’.

Cicada School contexts for introducing National Standards

Cicada was a low decile Year 0–6 suburban school of nearly 500 students. It drew mainly from the surrounding suburbs²⁶ that had become ethnically diverse in recent decades while at the same time largely abandoned by the Pākehā middle and working class families that had lived there until the 1980s. The school had around 40% Pasifika (mainly Samoan and Tongan) students, 20% Māori and 36% Asian (mainly Indian) students: ‘we do have the odd Pākehā or New Zealand European child’. Around 80% of its children were learning English as their second or third language: ‘42% of our children are ESOL funded and a further 42% are ESOL. We can’t get away from the fact that 80% of our kids, approximately, are ESOL’. Many had had little early childhood education:

A number of parents write, ‘yes, my children have gone to early childhood’ but that covers the whole gamut from one day a week to going to a local church thing on a Sunday. In terms of regular, three to five day visits over an extended period of time, say nine months or more, the figures are closer to 25%.

Cicada School also had considerable special needs provision including a unit that catered for approximately 15 ORS-funded students.

As at Kanuka School, parent involvement was an issue that Cicada School was trying to work on:

What we need as a school to get better at is making connections back into their communities and into their home and accessing that knowledge a bit better.... We’ve always done it, we’ve always tried to make these things but they were at a song and dance level ... now we are trying to say to mums and dads and grandparents and aunts and uncles that they have a richness in their own lives that will impact upon [the children’s] maths learning, or their reading or their writing or whatever, and that’s what we want to tap into now.

Cicada had had mixed success, depending on both the activity and the ethnic group concerned:

Cultural evenings, physical activity evenings for the community, you know—one night we had 400 people rock on up; maths evenings; reading together programmes; things like that are really powerful; and next year we’re doing science evenings for men and boys—all sorts of things. Really powerful, great turnout. Our Pasifika and Indian communities, they turn up, I think our Pasifika parents would turn up to anything; they’ve got a real investment in education. Where we are not getting attendance is where we do formal reporting as cohort, to Māori parents. I don’t know whether they

²⁶ Some families lived further away but came to the school either because of its special needs provision or because this suited parents who worked nearby.

think that we're going to lecture to them, whether we're going to tell them off or whatever, but—you know—we do the flash Power Point presentation, we ring up everyone, we do the bilingual messages, we have a very much a kaupapa that is very Māori, all the speakers are Māori, but it's still not what's turning them on. We have to rethink that; we have to rethink it quite seriously....

The principal noted the value of the school having connections to people with influence in the ethnic communities it served:

It's also about who is on your Board, like one of our board members, he's got a position of some responsibility within the Pasifika community and his father is a minister and he will know better than I that that carries a lot of weight ... they're an important family. And our Māori families that are on the board, I'm not sure they have the same status ... it's just a different dynamic.

Transience was not considered a problem at Cicada School so much as 'parent-condoned absences' with about 8% of children away from school 20% or more of the time:

It's not that our parents don't want their kids going to school—I don't believe that for one moment. It's just that they've never stopped to think about it and they bring their kids up as they were brought up, and when there's a ... not necessarily a tangi but a Pasifika funeral or a wedding or a white Sunday event, families miss school to celebrate those things and they do certainly have real huge value, but there's a cost in terms of the schooling. So they are the conversations that we have with our families.

The roll of the school was stable and in the first reference to the local culture of schooling in the area that seems to have also supported opposition to the standards system, the principal explained the attitude to 'poaching' amongst local principals:

That's something that's really frowned on in [this area], like we have taken a couple of kids from out of zone but ... I always ring the principals up, just as they ring us up. Although it's always easy to be generous and ethical when you're not on a falling roll.

Turning to the Cicada School staff, leadership and board, Cicada had a noticeably large number of young teachers and overseas trained teachers. About 80% of the staff were PRTs, 10% had 3–4 years New Zealand experience and the other 10% had been at the school for more than a decade. This reflected the problem that staffing the school had often been a struggle in the past with few experienced New Zealand trained teachers applying for positions. It was becoming easier to recruit teachers and the principal put this down variously to the effects of recession, to an improved culture in the school and to the school becoming involved in the graduate teacher education programme of the local university: '...inevitably when students come here they actually realise it's not complete anarchy in [schools in this area]—the kids are actually really lovely and the teachers actually can teach. You get the odd ratbag but you get that in any school'.

Cicada School had a prior history of senior staff staying at the school for a long time and two members of the SLT—an AP and a DP had both been at the school for more than 15 years. The Cicada principal and the AP who was our lead teacher were relatively new to the school. The principal had been at Cicada for 3 years before and unusually perhaps, had previously been principal at three very high socio-economic schools before that. He seemed to have wanted a change and perhaps a challenge after nearly a decade in his previous school but stressed that from his point of view there had been no reservations about becoming principal at Cicada. Contrary to the stereotype of a tough neighbourhood, the Cicada children were very well behaved and the previous principal had 'squirreled away funds' so money was also less of a problem than might be expected in a low socio-economic area. The AP who was our lead teacher and is quoted here had been at the school for about four years. Both were involved in advanced university studies in education. The principal was frank about needing to 'grasp the nettle' on performance with some teachers:

I've become really hard-nosed with the support of NZEI. They've been absolutely marvellous, I have to say; that's a plug, by the way. We've had to call people to account. The board have invested hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars in the last few years ... because we saw a gap between teachers and what they realised they

were capable of. There was a pedagogical gap, there was a content gap, there was a philosophical gap—the notion of deficit thinking in its many twenty-first century guises was alive and well here, so we had to really confront that.... Unfortunately some people, there have been some tough decisions about whether people want to work here because it's really easy to blame the family and blame the child for the lack of learning and not look at your own practice, and we've had to really hone in on that. But we do try to do it—those conversations are hopefully around enquiry into personal practice but if they aren't, and if we need to move from there, there's the mana and dignity of the people involved to be respected. But we will always take a hard line. We don't put the rights of the teacher above the rights of the child.

The Cicada School board included a builder, health consultant, teacher at another school, electrician and maintenance worker and they were an ethnically mixed group. Most had been board members for two-three terms but under the new principal they had been undertaking training because the previous principal had not involved the board in many decisions:

Oh, ours is a very experienced board; a very experienced board. And as this Cook Island woman said, if only she knew then what she knows now, she would have been at the principal's office a lot earlier. Whether that's true or not I don't know but it's fair to say that they have learnt a lot. [And now] they know what their role is a bit better, they can ask questions about kids' learning.

The curriculum at Cicada School had been largely focussed on literacy and numeracy for many years but also included other subjects such as social studies and science, which were included through an integrated approach called 'concept learning' and also health and PE. In recent years the approach to curriculum had been heavily influenced by professional development especially the Pasifika strand of the Literacy Professional Development Project (LPDP). This meant that staff were 'really unpacking the curriculum and teacher were working in vertical groups so we were providing as many opportunities to cross-group and create conversations around curriculum and classroom practice that people sort of began to get more comfortable with it.' (AP):

Whereas, there had been a history of gathering data and putting it in a profile, the LPDP had been instrumental in 'really empowering and up-skilling teachers.... Improving teacher pedagogy was really the philosophy behind it but also using data to drive practice' (AP)

... when I got here the staff ... had very unclear pictures of what a learning intention was or what success criteria was or plenary sessions or what feedback, good quality—they'd done none of that and not their fault because they're not stupid, they had just never had the input. We used the LPDP contract to not only to improve their literacy but to transfer that learning to other curriculum areas.

Along with the LPDP, curriculum mapping training and leadership had together been forcing those at Cicada to 'enquire into our own practice, both at a personal level and at an organisational level' (AP). The SLT had nothing but praise for this professional development, although the school had only prioritised it because it was being phased out by Government. It had helped overcome a kind of 'closed door sort of mentality':

The LPDP backed the way that we were wanting to go in our school, which was a model of a more distributed leadership and looking at open practice, creating those professional learning groups in order to actually have some really robust conversations about driving learning forward. So there were a number of things happening and actually the LPDP fitted very well with that; you know, we were doing leadership training, we were building team charters in order to develop ways to operate and improve our teams throughout the school and the LPDP was something that sort of ran throughout the whole school and underpinned a lot of that and helped us align something throughout the school, because people were getting a common understanding of what effective literacy looked like. (AP)

... everyone's sort of knee-deep but I think if we hadn't had the LPDP to actually open the door on practice and, you know, remove some of those anxieties around being

observed, I guess, then ... you know, I'm not sure that would have been a model that would have necessarily worked. I think the fact that we've been responsive to need is probably what's made it more effective. (AP)

The LPDP was also seen to have provided a 'skeleton that we have been transferring to other areas', for instance it had not only led to a staff member being released as a literacy coordinator but to another being released two days a week in order to 'do some real specific driving and identifying needs of teachers in numeracy' (AP):

I would say it's improved teacher practice and pedagogy across the board; like, teachers are realising that some of these strategies that they are using in an effective guided reading session actually is effective teaching. So using think-alouds to link with the key competencies, not just, you know, when you made that connection to a book you read last week, that's what good readers do, you know, and making that connection for the child, that they are making connections within the texts but they're actually saying, 'well, when you kept at it when you were on the soccer field, that was showing persistence. You did that in your maths in the other day when you kept going even when the problem was hard'. So I think it's been really great because it's linked in with our curriculum mapping as well. A lot of it all links up. (AP)

At Cicada School there were four monitoring meetings each term where staff shared 'Puzzles of Practice' focussed on particular students that teachers were struggling to make progress with: 'There's two literacy a term, two maths a term, and they're literally twenty minutes, it's not a whole laborious, 'well when he was two he could do this.' It's just like 'here's the data' (AP).

The specifics of classroom assessment involved different tools including PM Benchmarks and running records, STAR, asTTle (and more recently e-asTTle), the five and six year old observational surveys, GLOSS and IKAN. The school tried not to lean on any one assessment:

No, I think one of the strengths of what we've been doing is actually triangulating data and so I would probably argue quite strongly that it wasn't necessarily led by anything, it was like look at the running records, look at what STAR is saying, look at what [asTTle] is saying, does it confirm what our ideas are about where the gaps are? What does that tell us about the needs for this group or this class or ... look, you know, three out of the four classes in year 4 are really struggling with paragraph comprehension but hey look, this class has actually done really well, what have you been doing? (AP)

An interesting development had been attention to student voice:

... they are the ones that are being bullied, or not bullied. So in terms of benchmarks or standards we're trying to work our way through ... collecting data to hear from children. And even our key competencies—for next year what we've doing is videoing children in a certain range of skills, deconstructing it with them afterwards and then videoing them two or three times during the year and talking. Because we don't think you can actually measure the key competencies, but we're looking for meaningful ways to engage kids with the key competencies.

The same approach was taken with special needs students where there was the use of narrative reporting, doing a lot of videoing with the child in context and trying to make links to the curriculum or to quality of life indicators.

Across Cicada School there was also within-school moderation in teams and use of assessment rubrics:

And this year every term there's a different genre, so this term its explanation writing so it's the first time the teachers are actually using an explanation rubric because these are just a work in progress and they've been sort of ... yeah, sort of developed so we're onto version two of the explanation rubric and yeah, I'm sure when the teachers come to do the moderating so in teams they'll bring a few pieces and just ... you know, check in around their OTJ and then twice a year we do whole school moderation where people bring three pieces of writing and then they are put down on the tables all the different levels and then people go and ... 'well, I don't think they should be here' and have

some robust discussion ... and that's interesting what, you know, a level two basic is to a year two teacher and what it is to a year four, you know, so it's becoming a lot more aligned but we still definitely have a long way to go in terms of getting that right.

It can be seen from the quote above that the school used the notion of OTJs since they fitted with their practice too:

Yeah, I think we probably have borrowed it [OTJ] from National Standards. I mean, it sort of backs up what we were doing with the triangulation of data, the puzzles of practice ... there's curriculum mapping and we do our planning, teachers annotate their maps with where students are at, whether something's worked for a group, so it's a way of actually driving your planning forward so it's not just your plan for the week, it's scribbled all over; and those annotations are your judgements, they're your judgements as you teach, your ongoing ... so it was, I guess...something that we're doing already. This isn't something new. So I guess that's why the term has been probably used quite a bit.... (AP)

Assessment data also fed in to target setting across the school:

We've done a lot of work around that, around the goal setting and target setting and success criteria ... we set targets, they then report, they then, each team, not the team leader, reports to me once a term on how well they're meeting their targets against the success criteria. To be fair I give them generally a guide on the target because what we do is we have our strategic goals, we have the annual goals, and each team, year team, picks their team goals from that. So they are guided a little bit. For instance, if say 92% of our Year 2s are reading at their chronological age this year, the year twos said, 'oh, we want 100% next year' not realising that the benchmarks don't quite [...] next year, so at the start of the year they might only have 40%. So we say well, let's have two benchmarks—it might be value added. You know, how much value—if it's normal to make one sublevel shift in reading over a year, we want to have the notion of Ka Hikitia, to hasten or lengthen your stride, let's make two sublevel shifts that we want for kids. That's value added. All right, what are going to do for our Māori kids? So we break down, instead of just having one target for everyone, which is ... we target certain groups within it as well.

The school used ETAP—a web-based, NZ developed, internet-based student management system that has numerous planning, recording, analysis and reporting capabilities and can be easily adapted to the needs of particular schools, for instance integrating the English Language Learning Progressions that were important at Cicada School because of its intake.

It can be seen then over the last few years the new principal and key staff had set about attempting to improve the teaching and learning culture of the school, using external advice and dealing sensitively but firmly with some underperforming staff. These efforts were seen to be paying off:

So we've done a lot of work around PD, around literacy and numeracy and we are now seeing quite remarkable results. We're doing some neat things with families around maths and literacy and we've seen payoff. I ... would say that based on national expectations—and I don't mean standards—we would have say 80–85% of our kids in our first three years are what we'd say the national norms.... So we're really pleased, that's the best numeracy results we've ever achieved through this input.

Cicada School had 'triadic' interviews with children and parents twice a year and teachers also rang parents once a term. One area that had not been prioritised was written reporting. Written reports were issued twice a year but reports from 2009 and previously show that that only grade given was for effort (A—'consistently tries hard', B—'usually works well', C—'more effort needed') The reports also provided written comments but not of the kind that give any assessment of the levels at which students are learning. The 2010 reports shows a different emphasis, providing reading ages (e.g. L28, 10.5–11 yrs), a written language level (e.g. L3P) and a Gloss stage for maths and written comments for oral language, concept learning and health and PE. For each of reading, oral and written language, and maths, student achievement is graded against the schools own 'standard level'—'well below',

‘just below’, ‘at’, ‘just above’, ‘well above’.²⁷ Something we can probably take from this is that Cicada’s opposition to the National Standards was not based so much on the demotivating effects of identifying students as ‘below’ or ‘well below’ and this seemed to be borne out in interviews. At the same time the principal insisted there was nothing strategic about the scale in the 2010 reports being similar to the National Standards categories: ‘they’re appalling reports, and they’re the next thing to be changed but I’m not going to do that till next year’. He explained:

We realised we needed to report more clearer to our parent community and the person from Team Solutions said go to the TKI website and they’ve got some reports there and we used them (but) we are changing them for our next reporting cycle.... We should have proof read it a lot better.... We have to report better to our parents. For instance, we used to give children a rating on effort and all of this sort of stuff, which is something historically the board has done and I always hate that because I find judging anyone’s effort really difficult.

On the face of it: Cicada School responses to the National Standards

Since Cicada School was opposed to the National Standards it did nothing to support them until September 2011 when, three months after the deadline, it finally handed in a charter with some National Standards targets included, accompanied by a disclaimer that they were being included only at the requirement of the Ministry. Nor did it discuss National Standards in triadic interviews with parents and we have already seen that its reports referred to the school’s own standards, not the National Standards. The public face it presented to parents and the community was one of opposition to the National Standards. For instance from a school newsletter in August 2011:

The Board at Cicada School are pro standards. Teachers, parents, and students need standards so they can see how well their learning is progressing. We are asking the government to take 6 months out to develop decent assessment tools and apply them to real classroom settings. We have Ministry officials coming to meet with us to hear our concerns. So then why is the Board of Trustees against National Standards? We don’t think they are good for the students in our area. Here are some of the reasons:

Reason 1.

Most of the students at our school are learning English as a second or third language. It takes time to become a proficient user of another language. Research says that it generally takes 6–8 years to learn the academic language of English. Our students are being tested before they have had 6–8 years of learning English. They are then being measured against students who have only ever spoken English. This is unfair on our students as it ignores the fact that they will potentially have stronger linguistic skills because they can speak two or even more languages.

Reason 2.

National Standards don’t exist. Each school has its own choice of assessment tools, collects the data and sends it to the Ministry. The local schools in our area all use different tools to gather data therefore the validity and reliability is questionable. One of the national managers for the ministry has stated that at least 30% of the data they collect is wrong. Why waste everyone’s time, money and energy? We want the Ministry to rework the assessment tools so that the data becomes more meaningful.

Reason 3.

The curriculum (what we are meant to teach) is going to become very narrow. If everybody’s jobs are now dependent on making significant improvement in achievement (which is fine) people are going to focus only on Reading, Writing and Maths. Curriculum areas such as PE, Music, Art are likely to be squeezed out. Those things that many students enjoy and most of us see as important in an education system,

²⁷ There are also some gradings for effort – ‘needs improvement’, ‘satisfactory’, ‘excellent’ and key competences and values – ‘consistently’, ‘usually’, ‘sometimes’

will be given a reduced status. The Ministry has already got rid of all the advisors in every area other than Literacy and Numeracy.

‘Behind the scenes’—Views and activities of Cicada School senior leadership team

Along with having concerns about the New Zealand standards system, as at most of the other RAINS schools, there were various activities that overtly contested the National Standards at Cicada so these are covered here too. The discussion here is more or less chronological from the time we first started research at the school in December 2010, through an ERO review in early 2011, the school getting some heat from the Ministry in July/August for not getting its National Standards targets in and, late in the 2011 year, the school getting a Section 78J letter and dealing with that situation too. Overall the discussion provides an account of why Cicada School refused to comply with the National Standards policy, the various actions taken by the school’s SLT and Board and what the consequences were.

By December 2010 when we first interviewed the Cicada principal the school had already joined BTAC, which had been launched the previous month. At this first interview the principal explained his reservations about the National Standards as being

- fears that that the children at the bottom of the heap would be further entrenched at the bottom of the heap;
- the creation of a crisis to drive change;
- a concern that formative assessment tools would become national tests by default. ‘ERO comes in and says justify, why you have got 92% of the children at National Standards. And I will say, “oh, well the latest Gloss test”, it becomes the national test whether we like it or not;
- that the benchmarks did not align with each other;
- that the information that the state gets about each school is not going to be comparable to the school next door;
- that it would take his eye off the ball about children’s learning what was a world-class curriculum in many respect;
- that the standards system wasn’t trialled and a working group set up to work through the problems before it got put out to school; and
- that special needs students would become unwanted by schools once their National Standards results started to be seen to depress achievement data—‘it’s not our ORS funded kids, because they’re going to be exempt, but it’s your next tier of children’.

On the other hand, he agreed with parents getting a clear account of their child’s level of achievement:

There are some issues around people being fundamentally opposed to telling kids at a certain age that they’re below standard. I’ve not such a problem with that; I think as a parent I want to know how well my children are doing. I think as a parent they have a right to know. And I understand that children develop at different rates but I got really upset when my year seven child ... well, year six, went to year seven and they told me that her PAT score was about 23%. Now, all through her primary they told me she was great at maths, great at maths, great at maths—now, it might have been a bad day but it wasn’t because when I sat down and did a diagnostic on the poor young girl, she had some major problems; and we sorted them out, it wasn’t an issue. But I think we owe it to parents to be honest.

The Cicada principal said he had written submissions for the consultation both personally and collectively. His misgivings increased after attending training on the National Standards:

It became very, very clear to me at that meeting that they didn’t know what they were doing and the presenters spoke and all the others were standing around the walls learning what to say and I felt really sorry for them because they had a hostile audience in the main.... They’d all gone down to Wellington for a hui; they’d all been given the holy writ and they were there to go out and proselytise. And I thought well, that’s not a

good way of doing it ... when everything is rushed we have not got consistency of message and a lot of people that went not for the stray session I had but a range of sessions were getting mixed messages.

It was certainly not the case that this principal was poorly informed, rather he tried to read everything he could get his hands on:

I've read all the NZEI stuff; STA, I've read all the STA, I sit on the Board of another school who happened to have gone in favour of standards so I've been part of that discussion, we did have a rally here against the Standards and the NZEI used our school as one of the bus stop schools and we had quite a few people turn up to that.... Talking to mums and dads about National Standards, I certainly read all the Ministry websites, TKI, the *Gazette*, all of those things I've read; the booklets that they gave out to parents.

The principal described the Board as 100% against the National Standards: he had left the room and the Board had voted against. Most staff were against National Standards too, particularly after Cicada had tried to trial OTJs:

... the feedback from staff was high levels of anxiety. They really struggled to make it work. I was surprised about that because I was a little bit blasé about it, I thought it would be much easier and that might reflect their level of experience, too—and I put that on the table—but I found that very difficult.... So I would say at that point some of them started to realise that there's something a bit wrong about this. But I would not ... I wouldn't be naïve enough to think that there aren't people who are in favour of it, either. I'm sure there would be one or two people.

We looked at reading and tried some of the reading data and found that next to impossible. We looked at the writing and we thought how could we make that work and the only way we could make it work was huge amounts of moderation time. We struggled with the writing exemplars, really, we think there needs to be a lot more work still done on those.

The Cicada principal also raised the likelihood of fabrication at the 2010 interview:

Look, what I believe is going to happen is people are going to fudge all their stuff anyway. I was with a group of principals today and we were making fun of the whole notion that if you're going to make a decision on where a kid sits, you're going to interpret it upwards all the time.

In early 2011 the school was reviewed and by May had got its draft ERO report back. The AP felt that the ERO reviewers had sympathised with the stance of the school even though they had to take the government line:

We had some really good conversations around assessment and literacy and where it could go ... that to some extent you can't get to the end before you go through some of [the] collaborative processes in order to identify where the needs are and then drive it forward. If you put that change in too quickly then people don't learn the process as they go, so you've actually got to let it to some extent evolve to build that capacity because otherwise the needs aren't necessarily identified and therefore that process isn't honed. (AP)

Who was leading who in terms of the [Board's] decision that was made around the boycotting was a really interesting discussion ... I was actually explaining my confusion over it because I'd really been genuinely trying to work with it in order to make it fit and I think at that point there were some realisations [by the reviewers] that it wasn't just about one or two people making a decision—actually, the decision was based on a number of things ... and our board chair is a teacher; you know, she's a team leader in another school who is also trying to [make the National Standards] work. (AP)

There were numerous positive points in the report—in fact no apparent criticisms apart from not having introduced national standards and so it was seen to vindicate the direction of the school: '... it sort of reiterates that there are a few places where it does mention that we're actually using national

norms, that we have quite robust discussions around standards' (AP). On balance the AP was pleased with the report:

I was expecting some maybe some harsher words rather than just stating it as fact, pretty much.... [But] one of the things is that obviously we weren't going to get any more than three years because of our stance on National Standards. I think had we been seen in term 4 [last year] we may have had a chance of five years.

The principal agreed it was a good ERO report, leaving aside the issue of National Standards. This had been hard to do during the review as 'it was like the elephant in the room. It did get mentioned every day and we didn't hide from that fact'.²⁸

Also raised at this time was the problem that available PD had all but dried up. In fact by this time PD was supposed to have been unavailable for schools opposing the National Standards but the AP was saying there was little available anyway except for National Standards training and that was unhelpful.²⁹

We were looking at working alongside the literacy development officers but obviously they were all disbanded ... a number of them actually didn't apply [for the SAFs] because they asked for some clarity around what the roles were and nobody could give them any clarity. (AP)

I mean, we were going to literacy lead teacher meetings and I had my list of questions, because I've been trying to work with the standards—nobody was able to answer the questions, you know, and I mean, the people who are actually facilitating them, they were probably in an even tougher position than us because we were actually trying to apply them and they were just reading through them and trying to make sense of it all without the application, really. (AP)

By early in Term 2, the SLT invited Ministry officials in to talk about National Standards:

I was appalled at their lack of knowledge. They weren't able to help me on any real issue. They came to the school for two, two hour visits, and I did have to leave twenty minutes early in the last visit but they weren't able to answer any of the complex questions, and we weren't talking philosophical questions, we were talking about implementation, particularly around ESOL and special needs children or ORS funded.

There were many problems from the school's point of view including the assumptions that underlay funding arrangements and therefore whether students were seen to have problems severe enough to allow them to be exempted or not. For instance, with English Language Learners:

They basically have a formula. There are two things: if they're born in New Zealand and if they're born overseas they're entitled to x number of terms of support and it might be eight terms or it might be twelve terms of support. And that's if they fit within the criteria, so the game that all schools play is to mark them as low as possible to ensure you get the funding. And then what happens is that after x number of terms they fall off the wheel, so it's not really based on needs, it's based on some sort of an assumption that after twelve terms they will be able to cope in a regular setting.

In a good example of New Zealand being 'a small and generally highly connected population' (see Section 2.2), by July 2011 the Cicada principal was able to talk to the Minister at a conference and then a senior manager in the region's Ministry office:

And I guess what I wanted to get across to her was that the group opposing National Standards was not a homogenous group, because people are against it for all sorts of reasons. Her thing is 'you're against Standards'; and I said 'well, actually, we've got standards, so it's not against, we're not necessarily against standards per se, but there are some issues for us, both at an ethical and at an implementation stage' and I said,

²⁸ Clearly there was a lot more attention to National Standards, or rather the lack of them by ERO, at Cicada than at Juniper. We will discuss ERO's reviews of the RAINS schools in a later report.

²⁹ She also noted with some amusement that despite being 'blacklisted' as a BTAC school, the principal was still being flown to Wellington to give advice to the Ministry, although not on National Standards.

‘and if you can actually help us with the implementation it would be really quite good’ ... and she said ‘have you spoken to the Ministry? And I said well actually, not a lot of people in the Ministry understand’; and she admitted that was an issue. So then I went and saw [Ministry official] and he was saying, ‘is this a hill that you want to die on?’... He said if it had been national testing he could understand it being a hill to die on, he said for him that would be a hill he would have to die on too because he doesn’t believe in national testing. But he believes you can make National Standards work.

In July the Cicada School sent in its charter without National Standards targets and by early August had been informed by the Ministry that the charter did not comply and needed to be fixed within ten days. A Ministry official was again invited to the school to address more than 20 questions from the SLT and Board and the Ministry sent two people: ‘the phrase was to “ensure consistency”, so the Ministry are having to moderate themselves!’ The meeting saw spirited discussion but the Ministry people, described as ‘Polyannaish’, again did not convince the board, although one new board member who had not been part of the original board decision to boycott the standards system and was used to targets in another social sector was arguing that ‘discretion would be the better part of valour’.

Meanwhile the SLT was also trying to improve assessment by trialling its own school standards, based partly on advice from ERO:

I think our focus has been a lot of formative stuff and it’s been really neat, but sometimes that’s fudged the issue a little bit because we’re always working towards it. And I said well actually, where are we actually at?

We’ve basically used assessment for more formative and diagnostic purposes; we’re now starting to get a bit more hard-nosed around it and we were also asking them to make an OTJ and the teachers found that they basically couldn’t make an OTJ without a tool of assessment. And so there’s been some real good teaching and learning for us.

What I would like to do is be able to say, ‘this is where your child is at, this is where we’re aiming for’ and see, I think that part of the reporting process is not a bad thing.... But we might [give it a] reading age or something, something like that, something that is quite precise and particular to that child rather than some sort of benchmark that no one has a clue.

What my staff also have to realise, is that the reporting to the board will be summative reporting and we’ve been really good at formative reporting. And there is a place for summative, at some point ‘cause we invest a lot of money in programmes and stuff and we’ve got to know whether they work or not, so we need some lines in the sand to make some judgement calls about programme effectiveness and all of that. So we’re trying to do that a little bit better.

I see there’s a value in national norms because otherwise you operate in isolation and at [my last school] I thought our rating was appalling, absolutely appalling, because my year sixes on average were only reading at about twelve and a half years of age, you know? I come here, any of my year sixes that read at twelve and a half, they’d be well ahead of the game.

I think our report primarily has to show the progress of where the child is at now, and the progress ... and there has to be some broad indication this child is working the national norm. I think parents have a right to know that. But I also have a belief that parents should know that well before a report. Like here, they’re meant to ring the families once a term and have contact with that family; and I don’t expect them to talk about the curriculum, actually, I just expect them to talk about life in general, make some human connection. But that creates opportunities for that talk. I mean, well below, there should be no surprises in a report.

At the same time, the Cicada principal was really looking for approaches that matched the complexity of the social context:

I’ve just written in the newsletter—and I try and do it quite regularly—one or two things about National Standards and what I’m trying to get my community to realise,

and my staff to realise, is that most of our kids are ... English is their second or third or fourth language and we're being compared against kids who only know English and they haven't had five or six years of English learning like other kids have had so it's really unfair to compare. One of the complaints that the kura movement had around ERO years ago was that the ERO were making a judgement before the process was finished. They were saying the kids are not reading in English at the right level—well, you have to wait until the process is finished before you make some valid judgements. There may be some milestone reporting along the way, and I can understand that, but I think we've got to be careful about jumping in with making facile statements, and that's one of my problems with a written report format.

I would rather we changed our whole way of reporting; and maybe—maybe—we move into electronic portfolios, where we catch real learning, an electronic portfolio where we show video, where we show photos of kids' work, the whole work, which gives a clear picture. Now, I know that Anne Tolley would say parents can still look at that and still say 'where's the child at, where's the child at'? And I understand that, but I still think that you can include something into a portfolio that gives a fuller picture. I can give you an example of a boy whose English is appalling, his oral English is appalling, but he's fluent in three other languages—and we're saying he's illiterate. I think our parents—and I may be wrong—but I think our parents already know that their children are not as good at English as the Pākehā kids down the road and I'm not sure reinforcing that message is what they need to hear. What they need to hear is their kids are highly competent in this, this, this and this, but if they work really hard on A, B and C, they'll get there.

My big fear is that National Standards has the potential to damage the relationship between the school and the community.... We can't do any more here—I've held people to account; we've moved on so many underperforming staff; we have spent hundreds and hundreds of thousands on PD, we've got the best people in the country doing our PD for us ... the new model of PD that's coming in is going to ask for short term interventions for accelerated learning and I'm not sure. Like, I know Pita Sharples really liked the reading together and at one stage he was almost promoting it as the answer to Māori achievement—well, we've been doing it for a couple of years now and we can say it's not a one-stop solution to all the problems. It's part of an approach where we invite parents in but it takes years.

There has to be some acceleration, I have no problem with that, no problem with it at all but they can't ... some of the issues are really huge. Our most at-risk family today at our school in the weekend the boys turned up to school stoned, you know? He's only nine years of age. I'm not going to turn him around until I turn around the whole context. I mean, I can plug up the gaps and I can make him feel good about himself and I can relieve some of the stress off the teacher who finds him a handful but it's a bit more complex than saying National Standards, you know?

Beyond the school by this time, there were mixed signs about the positioning of other schools in the area. There had been a very good recent turnout at the local BTAC meeting 'at least twice as many as the meeting before ... there would have been a good hundred.' On the other hand, some local principals who had been very much opposed to National Standards were reporting pressure from their boards to be careful about their public statements and others were becoming resigned to National Standards coming in:

Some see it as a fait accompli and so why fight it? And I ... and at times I've felt like that too, I've got to say. I got asked how much time has this occupied of my thinking time ... instead of having a think about how do I improve my kids' learning. But yeah, I think people are getting tired of it.

The Cicada principal reported that in the local cluster of schools all remained opposed to the National Standards by August 2011 but for the majority it was a case of 'minimal compliance'; only about a quarter had not put in charter targets. He also reported writing to local iwi:

... we've said because we're in your rohe we would like to see direction from you guys, because I said in terms of the Treaty and our understanding of tino rangatiratanga, we're asking them to direct us, to help us in that direction. [Chuckles] I know, I'm clutching at straws. On one level I am but on another level, a philosophical level, I actually think that major policy, government policy, should go before iwi, anyway. The national runanga should be involved in these decisions because they're talking about this 'long brown tail' ... they're talking about mainly Māori kids and some of the Pasifika kids but mainly Māori because [with] the Pasifika kids there seems to be some traction.

The idea, expressed in the December 2010 interview, that schools would fabricate result was reiterated but was now being linked to the 'politics of blame' (1.3, no 12) as well:

[Another principal] gave them a PAT or an asTTle, one of the tests. A week later gave them the same test back again. They taught to the test and his argument was, it was a pre- and a post-test. And that's what I saw happening in the UK and that won't be the first time or the last time I hear that sort of anecdote—that's what principals will do... They're going to spend this money on SAFs, and they're going to have these short-term interventions for accelerated learning, they're going to say after a couple of those cycles, they're going to be holding schools to account and they're not just going to keep pouring money in. They're going to say... 'why isn't there enough progress at your school'? And if I'll say to them 'it's because 170 kids were not here on Friday because it was cold, too wet and they didn't get fed and this little boy that's playing up, he's coming to school with no food and da, da, da, da'—they won't care about that. They've said to me already 'it's your responsibility to improve attendance at your school' and we've got really—well, now in the process of developing much better systems—really good systems but at the end of the day I can't force kids to come to school. Our most highly attended group are kids who are ORS-funded, because the taxis pick them up and they just come and pick them up at 7:30 and bring them to school. Look, at the root of it is ignoring ... poverty and the impact on the learning. You know? The teachers were telling me that yesterday some of our kids are just coming to school absolutely frozen. There's just no heating in the homes. A lot of them in [this area] have the sleep outs and all the verandahs, they now plywood over the things ... and they throw the mattress in and they can sleep there. These are all factors that influence learning.

Neither parents nor the teaching staff had become more involved in opposition to National Standards. In the case of parents 'we've lost the sound bite competition ... my parents struggle to put food on the table.' In the case of teachers:

... a lot of them are PRTs and I'm really loathe to involve them, I just want them to become competent teachers, I don't want to politicise them ... I would hate to be bullying my staff into a position but as a professional leader you've got to take a stance.

With the 2011 general election not far off, there was the prospect of some political shifts but the Cicada principal questioned if they would be remotely realistic:

... if ACT increases its share within National, we know that [performance pay] is on the education manifesto, they want to pay principals a lot more but then they're going to hold them to account; and I don't mind being held to account but I think if people stop to think ... I mean, I've been reviewed by ERO, I've been reviewed by the ESOL people, I've been reviewed by auditors, I've been reviewed—this is just this year—by the Ministry auditors, ... eight reviews of my performance this year plus my professional appraisal performance.... You know? You're constantly under the spotlight by external reviewers.

The last part of 2011 was a further difficult time for the Cicada school SLT and Board as, like most other BTAC schools, it capitulated in September and sent in a charter with some National Standards targets included but was then sent a 78J letter (see 2.2) because the charter had been accompanied by a disclaimer that targets were being included only at the requirement of the Ministry. The Cicada principal and Board responded by sending a letter to the Ministry outlining the numerous efforts the school had made to communicate with the Ministry over the National Standards, pointing out that the

school had received an excellent ERO report and reiterating various intellectual and moral grounds for its position. By the end of the year, after a ‘week of toing and froing’ and answering lots of questions, the school eventually had its charter signed off in a similar way to the other schools we contacted that had been sent 78J letters (see Section 5.0)

Also by the end of the 2011 year, schools had been advised that there was no longer any exemption to schools’ reporting of school-level National Standards data to the Ministry or reporting to parents against the National Standards for English language learners or any children with special needs. This was a further blow to this school; especially given its makeup (also discussed in Section 5.0).

4.5 HUIA INTERMEDIATE

As indicated in Section 2.5, we see Huia Intermediate as the most disadvantaged RAINS school overall in terms of being able to respond to the National Standards. This is because as well as serving a very diverse but significantly disadvantaged intake, it also has a less cohesive and less ‘ready’ organisational context than any of the other schools. Therefore, while it raises questions about teacher practices and experiences in socially challenging settings like the two lower SES schools, we see it also especially highlighting (see section 5.0):

1. The particular features of intermediate schools (also middle schools, year 7-13 schools and perhaps also area schools to some extent) that will often make responding to the National Standards more difficult than in contributing and full primary schools.
2. How some schools will be a long way from the standards system and how their school leaders will struggle to make ‘required’ step changes.
3. Whether National Standards will help provide better information about children who are transferring or transitioning schools.
4. Substantial changes to the curriculum as a response to the National Standards.

Huia Intermediate contexts for introducing National Standards

Huia Intermediate was a large school of over 600 children located in a suburb that was both ethnically diverse and had a high proportion of recent migrants to New Zealand. At the same time Huia was not a local school in the same way as the other RAINS schools as this school drew from contributing schools across the city in which it was located, as well as from schools in surrounding semi-rural areas—over 40 schools in all. It had a zone but only about half of its students came from in-zone. This had not always been the case—the school had once served a more local intake but had engaged in strong marketing activity over the last decade which had also seen it growing, until recently, at the rate of about a class every year. Within the last decade Huia had also benefited from typically having more than a dozen international fee-paying students each year. In recent years however, the fee-paying market had fallen away and the school had been forced to manage within the normal operation grant. The general school roll had also recently fallen back a little, largely because of demographics. As mentioned in section 2.5, this led to staffing having to be reviewed during 2011 with a small number of teachers eventually losing their jobs.

Drawing from such a wide geographical area, Huia was socio-economically quite mixed. It had a mid-decile rating but had lost the extremes: ‘you would have had a definite bottom and a reasonable amount on the above, so to speak, but now I think it’s flatter than what it has been’ (DP). In terms of ethnic composition, it was about 40% Pākehā/New Zealand European, 30% Māori, and the rest split between Pasifika, Asian and MEELA (Middle Eastern/Latin American/African) children. Around half of Huia Intermediate children were EELs students, it had about five ORS funded special needs students in 2011 and the school had noticeably more boys than girls, around 60%. Yet such general facts and figures tend to understate the actual diversity of the Huia Intermediate intake. For instance there were nearly 50 nationalities represented in the school and competence in English ranged from ‘total non-English—they might step off the plane the day before school starts—to those who are GATE material [in English]’ (DP).

There was also more uncertainty around the intake at Huia than at any of the other schools for three reasons. First, being a two-year intermediate, fully half the school was new every year, whereas for contributing schools it would typically be less than 20%. Second, drawing from so many schools, Huia Intermediate often struggled with the range of information it was getting from contributing schools, which often neither matched up across the year group, nor signalled children's needs adequately:

We have certain knowledge about some of our schools and ... they are generally pretty good at alerting us to maybe a kid who mightn't fit the norm....

For schools that send us half a dozen students or more we make a point of going out and visiting ... and you go out and talk to the classroom teacher one on one so you can get the ... what's not written down in the request and get more of a feel for the child. (DP)

... what we find—and of course it's only natural—is that some schools will assess children at a different level to what we do. And so therefore in some schools, the ESOL kids, for example, will have been assessed as being quite fine, coping and all the rest of it, and they're coming to us like that. [Whereas] we very quickly find out that they're not, they're not at all coping, that they do qualify under that [ELLs] assessment scale for assistance.

And when children come to an intermediate they may have been really quite low but it doesn't show up that way until they get here and there's no young ones to hide where they're at so if you're in a combined class, for example, four, five, six, the child might be operating at four ... but sometimes it's not picked up that they're really quite low and suddenly you can't hide here and our teachers are going 'what's this?' (DP)

Third, there were always a lot of students who arrived at the beginning of the school year:

But there always have been a number, nearly quite often 40–50 children used to arrive when school had finished at the end of the year to when school started. And so they were totally hidden talents. (DP)

All of this meant it was an considerable challenge to get children positioned quickly in order to make the most of their relatively short time at Huia Intermediate:

You'd like to think that we could get started straight away but we never can. We never can, there's just so many factors affecting these kids that we have to spend quite a bit of time testing and getting to know those kids.

Additionally there was a fair 'churn' of transient students, many of who also came with little information:

Our roll has remained the same but we have had about 50 students in and out. (DP)

Quite a few of them are issues from other schools, they've switched schools just before they've been kicked out.

If we are lucky and have the opportunity to talk to a parent when they come in, you may get a lot of the picture but quite often the parents don't show us the whole picture and we discover it when some issue arises and we find out. When a child comes in mid-stream they go on to the ENROL, the [Ministry's] web-based enrolment system, and schools have the ability to tick a box, a flag that they have got some learning issues or whatever but I'm afraid it's an aspect of ENROL that most schools don't use very well at all so you don't get that information. It's reliant on you as a person enrolling or the classroom teacher making contact with the previous school to find something. There's no other information passed on. (DP)

Despite such problems Huia continued to be a popular school amongst its various constituencies:

We were the favoured school by [an ethnic community] when they settled [in this city]. (DP)

Recently we've got people who are just genuinely moving in and Huia's the flavour of the month. What I'm saying is our school's name in the community is quite positive at

the moment, so we often get told, ‘we looked around and this is the school that our families and friends told us about,’ so that’s quite common too.

We do have, and we are well known for, well supporting kids with a difference. (DP)

Although there was a ‘range of levels of involvement’, parents of the children at Huia were generally seen by the school as quite supportive, both in terms of extracurricular activities and academic matters: ‘our parent interviews we would always get 70% or more, which I think is a pretty good figure’. The school had an active PTA and a whānau group for Māori parents.

The Huia SLT were all very experienced. The Huia principal had been in place for about a decade and the DP, our lead teacher, had been at the school for more than 15 years. The AP had only been at the school a few years but had previously taught at a school with a similarly diverse intake. The teaching staff were also often longstanding. The principal commented that because of the rapid turnover of cohorts, ‘... to maintain a culture in the school you need stable staff—that’s absolutely essential to maintain a good culture’. In this respect the school had been fortunate, at least up until the time of the research: ‘the staff situation here at Huia has been very stable’. Recruitment had never been a problem: ‘there have been times when you haven’t had a big pool to choose from but we’ve always had a pool to choose from’. Teachers generally only left to go overseas or on promotion. There was a range of ages and a higher proportion of male staff at Huia Intermediate than in any of the other RAINS schools although the school had apparently had more male teachers in the past. The staff had also become diverse in terms of ethnicity and other backgrounds and this was seen as a matter of respect for social diversity and very useful with such a diverse intake as well:

... when we interview staff we don’t—because a person might have a gap in their teeth or tattoos we don’t write them off as being not suitable ... if we get a person whose English might not be perfect, we still don’t write them off, we are receptive to what the person can do.

Without a doubt that diverse staff helps us to cater for our children; there’s no two ways about it. They can see staff members who are like them or they’re different, you know. If you think about [a lot of schools] the majority of their staff are European. And that’s fine, but that just wouldn’t work here because ... with the sort of clientele we have, our staff make it easier for us to have discussions around inclusiveness and diversity because they are [themselves diverse]. So the staff themselves have had to adjust to differences of background and everything, and we also do that not just with the teaching staff, it’s throughout the whole—like the cleaning staff, the caretaking staff, there’s a huge cross section of people and at this school we expect respect of all of them. So what I’m saying is that diversity of staff helps us to maintain our diversity in the way we treat our students.

One important element of this staff diversity was that the school had approximately 10 Māori teachers and support staff. Some of these staff were working in Huia’s bilingual unit but there also seemed to be a element of critical mass where the school was able to attract Māori staff because a number were already working there.

The board of trustees at Huia were described by the principal as ‘a damn good board, they bring with them a huge array of skills’. Boards at Huia had tended to be quite mixed: ‘we’ve had some really professional-type people, also much more grounded people, I’ll put it that way’. The current board included a courier driver, a project manager, an insurance representative and a real estate agent. They were described as people who were actively involved in the life of the school and with whom the SLT had a constructive relationship:

... we’ve always had one or two who will be there at everything—you know, they’re down there for the sport day, they’re down there for a meeting so the staff get to know them—that’s the key, otherwise they just become a figurehead. But I think our board’s always been more than a figurehead.

... we promote the board and work with the board as our allies and so we’ve never had any—there’s never been any conflict with the board. There have been robust discussions but I definitely promote this as a collaborative relationship. You’ve got to,

because I know people who don't and you're working against your employer the whole time so it's really important to work with people.

Turning now to curriculum, Huia had long offered a broad curriculum with undoubtedly more emphasis on areas other than literacy and numeracy than the other schools in our study. This is partly because at the same time the children did reading, writing and maths as well as topic work in areas such as science and social studies in their regular classes (some of which were GATE classes or bilingual classes), they were also exposed to the offerings of specialist teachers in technology (ICT, food technology, materials technology) and the arts (visual arts, drama, music, dance). There was also a strong emphasis on PE, sport and outdoor education.

This wide curriculum emphasis also in many ways reflected a significant difference between intermediates and contributing or full primary schools in their approaches to numeracy and literacy: a matter discussed further below as one of the key points highlighted by the Huia Intermediate case study. The school had also still been developing its local response to the New Zealand Curriculum: '2009 was a big focus of us developing our curriculum, which was for the curriculum team was a huge task, a lot of staff contributed their ideas, their thoughts, we'd come back, reflect, shape; so we'd been doing a lot of rethinking and reshaping, where we're at'. (DP)

In terms of assessment, Huia had long had some kind of school-wide testing but, '[t]he only thing I could use that was clear and consistent was really the E-asTTle as a tool or PATs when it was in the past or STAR' (DP). Apart from this, teachers used their own choice of classroom assessment so assessment practices are likely to have varied widely across the school. Teachers also used portfolios but again there was not a lot of consistency across the school, 'we've had varying degrees of success, it's definitely a work in progress for us' (DP). Nor was Huia using school-developed benchmarks or rubrics:

We have not gone down the track of setting our own benchmarks; you know how a lot of schools have done their own academic benchmark, we didn't do that, just used the Ministry ones....

Another big area which had yet to be grappled with before the standards system was introduced were the English Language Learning Progressions. These sent out to schools in 2008 and were potentially important in a school with so many ESOL students but the DP commented:

... that's a huge learning curve for teachers. Most of them are not even sure of what those books are because all of that is kind of new in the last couple of years into the schools and that's another thing that's not unpacked enough for us to use it as a tool. So yeah, so whilst I've got—and I've purchased the extra books and that to give to people but there's not a lot to gain from just, 'here's a book and here's what we're talking about – go to it'. They need time to be able to read, to digest, to think about it, to reflect on it, to incorporate it into their programmes. (DP)

On the other hand Huia had for many years had two parent interview nights and two written report nights which would have made more uniform demands on all teachers. Reports used a five point scale (demonstrates excellence, demonstrates competence, achieves at an acceptable level, experiences difficulty, needs continuous support) and scored students on more than 20 aspects of English, five aspects of Mathematics and also multiple aspects of ICT, social studies, science and health and PE. There were also some summary comments and separate reports for the subjects offered by specialist teachers.

In terms of formal professional development, during the years prior to the RAINS research the school had been involved in Ministry literacy, numeracy, writing and ICT contracts. Generally improving the quality of teaching was seen to be another key area for professional development:

... we're a very inclusive, quite a positive school. Academically as a leadership team, we are really trying to raise the standards. Our results have been mentioned to you earlier, our kids aren't achieving as well as we'd like them to be and one of the reasons for that is ... to be honest, the quality of the teaching of our staff. So that's one of the reasons and that's one of the big things we need to work on in our school to bring up the results of the kids.

On the face of it: Huia Intermediate responses to the National Standards

All members of the Huia SLT went to the Ministry's National Standards courses for school leaders and they also attended one of the day workshops on the National Standards offered by the University of Auckland's Visible Learning Laboratories and run by John Hattie and colleagues in 2010. The school also changed its report formats in 2010 in various ways. The language of the five point scale noted above was replaced with a five point scale made up of the National Standards four point scale as well as 'well above': 'We use that ['well above'] because we had GATE classes who felt they would like that distinction' (DP). The multiple assessments reported were replaced with just one for writing, reading, social science, science, health and PE and one for each of the maths strands number and algebra, geometry and measurement and statistics. A 'where to next' comment was also added to mid-year reports. By 2011 materials related to the standards system started to be circulated within the school, a few staff meetings began to be devoted to moderation and in mid-2011 the school also held its first parent meeting about the National Standards and got its 2011 charter in, complete with National Standards targets for particular ethnic and gender groups, just before the July 1 deadline. In 2011 the school timetable was also changed to require children to always be doing regular classroom work from 9-11 each day and for that to be uninterrupted time spent on literacy and numeracy. This was an important change in the school day as it meant children could no longer be with specialist teachers or doing PE or other activities in the first block each day. The school also began to focus its curriculum more on literacy and numeracy. These curriculum changes related to the new New Zealand Curriculum and the concerns about the quality of teaching in the school signalled above as well as the need to respond to National Standards.

'Behind the scenes'—Views of Huia Intermediate senior leadership team

When first interviewed in 2010 the SLT at Huia Intermediate were taking a low-key 'business as usual' approach to the National Standards. It was argued that one reason for this was that there were some aspects of the standards system that were in line with what the school was already doing and the directions it was taking:

So those sort of [reporting] requirements that the Ministry was wanting for National Standards are no big deal for us because we're already doing it.

[It has] supported the fact that we have had quite specific whole-school Ministry contracts in reading, writing and maths, so it was timely for us so we could grab that part of the National Standards with more ease than perhaps if we had not been involved in those contracts. Our staff were a lot more skilled in unpacking the data, or collecting the data and unpacking it, and hopefully they're using it better; I'll say more skilled, not necessarily well skilled in all of it so that's what I mean by that part of the National Standards suited us where we were at. If we had not done those contracts maybe it would be a different issue, but it suited us. (DP)

We've used the core language of reference, which is well below, below, at, above, and well above, because we had a five point system but we had always had issues about how we called it.

We've always promoted those areas [reading, writing and maths] but this has given us some real teeth to push it.

I think we've managed to capture a little bit of the essence, which suited our purpose—we were due to review our own assessment procedure and we knew we needed to change our reporting due to the changes in the curriculum....

On the other hand it was recognised that the National Standards potentially represented quite significant change and development

One of the changes, big ones, is moderation, it has to be used as a tool and accepted that it's going to need to be used as a tool, which is a change for intermediates because moderation's always been thought to be a high school tool. You do it at some stages of

primary but intermediates, they haven't had a culture of it. So moderation is an accepted one. (DP)

... we really need to [develop benchmarks], we need to go through that, it's more the process of the setting of the benchmarks themselves that the teachers really do more moderating and understanding them more.

... we need to take the concept of the 'where to next?' and make it public and use, I won't say 'kids speak', but 'parents speak' so they can understand. That has influenced how we've modified our reporting. (DP)

Nevertheless there was seen to be little point in getting teachers stressed about changes that would be required, particularly given the uncertainty about the policy:

... right from the word go that's the message we delivered here: 'business as usual, you guys don't have to worry about this at the moment, it'll become more apparent'. And we gave that message because we didn't know, so we thought well, let's just give 'business as usual' and we took that approach, just 'we're going to stick with what we're doing'; as we get more information that makes sense to us we will then involve staff.

And staff were ... some of them really [wanted to] be quite demanding—'we know nothing about it, why haven't you told us?' sort of thing and I said well ... the people delivering the message don't know. (DP)

The other thing too: the Ministry sent lots of information, books—we held onto those. We did not give them out to staff. Unfortunately we had an office member here at the time who gave them all out to staff. I didn't realise they were even in the school until a staff member came up to me and said, 'what are these? What am I meant to do with these?' Oh, they'd been given out and [we needed to collect] them all back in. (DP)

... even at our 'meet the teacher evening', you know, I mentioned that 'yes, we were aware of National Standards but that, you know, at this stage don't worry about it, they didn't affect you', I kept it just a little bit to say 'yes, we're a school that knows this is happening, but we're not a school who's going to call parent meetings'.

We did not call any big staff meetings, important staff meetings to sort of unpack what National Standards are saying. We didn't even think of ... going that far because we didn't know enough about it. So we've just picked out the bits that do make sense to us.

... we will fine tune what we've got because we've made a collective decision at this school that we will manage what information is given to the students and to the teachers because they're just bombarded with too much. We filter it and withhold aspects of it. (DP)

The SLT members at Huia raised a range of problems with the Ministry of Education—provided PD for the National Standards: the local school support services staff were described as 'trying to give a non-scary message while actually looking scared themselves':

And what a terrible thing to deliver PD the way they've done this year [2010]. Most people I've spoken to who have gone to the [MoE] PD have felt they have been undercut, undersold.... Blind leading the blind. You could see they were in the same boat as us. You could see they didn't have the information. We had more.

And they had a large number of the [school support services staff] there who were learning it as much as we are—doesn't fill you with confidence, when the deliverers who tell you, 'we're going to work with your school', when they are learning with you, that does not look cool.

... the method of delivering it and the cluster we were working with was so widely spread so we had no connection with the other schools, they were all way out over here and we were over here. The people delivering were trying to deliver a lot within the hour and a half or two hour timeframe or the half-day or whatever it was we had. (DP)

I knew some of them [school support services staff] and they had no idea what they were going to teach or how they were going deliver this PD because they hadn't had any training.

And the other thing was if you wanted to go to a different provider they actually all had their PD on the same day. (DP)

The principal and DP emphasised the contrast represented by the Visible Learning workshops:

You know, when we went to their workshop, it just makes sense. When you go to their workshop and then you went to the others that were being offered there's just a huge gap.

... we paid extra money, we had to pay big money to go to those, to send all three of us, but still reasonable money and I'm so glad we did.

We came back from that PD with John Hattie and Vision, whatever they are, that was really, really empowering and took away a lot of that unknown from us and made us relax.

The need for practice to be improved in many areas of assessment was being recognised at Huia Intermediate. Moderation activities in a staff meeting had illustrated variation between teachers of up to two curriculum levels: 'the way teachers were judging a piece of writing made it really obvious to us, there were just differences from here to here.' Nevertheless there was a lot of tentativeness and uncertainty around teachers beginning to use the standards system:

We have run staff meetings where we've taken a rich assessment task and seen how we can use that to reference it and moderate it to the National Standards and we've also taken a National Standard task and said 'well, what can we do', we've worked both ways so we have actually run some school PD sessions on bringing a little bit more light to the situation; I won't say we've got total grasp and mastery but we've introduced those concepts because ... people thought we'd throw everything out so we've, I believe, created a culture now where we realise we've got to have what we've got, it's still worthwhile, not to throw it all out and the OTJ is the other big thing, that must be validated. (DP)

Our biggest issue at present is actually getting teachers' content knowledge up to being able to understand the terminologies and the phases or the sections or the levels or the growth, whichever way you want it, you've got to understand that first before you can moderate; otherwise you really are not facing that moderation on good, sound professional judgement.... So [when] they start being technical, talking about 'aspects of language' for example, the teacher actually understands that and knows the progression, where it fits in. They need to get to grips with that before they can say clearly and quite comfortably, 'ok, that fits in here'. (DP)

... in the reports the teachers know they have to compare their data to what the standards are, they do know that; how rigorous are they being? I can't tell you. Because I don't know—we haven't really gone down that rigorous checking. But they do have the information, they have our information, at the moment it's up to them to try and make it fit.

And so we use the terminology now and recognise that we're not good at recording our OTJs in whatever shape and fashion, it's still a process we are sorting out for ourselves but we recognise OTJs are valid where they're based on some things that we've got and we've recorded and developed tasks on a variety of things. We're not necessarily very good at using it yet but we have made some mental shifts. (DP)

To be fair our assessment was an area that we knew wasn't looking crash hot and we hadn't put a lot of work into it because we had put a lot of work into those three areas and to developing our school curriculum.

... we will take the chunks that fit in with us at this point in time. If we have to report it externally—oh yeah, that would be a bit of a crisis for us at this stage because I'm not sure what shape or form it may take.

We didn't just leave it ['where to next?'] to happen in the comment, there was a comment and a 'where to next?' And some teachers sort of floored some of us by saying, 'I don't know "where to next" for them'. I'm thinking, 'isn't that the basic philosophy of teaching—you know where you are going to take your kids to next?' So that has rocked a few people's personal confidence in their ability to know that and has shown up that some don't have the content knowledge to be able to step them through in those three areas, even though we've been on the [PD] contract but now they actually have to articulate it and put it down, that's still different.... It's made the specialist staff think, 'oh ... I have got some responsibility in this now'. (DP)

[Talking about reporting] National Standards is about attainment, in our view, as opposed to progress—it's where the child is at, not about how much progress we've made. So we are going to take the focus of progress. Comments can be made in reference to National Standards if we so choose, we haven't clarified that, but that's where we've got to. (DP)

... and we were dabbling around, trying to understand National Standards so we said 'ok, well let's use this concept and I was lucky enough to have that nice conversion chart from [Visible Learning].'

Other comments from the SLT (and other staff to be discussed in later reports) indicated that a further reason National Standards were not being emphasised more at Huia was because it was considered that more fundamental teaching concerns needed to be prioritised at this school. As mentioned earlier there was a concern about the quality of teaching and the DP indicated that while there had been high-trust approach with teachers, some had taken advantage of that trust and had been under-performing. The SLT had been 'a soft touch' and had 'listened to the plausible stories' but were now requiring 'more teacher ownership' and were also spending more time visiting classrooms:

So that's why I personally choose to keep [debate about National Standards] up here ... because you know, I'm asking them to do this, I'm asking them to do that, I'm concerned about strategies they use to teach literacy; I don't think I need to take them into that [National Standards] debate.

While the National Standards, were not being directly addressed as much as in some of the other RAINS schools, what Huia Intermediate was clearly doing was creating a more focussed curriculum. This was happening in four ways. First, it was holding back worthy but 'extra' activities such as police education programmes more than it had in previous years. Second, the curriculum had been 'streamlined' to focus more on literacy and numeracy:

Well, we've worked our curriculum, our Huia curriculum, to be a bit more streamlined. Yes, you're expected to teach reading, writing, maths and yes, you're expected to have one other major focus and we've decided, next term coming, for example, is a science focus because we can't do all justice by trying to have bits of it all the way through, we felt it doesn't work for us.

Third, attention to reading, writing and maths was being encouraged across the curriculum including in specialist subjects:

We have been focused on the strands within a curriculum on getting the science done or the social studies done and now we're looking at it as an assessment across the curriculum areas, we're not looking at it just within the English strand and we're promoting [even] our specialists, planting the seed for thought, that's all we've done, they've been involved in observations, that ultimately, I think, we should be working towards them having an input to our assessments on reading, writing and maths, it's not just left to the classroom teacher because it's across the curriculum.

Finally, there was the focused teaching time on reading, writing and mathematics for two hours every morning: ‘those three things should be in there but they can be at other times as well and they would need to be in other times but as a goal for two hours the kids should be focused on those core basics’:

For some it was hard because they like to have something different, to dangle a carrot each day so no day was ever fully on their own but now they have to be. I believe it’s having payoffs—we’ve seen far better teaching of those three areas.

The DP also argued that some Huia teachers who had not taught at other schools were unrealistic about release time and support from teacher aides, both of which she argued were better than at many other schools.

Overall, the school needed time to work on teaching and assessment ‘before we go on public show’ (DP). As a result, it was generally only toe-dipping in relation to National Standards and where a particular approach to the standards system was being taken, this was often to suit some teaching purpose as well. For instance E-asTTle was being used as the main assessment across the school, the DP noted that National Standards were not supposed to be based on any one assessment, but ‘you have to start somewhere’ and the rubrics provided by asTTle were useful in a context where the school had not yet developed its own. AsTTle was also being used with the school’s many ELLs students:

We used asTTle and I said ‘well, what other tool have I got that’s common across the school’. I know it’s not the ‘in vogue’ thing, it’s not encouraged, I do fight my battles. I said, well, ‘they come with nothing [no information], how do I know? I don’t know’. I’m not going to accept ‘oh, because they’re another culture, a different name that that’s a reason to opt out’ because no, some of those are GATE kids ... they are usually the ones that actually make the big shift, they can help paint our picture better because they do shift. It’s the ones who have real learning issues who are not going to make a big shift. So it’s kind of awkward for us. We’ve shifted that big tail; we’ve only got a little tail now. Isn’t that empowering? I still have my ESOL teachers come to me at the end of the year and say ‘oh, look at these kids, they’ve really shifted along’. I say, ‘if I didn’t [assess] this at the beginning you’d have nothing to compare’.

Part of the challenge was to get ‘buy-in’ from staff in terms of both improving teaching and setting targets:

... we need to get a bit of buy-in from the teachers, that’s what I’m trying to promote; not just ‘hey, I look at school wide data’, a few of us set the collective thing, I actually want a buy-in to get greater shift. I’d like us to push our boundaries a bit further. (DP)

I’m trying to get greater buy-in from teachers so at the end of the year they realise they’ve actually had to work to get that input and they’ve had to work to get that progression that they want. Because I tend to find that at the end of the year it’s like ‘ho-hum, yeah, that’s the end of the year results’ and they take no ownership of it. (DP)

In general, the specifics of the National Standards were not as often discussed and critiqued as at some of the other schools, nor as clearly, for reasons that are again likely to reflect the Huia SLT’s preoccupations around the quality of teaching and this schools greater fragmentation and looser organisation. Nevertheless some issues were coming up. For instance mid-year reporting for year 7 students was difficult, both in value-added terms because end of year 6 data from contributing schools was so variable and because only some mathematics areas had been covered by mid-year. The DP suggested it wasn’t useful for parents to be told the child hadn’t achieved when they hadn’t been taught the relevant material.

It was apparent from the interviews at Huia that there was little prospect of the school overtly contesting the National Standards. One reason for this was that while the principal recognised there were problems around how the standards system was introduced and the potential impact of the policy, it was also seen to bring some advantages:

We were told bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, this was going to happen and we were given the timeframe. We were told this is the year and everyone’s sitting there—I can remember this clearly—how, who, what. So we got given a big picture with no hows,

no whats, and no methods of evaluation or anything, so that was why people got up in arms.

Right from the word go, the messages that were being delivered to me were not scary. I didn't think at that stage it was scary, I recognised the potential for things to go off and wrong but I didn't think it was worth getting into.

I think for us the big picture ideas that we have received have some merit. The processes about how that information was delivered and how we're going to be supported definitely don't have my support.

A particular hope in this school, with more than 40 contributing schools, was that the National Standards would become a reliable means of comparing student ability regardless of which school students came from:

Well, the cool thing about National Standards if it worked in the way that we would like to see it work is that, you know, you can be having the same dialogue with any school about where kids are at.

Oh, secondary schools actually get their students in and sit whatever tests so they have a commonality; like, they've already done their tests this year for next year. They don't pull upon quite as many contributing schools as we particularly do. And that's the norm for them to do, it's regularly accepted by the contributing schools to high schools that's what happens. But do that for a primary school—it was a challenge enough to do a particular test for our GATE class and try and help sort it out. That was challenging enough to sell that as a concept and we had to pay for it. (DP)

But having a common measure across schools without going to a national test is in the best interests of education; I accept that personally, I think it is, it's needed.... And I see that as a need because the reality is I work with the issues when we haven't got something. So I can see that quite easily. And parents want to know when they shift from one school to the other where things are. Yeah, I think that's one of the big concerns and they've got every right to know. It shouldn't be a hidden secret any longer.

The Huia principal also suggested that intermediate schools as a form of provision had generally become more vulnerable in recent years and pointed to some intermediates being closed. It was argued that this could lead them as a group to be less likely to contest the National Standards³⁰: 'We're trying to make a position I think, we're trying to prove that we're ok, we're united, that we're doing something [positive]'

Given these perspectives, the Huia principal had ignored a lot of the debate over National Standards: 'every week there's stuff coming in, I don't even read it all, I just file it'. The school had also only supported the opposition to the National Standards to a very limited extent:

I'm not saying that some of the things that they are voting for aren't good, but I just don't want to get caught up in that. We have signed some bits of paper, I have supported the fact that, you know, I've said 'yes, we needed more time to trial', but I haven't said that I don't think there's some good things in National Standards and the 'rebel group' are really wanting an all or nothing. I filled out surveys ... I've said 'yes, I agree with you that we need more time, yes I agree that information hasn't been- but I don't agree that National Standards, in the whole picture, is a bad one'. The 'rebel group' are saying you're either all against it or you're all for, whereas I'm not. I can understand where the problems are but I can also see the merits of where it is going so I'm avoiding that sort of stuff.

The Board were generally happy to follow the lead of the SLT:

No, the board have discussed it at their meeting, they have listened to how we put our thoughts across ... and they had one or two chances to go to a session, it might have

³⁰ Although intermediates made up about 10% of the schools in BTAC when it was launched in 2010.

been an hour or so, with someone speaking about it so they had their chance to take their stance and they supported us in the approach that we were taking. (DP)

Nevertheless as at Magenta, the SLT at Huia intermediate came to feel under more pressure around the National Standards over 2011. When first interviewed at the end of 2010 there was a sense of possibility and of the school being left to its own devices:

We're still in the shaping of; we're still in the debating of what is going to be practical for us. And I think that's what has to be the bottom line.

... it has come to a stop, even the PD that's been offered has all come to a stop. So it's also stopped obviously at the Ministry or the policy level as well at this stage because nothing's really happened apart from term one and two, a little bit in term three and it's just gone on the back boiler from the outside people as much as anyone else. (DP)

However, by June 2011 the principal reported greater engagement with the New Zealand standards system in several ways. First, she was personally finding it increasingly difficult not to become involved in the political debate over the National Standards:

it's a topic nearly everywhere you go and, you know, it's just more difficult because you're either a school that is or a school that isn't and I have tried to disengage from that argument and tried to sit on the fence, I guess, because I'm trying to stay focused on what counts and that is student achievement and how we best report that. So I've tried to ... and I know that middle schools in general, intermediate schools and middle schools, are taking that stance whereby we are trying to just get on and do what we're doing in our schools without getting involved in that debate; but it's becoming harder to do so, you know, it is becoming harder. When you meet with your colleagues at any sessions, whether it's the local principals gathering or a drink at the pub or, you know, it's becoming ... 'what are you doing? What's your school doing? Are you standing up and fighting and are you ... what are you doing?'

As at Magenta, the SLT at Huia was trying to stay focused on its development of the Huia Curriculum, its local version of the New Zealand Curriculum, but as at Magenta that was becoming increasingly difficult:

We've tried to stay away from the National Standards. So we've got all the information on the Standards and yes, we have tried to make some movement towards making our assessment based on the Standards but not explicitly, ok. And let's face it, there's huge gaps between what the curriculum says and where the Standards sit ... so why would you want to go there? What I'm saying is, it's a lot easier for us as a school to stick with what we know, which is the curriculum; when you go to the Standards there are gaps between the two and trying to say, 'oh we can match that'—well, teachers don't get that. Teachers don't really- to be frank, I'm finding my teachers—no one's come to me and said, 'we're not having a discussion on Standards' ... not once has a teacher questioned me on why we're not getting into that dialogue. Now, I have been quietly emailing the stuff that comes to me—I feel obligated to do so and I think they need to come from a position of information. But we have not run big staff meetings on National Standards; we have looked at the standards on the paper that have been given to us and discussed them at the curriculum leadership team level, which is a representative group of nine people who represent all staff members in the school. So can you see what I'm saying? We're not clear ourselves on exactly how we're going to make those two match. So it's very hard to try and be very explicit with teachers – we can be really explicit with the curriculum; we can't be explicit with the National Standards.

There was some new forwarding of information to staff, albeit at a minimal level:

I'm making sure—whereas I wasn't last year, I really was just sitting back—this year stuff that's coming through from NZPF, NZEI, articles of interest regarding the standards, I just send them off. All I do is forward them on [to staff] and say "for your information to read".

In mid 2011 Huia Intermediate also held its first meeting to inform parents about the National Standards

... we've called it 'Parent Information Evening: How Huia reports on student achievement and progress and National Standards'. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to start it off by just presenting a very simple powerpoint on what National Standards is about, then we're going to talk about what we're doing at Huia in terms of reporting to parents; and ... because we didn't do that last year, we didn't feel anywhere near ready to, you know, we didn't feel brave enough to go down that track with parents.

Nevertheless, the principal was wary of getting into any public debates about the National Standards:

I'm not going to stand in front of a whole group of parents and get into a political debate about National Standards. I don't think parents want to go there either. I've had not one phone call, not one request. In fact, even at board meeting level it's only ever brought up if I bring it up. The board are getting everything because the board gets all the emails from STAR that I get and so what I'm saying is, at this school, in this community, people aren't really wanting to go there and I don't blame them.

Whereas the DP had noted some early interest from teachers, the principal said she had not been fielding any further queries about the National Standards from teachers either. She put this down to teachers being preoccupied with other demands of teaching:

I'm surprised, I have to say, that not one teacher has come in here and said, 'can we talk about this? What are you doing? Why aren't you saying more? Give us more information.' We've passed on the stuff, don't get me wrong—anything that has come onto us to be passed on has been passed on. We have had discussions at staff meeting level but only when we really need to or it's essential that we do so. That's the approach we've chosen to take.

For Joe Bloggs in the classroom it's over there in cyberspace, it's not happening today.... If there was any inkling that teaching to National—you know, real inkling I mean, defined inkling—that this would mean that teachers are going to be looked at because if your kids in your class aren't performing at a given level then it's going to affect your pay packet of course they'd take notice and teachers would be actively involved. But I think teachers, and I don't think they're being negative, I think they're getting on with the business at hand, they've got bigger business at hand.

The Huia principal indicated that she was trying 'pick the eyes out' of the policy and take any engagement slowly rather than fully embrace it:

My personal opinion is that it's politically-driven and I just, you know, we're taking on board the parts of National Standards requirements that make sense to us; that make natural sense for us to pursue. But as I said it's becoming harder.

Our Huia curriculum is driving where we bring the Standards in, not the other way around. So we're not having the Standards drive us—that's why I'm not rushing in the charter. We're delivering the curriculum. We've set our targets. So normally I'm a person who tries to meet deadlines but I'm thinking oh ... it's on my 'To Do' list; not a hard one, I can do it—I just haven't got round to it.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

The first part of this concluding section discusses some general conclusions that are apparent from looking across the six RAINS case studies as far as they have been developed after one year. Second, we discuss each of the school case studies as presented so far, revisiting the points signalled in Sections 3 and 4. We want to reiterate the point made in Section 2.5 that the work being done by the RAINS school case studies is to illuminate a range of important themes and issues that need to be considered in relation to other schools enacting the National Standards. This means that discussion around each individual school in this section often speaks to key points in the wider debate over National Standards. To avoid repetition we begin with Seagull School and only add on significantly new perspectives contributed by the other cases. Areas for future investigation are indicated across the discussion. We conclude by summarising what we see as the main research tasks during 2012.

General conclusions from across the RAINS case studies

1. *Schools approaches to the National Standards are, ‘intimately shaped and influenced by school-specific [contextual] factors’ (Braun Ball, Maguire and Hoskins 2011, p. 585).* Perspectives and responses often ‘make sense’ when seen against context and are more nuanced than the debate over National Standards has suggested so far. Each school’s school-specific factors cumulatively create more or less advantaged positionings within which the New Zealand standards system gets enacted (in one way or another) and this has significance for both those who are keen to see the National Standards ‘rolled out’ and those who oppose the standards system, as it means that schools ‘contest’ or ‘comply’ with National Standards from positions of relative strength or weakness. Context will also affect comparisons of school performance in the National Standards, even if these are also likely to be clouded by between-school differences in judgements against the National Standards. The issue here is both (1) the unfairness of such comparisons and (2) the fact that those in schools are aware of the unfairness. Their awareness is likely to legitimate for schools the kinds of ‘game-playing’ around the standards system seen in high stakes systems elsewhere. Those operating from disadvantaged positions can be expected to take shortcuts—measures that will improve National Standards performance even if these do not authentically reflect the rest of school life. For those in the most advantaged contexts, there is the ‘fear of falling’, particularly if they are concerned that other schools are not playing the game fairly in which case they are also likely to take steps to make sure their performance is not shown to be inferior.
2. *Changes around National Standards are typically incremental—because the National Standards policy is not yet particularly ‘high stakes’ in terms of reputation, because change in schools is tempered by what already-busy teachers can deal with and because schools have already had a major focus on numeracy and literacy as a result of policy over the last decade.* Just as the Curriculum Implementation Exploratory Studies (CIES) researchers found that the NZC ‘did not arrive in a vacuum’, (Cowie, et al., 2009, p. 7) the same is true of the New Zealand standards system. The effect of this is that even the most obvious responses to the National Standards, such as report formats, tend to involve modifications of what the schools have already been doing. The influence of what schools already had in place will be seen both in the schools that have concerns about National Standards and those that are more supportive such as Kanuka. It is not only pre-existing policies that are influential but teaching and learning discourses, including those around the New Zealand Curriculum and Māori education: New Zealand schools operating within the kind of ‘policy soup’ discussed by Ball and colleagues. Where school leaders are trying to make step-changes there are tensions and resistance from staff.
3. *While large and rapid culture shifts are unrealistic, more subtle changes are likely to become important over time.* The language of the standards, especially ‘below’, ‘at’, ‘above’ is becoming noticeable in schools and there is becoming a more explicit focus on reading, writing and maths and a more explicit positioning of students. School leaders and teachers are typically unconcerned about some of these shifts while more concerned about others. They are reporting some discomfort at the need to categorise students and some ‘foreshortening of choice’ (Woods et al.,

1997) around the curriculum although here changes to the standards system are adding to curricula shifts that were already underway.

4. *It is clear that some effects of performativity are beginning to emerge.* The instance we have highlighted in this report is the way Seagull School has chosen to reduce its target for student achievement compared to previous years in order to be more certain to reach it in the event National Standards data becomes public. We will not comment further for the time being. Being just one year into the study and with more detailed investigation of the schools' assessment approaches ahead of us, it would not be helpful to discuss what else we are likely to find.
5. *Teachers and school leaders often prefer to think their practice is not being 'directed' by policy even if it might be.* This is indicated by the way they are often keen to emphasise 'no change' but then go on to raise various changes. This is a complex issue and one we would like to explore further. Some of the elements include (i) the way incremental change allows the argument that a school was heading in a particular direction anyway; (ii) the way that strong demands from the Ministry around charters often led school leaders to feel more directed over 2011; (iii) the way that professional reputations are being made and being put at risk through the National Standards (for instance with 4-5 year return times becoming the gold standard for ERO reviews, getting a 3 year return because of non-compliance with the standards system may affect promotion prospects); (iv) the self-managing ideology of Tomorrow's Schools and (v), the reality that there are some ways that schools can 'mediate' policy. Schools do exercise some choice in how explicitly they report against the National Standards and teachers report various ways in which they 'soften' and distract from the judgements against the National Standards. For instance at Seagull School the school does report explicitly but the reporting 'continuums' provide a welcome means for teachers to focus on progress against specific assessments.
6. *The potential for continuing covert contestation of the National Standards appears high.* Four of the five RAINS schools that have publicly 'gone with' the policy are holding much more critical views behind the scenes, and it is not just schools that are contextually disadvantaged that are critical of the policy. The case of Seagull School is particularly instructive. Despite this school being apparently compliant and in a highly favourable position to introduce the National Standards, Seagull's leadership team, board and staff are all questioning the direction and impact of the policy, with significant concerns being raised across the school and in relation to numerous issues. The situation can be contrasted with that around the New Zealand Curriculum where the CSIE researchers reported 'a view by leaders that the implementation of the new curriculum should be carried out as an urgent, but gradual, process that avoided doing too much at once, thus risking getting ahead of teachers' need to understand the curriculum document and its import for their own teaching' (Cowie et al., 2009, p. 7). This is the kind of cautious but enthusiastic approach that occurs when a policy has real 'buy in' from schools: what we are seeing instead is a mixture of caution and reluctance. Nor does the picture that Hipkins et al. (2011, p. 74) paint of empowered schools mediating the National Standards policy and taking what they want from it ring true with the less positive experiences of the RAINS schools (although they too were not short of confidence). On the other hand, Kanuka School illustrates that some schools and individuals will be enthusiastic about the New Zealand standards system and that they will have particular reasons for this.

Points from Seagull School case study

1. *How New Zealand primary schools may be relatively coherent.* Seagull School is the only school where we have so far looked at staff across the school and while even at this school our analysis of different policy positions remains underdeveloped, Seagull does suggest relative coherence compared to the picture painted by Ball and colleagues based on their English secondary school cases. Primary schools—particularly contributing and full primary schools—have many features that would lead towards greater coherence than secondary schools. They are smaller and their teachers have more in common in terms of the scope of their roles. Intermediates are somewhat different as their specialist teachers make them more likely to have some of the 'departmental' differences found in secondary schools. Most New Zealand primary teachers are women and many share career trajectories interrupted by raising their own families. They also have much in

common in terms of their acculturation in teacher education programmes and their almost universal membership of NZEI, which principals are also members of. Finally, New Zealand is not as far down the track of the kinds of managerialist and privatising reforms that have created divisions within the teaching workforce as in England. The main implication of this may be that in many schools the staff will often share quite similar views on policy as was apparently happening at Seagull. In this context, some policy positionings of the kinds outlined by Ball et al. (2011b) may be relatively muted while others—particularly ‘narrating’ principals—may be strong.

2. *How existing high quality processes in schools may be compromised by National Standards.* Seagull School already has sophisticated national-norms based assessment and reporting practices so that National Standards is regarded as a retrograde step, a time-consuming burden on top of what is already being done successfully and which this school is reluctant to put aside, at least for the time being. Seagull School therefore highlights the issue that the National Standards policy is insufficiently responsive to context to avoid compromising worthwhile practice in some schools. This also raises the related issue of what seems to be a mismatch between a universal policy like the National Standards and the claim that it is primarily about targeting the problem of the mainly Māori and Pasifika children who make up New Zealand’s so-called ‘long tail of underachievement’. Support for the universal application of policy can be found in PISA’s argument that ‘[w]here performance variation is concentrated within schools (i.e. high academic inclusion), educational policies that target individual schools are likely to miss out on many low-performing students’ (OECD, 2010, p. 86). Nevertheless Seagull reminds us of the cost of putting policies into schools where most students are not in the target demographic.
3. *Schools using the National Standards categories for reporting even when staff have deep reservations about the effects of labelling.* Although there aren’t many students at Seagull School that need to be characterised as ‘below’ or ‘well below’, this doesn’t stop the teaching staff there being worried about this issue. Essentially the view amongst Seagull teachers is that if the New Zealand standards system ends up damaging any child, then the policy is unacceptable. This chimes with the MTL research which found ‘the demotivation of students who are consistently below the standards’ to be the main issue of concern to both principals and Boards (Thomas & Ward, 2011) and the CSIE research which also found ‘teachers concerns about the National Standards centring on overly simplified *reporting* of students as being “below the standard”’ Hipkins et al. (2011, p. 71).

Given such wide concern about the effects of labelling at Seagull School it is a puzzle as to why this school reports to parents against the four-point scale. As mentioned in 2.4, the MTL research (2010) found that most schools reporting against the National Standards are using some variant of this scale. If concerns about the effects of labelling are as widespread as the above research indicates, then it seems Seagull might be illustrative of many other schools that are using the scale (or a variant) despite their concerns about labelling.

That the four-point scale is optional for schools is in some ways very clear, for instance from the Gazette:

Q. Do I have to use the terms ‘above’, ‘at’, ‘below’ or ‘well below’ when reporting on a student’s progress?

A. Teachers are not required to use the terms ‘above’, ‘at’, ‘below’ and ‘well below’ when reporting student achievement to parents. Whether they want to use those terms depends on their judgement about what will best motivate an individual student. The requirement for using the four-point scale only applies to boards of trustees’ annual reports. (“Q&A”, 2010a)

There is also advice in the Gazette that gives preference to ‘Report B’, an example where the four-point scale is avoided:

Report A does not meet the intent of either the NZC or the National Standards. It is primarily about reporting the teacher’s judgement against the standard, supported by evidence. It puts the National Standards at the centre, rather than the learner. Report B on the other hand recognises David as an important partner in the learning and that

the report needs to capture his view of his learning. It recognises and celebrates what he has learnt over the year so he can feel confident and motivated to return to learning the following year.... Do your reports merely comply with NAG 2A or do they also meet the intent of the NZC and encourage David to remain a learner? (“Reports to Parents”, 2010)

At the same time, it has to be said that these are just two articles in a flood of information that has come out from Ministry and that it is difficult to find other reporting examples provided by the Ministry that do not use the language of the four-point scale or some variant.³¹ One possibility then is that schools like Seagull remain under a misconception that they are required to report using the scale and indeed it was explained to me at Seagull that ‘throughout the year you don’t need to [report against the four point scale] but at the year’s end you do’ (DP1). But it is not hard to envisage several other reasons why Seagull and other such schools might report against the four-point scale even though they don’t like it and don’t have to use it:

- Avoiding the dissonance between requiring staff to start thinking in terms of OTJs and the National Standards four-point scale and yet not reporting to parents in the same way. It may be all very well for the Ministry to want reports that ‘meet the [wider] intent of the NZC’ as with David above but it may be a lot less confusing in terms of school organisation and leadership to just go with the four-point scale.
- The complexity—linguistic gymnastics—of avoiding the scale. Some schools clearly manage to do it—Juniper is an example amongst the RAINS schools (and the Juniper principal had done so as a response to the Gazette article about ‘David’s’ report above) but then the Juniper principal is not responsible for getting clear messages out to hundreds of parents, only a small number.
- Perceived demands from Boards or school communities to go with the four-point scale or some variant.
- The strategy that seemed in place at Seagull where other forms of reporting were given emphasis and reporting against the four-point scale was treated in a token way, almost as an afterthought. This may be one way (effective or otherwise) that schools deal with their concerns around labelling.

Overall this is an issue that needs more investigation. Clearly there is the potential here for what the MTL researchers generously call the ‘unintended consequences’ of National Standards if from the Ministry’s point of view schools can avoid the four-point scale and yet schools actually feel they need to use it even though they are uncomfortable with its potential for labelling children.

4. *Between-school comparability of judgements around the National Standards.* There is the strong perception at Seagull that it is demanding more of its students to reach the National Standards categories than many other schools, a situation that might end up unfairly depressing the school’s positioning in inter-school comparisons of National Standards results. This is another area worth investigating further in the RAINS schools in 2012 and there may be a role for the lead teachers and/or independent subject specialists to compare the assessment approaches of the schools and the OTJs they are making. Several questions present themselves. What is the range of current pressures on schools to show that students are at or above the National Standards? Can schools pick a line through assessment against National Standards that allows greater National Standards success while being less demanding than at other schools? If so, might this underpin some support for the standards system at low SES schools because the staff at those schools can see that there is enough ‘flexibility’ in the system for their school and its students to look good even if their achievement is relatively low? Finally, how accurate are the processes of moderation that schools are being encouraged to participate in? We note that subject experts have often struggled in this area.³² Of course all of this also assumes schools are taking seriously the need to have

³¹ See, for example, “Q & A” (2010a, 2010b); also the examples provided on Assessment Online (2011) and the draft report of the Practitioners’ Reporting Group (2011).

³² Personal communication with Prof Clive McGee, University of Waikato, 16 January 2012. As someone involved in the development and rating trials for the Social Studies Subjects Survey (Department of Education 1987), he notes that the subject group found it difficult to achieve rater consistency when assessing what children wrote in response to learning

multiple sources of ‘hard’ and ‘softer’ data and to match against the various levels or stages intended. One teacher reported a friend in another school saying that that all that school had done to generate its reports against National Standards for reading was to take one running record and gauge the students as ‘below’, ‘at’ or ‘above’: ‘And I said are you happy with that?’ ‘Oh yeah, that’s fine’.

5. *Existing tensions between curriculum ‘basics’ and ‘frills’ and the academic and social/pastoral purposes of schooling and how National Standards may exacerbate these.* Seagull School illustrates how many schools are already very focused on numeracy and literacy ‘our big thing is that its literacy and numeracy on all the other [four] days and so that’s what it is, literacy and numeracy’ (DP1). This suggests that even a little more focus on reading, writing and maths as a result of the standards system could lead to the shutting down of the wider curriculum in such schools. At Seagull it is the optional programme, along with Understanding by Design that is the hope for the wider curriculum such as Science, Social Studies and the Arts continuing to thrive. However it is an important question for further investigation whether this programme (or ‘topic’ work, topic studies and those covered through concept learning at Kanuka, Juniper and Cicada respectively, or the variety of subjects being reported on at Magenta and Huia) see other subject areas being taken seriously in their own right or merely becoming a vehicle for the development of literacy (and perhaps numeracy to a lesser extent). Note that this is different from the argument used by the Ministry that “teachers need to give students rich and diverse curriculum contexts to apply and fully develop their literacy and numeracy skills and understandings” (Ministry of Education, 2011b) as this can be accepted. It is, instead, the recognition that there are limits to what teachers can cover or emphasise in any period of teaching and the concern that it is sufficient emphasis on the skills and concepts from the ‘other’ curricula areas that is being necessarily set aside.
6. *Teacher workload and opportunity costs.* We saw that about a third of Seagull School teachers had concerns to do with workload associated with the standards system. These concerns were not just about a general intensification of workload but about increasing the ‘paperwork’ element of their role at the expense of face to face teaching and, connecting with the previous point, concern about reducing time for elements of the curriculum not so closely connected to the National Standards. Investigating this concern is difficult because National Standards are clearly only part of the overall picture. Nevertheless it does suggest closer attention to what teachers are spending time on and from this it may be possible to make some general observations about their workload and the place of National Standards in it.
7. *Resources and their use to support learning.* In the past Seagull School has been able to put a lot of resources behind the relatively small proportion of struggling children that it serves and now seems to be taking the same approach to making sure that children are not falling ‘below’ on the National Standards. This raises the question of what resources different kinds of schools have at their disposal to help ‘accelerate’ children. Certainly schools like Kanuka are able to access extra state resources through TFEA (decile) funding and various other resources targeted to low decile schools, but higher SES schools have many local resource advantages combined with a much smaller proportion of students who are at risk of being ‘below’ or ‘well below’ in any case. The question therefore becomes not just whether there are enough resources to support children who are found to be ‘below’ or ‘well below’ but whether this is yet another area in which middle class schools are advantaged.
8. *The responses of middle class parents to the National Standards.* The rationale for the National Standards has often been stated in terms of parents becoming more informed about their child’s achievement on the assumption that this knowledge will be used by parents to help support their child to learn. However the Seagull teachers give examples of middle class parents wanting to know that their child is doing better than their peers. This raises the use of the National Standards to support middle class educational strategies in pursuit of positional advantage, ensuring a child has not just a good future but an advantaged one. Such strategies could include buying home tutoring support for their child or buying into the zones of schools of where nearly all children are

activity questions (in particular for children's answers that included giving their opinions in their answers and making evaluative judgements about content). This difficulty applied to primary and secondary teachers' assessment.

at or above on the National Standards (see Section 1.3, number 10). Put another way, National Standards will hardly reduce the achievement gap in New Zealand if they become a means of informing middle class strategies to increase the advantages of middle class children.

Points from Kanuka School case study

1. *How existing discourses/philosophical commitments—in this case to kaupapa Māori education and against ‘deficit theory’—may become lenses through which the National Standards become viewed in schools.* A general point here is that there are many educational ideas, stemming from professional development, research and the popular media, older and newer that float around in the New Zealand ‘policy soup’ that may be influential in the way in which any school chooses to take up the National Standards. Understanding school’s enactments of the New Zealand standards system then becomes a matter of understanding these ideas or commitments as well.

In the case of Kanuka School it was clear from their comments that the Kanuka principal and DP were taking an emphatic stance that student achievement was the responsibility of schools rather than society: this was made clear by the DP (‘... if the kids aren’t learning it’s my responsibility. It’s not the parents, it’s not anybody else’s, it’s my responsibility’). It was also illustrated by the SLT preferring the wording ‘financial stress’ over ‘poverty’ to describe the problems faced by families. Specifically where this thinking is coming from is something we should explore further. We note for instance that the local secondary school is involved in Te Kotahitanga, which actively discourages teachers from thinking about socio-economic issues.³³

Whether for these members of the SLT this ‘schools make the difference’ perspective represented a genuine belief that structural constraints could be ignored or was more a leadership stance to ensure teaching staff did not have low expectations³⁴, in this school it clearly helped to underpin support for National Standards and associated strategies to accelerate students so that they could achieve better against the National Standards. Were it not accepted that schools hold so much power over student achievement, it would be difficult to have enthusiasm for the standards system or indeed any school-based reform that claimed to hold all the answers. Kanuka School represents a case then where a school has not only been exposed to the ‘politics of blame’, but appears to have thoroughly taken up those messages or is at least mimicking them within the school. Kanuka may be usefully contrasted with Cicada School where the principal was also concerned about the effects of deficit thinking but also very clear that poverty had an impact on student achievement in a way that Ministry arguments around the National Standards were not recognising (‘Look, at the root of it is ignoring ... poverty and the impact on the learning’). This illustrates that it is possible to take an alternative approach where it is possible to believe in teacher agency but where this is set against and balanced by an understanding of structural constraints. At the same time this more critically informed view would never see the standards system as any more than a small part of the solution to educational inequality and it is just as likely, as at Cicada, to see it as an obstacle.

2. *‘Other’ reasons why schools might support the National Standards policy.* Kanuka School illustrates that where schools support the standards system, this support may often come from perceived wider organisational or cultural benefits to schools as much as the benefits of the National Standards *per se*. For instance in a school where a new principal is stamping their mark, the National Standards may provide a new direction in which to demonstrate leadership: there seemed to be elements of this at Kanuka. The same could be true of governance: National Standards may provide a fresh agenda for a board with ambitions. Similarly it is not hard to conceive of school leaders using National Standards as a rallying point in a divided staffroom or for performance management purposes where some staff are underperforming. The National Standards may also be supported where the policy is seen to bring resources into schools or to make teaching clearer and easier in some ways. We note enthusiasm amongst teachers for some

³³ Through the requirement that they “positively and vehemently reject deficit theorising as a means of explaining Māori students’ educational achievement levels.” This is the first point of Te Kotahitanga’s “Effective Teaching Profile”.

³⁴ We note the principal talks about having a lower target for student achievement before raising it after discussion with the board, who want ‘no child left behind’.

of the attractive wall-charts and other resources produced around the standards system. Whatever the other pros and cons of the National Standards, the standards system may be regarded in schools as a welcome organiser when teachers are working amidst numerous uncertainties. Kanuka School also illustrates how National Standards may also be better supported in schools when potential objections can be diminished. We suggest below that avoiding the ‘well-below’ category in reports and being involved in *Ngā Whanaketanga* may have both helped put a more positive slant on the National Standards at Kanuka.

3. *Low entry levels and the need for acceleration.* Kanuka is a school where accelerating the progress of students with low levels of achievement on arrival at school has become a central agenda as a result of the National Standards. There is a sharper focus on progress rates – on speed, resources are being reallocated and some practices changing. While we will watch with interest how this focus plays out over the next two years, we note three likely problems. The first is that reaching the National Standards in low SES contexts represents much more ambitious target-setting than in middle class schools and we question whether this will be helpful or counterproductive. For instance a recent Ministry publication on target-setting speaks blithely about what would be an extraordinary achievement gain:

For example, instead of setting a target to have ‘75% of Year 5 students achieving *at or above* the National Standard for mathematics’, your target should be specific and focus on the students who are not achieving: ‘All Year 5 students who were achieving *below or well below* the National Standard for mathematics will be achieving *at or above* the National Standard. (MoE 2011e)³⁵

This level of aspiration is unlikely to be helpful: even the school effectiveness literature (often criticised for not being socially critical enough) tends to point to ‘high but realistic’ targets/expectations being optimal. Unrealistic targets may be unnecessarily discouraging of both staff and children and encourage fabrication as a means of getting up to target without having to make the extraordinary gains required. It will be easy enough to fabricate National Standards achievement because schools practices are largely unscrutinised. At the heart of such thinking is the Ministry stance that social constraints on student achievement can always be overcome by good teaching, a position that is politically palatable but sociologically naïve.

The second problem illustrated by Kanuka School is that the quest for acceleration involves a pragmatic search for whatever works rather than being informed by any particular philosophy or theory of learning, or being particularly well contextualised to the situation of Kanuka school. The Kanuka approach is more reminiscent of US school improvement effects where you buy an ‘off the shelf’ programme, in this case ‘First-Chance Reading’, ‘Mathletics’, ‘Rainbow Reading’, perhaps trial it, but be ready to discard it if it doesn’t work.

A third problem is that Kanuka School doesn’t have a lot of extra resources at its disposal for the purposes of acceleration. It may divert some more of the resources it has towards this goal but it is not, for instance, able to radically reduce class sizes or employ more staff for working with small groups or individuals. Acceleration is being achieved by doing more with, if not less, than about the same. We have seen low socio-economic schools doing just the same in England and observations there seem apposite:

The overall impression is that, in the absence of any more far-reaching policy for responding to the effects of a socially disadvantaged intake, the schools in our sample were energetically trying a lot of different things, informed by experience of what had worked in the past or by particular educational philosophies and as and when they could afford them. Faced with challenging and unpredictable circumstances, without substantial extra funding or staff or fundamentally different organisational designs, and without the resources contributed by wealthy parents, these head teachers were having to adjust, innovate, and grab available opportunities and funding. There was an instability and ad-hocness about the responses of these schools that was absent from the more advantaged schools. This suggested that the

³⁵ Ironically, this example is given in a text box just above a point that targets should be ‘achievable ... realistic but challenging’.

challenge of genuinely addressing the issues they face went beyond what was readily achievable within existing policies and resources. (Thrupp & Lupton 2011a, p. 36)

4. *Cohort change, transience and the reporting of National Standards results.* Schools report National Standards results in their annual plans in May each year, reporting on progress and achievement of students in relation to National Standards for the previous school year, for instance Nov 2010-Nov 2011 (Ministry of Education, 2011a, see pp.13–15). In such reporting there is an assumption that the students at any year level in one year will be same students being reported in the next year level the following year. In practice of course this is often not the case. Schools are variously having to present data for students who have arrived in the school after the summer holidays or over the year (and were therefore not present at the start of the reporting year) and/or have been away for considerable periods during the year (and therefore not actually taught much). They are also unable to present data on some students who were there at the outset but have left the school. Kanuka illustrates a school where transience was a fact of life: it was persistent, unavoidable, dragged down many school processes, made planning ahead more difficult and was unable to be taken into account when the school reported on its National Standards achievement. We saw that the Kanuka principal wanted to be able to report between February and the end of the same calendar year as a way of ensuring the school was more likely to be reporting against students who had actually been present over the reporting period. At Juniper, which also had a fair bit of transience, the principal also suggested this would be a more ‘apples with apples’ approach to reporting.
5. *Reporting practices: ignoring ‘well-below’ and using ‘below’/‘at’/‘above’ in other than National Standards subject areas.* Kanuka School illustrates some interesting tensions and trends in reporting. To begin with it was happy to use the most uncompromising graphical depiction of whether students are ‘at’, ‘above’ or ‘below’ the National Standards but drew the line at using the category ‘well below’, arguing that feedback from the school community was that they didn’t want reports to be using that category. (Magenta was another school that didn’t use ‘well-below’ as the principal saw no benefit in doing so). Perhaps Kanuka’s avoidance of ‘well-below’ did a lot to make its otherwise uncompromising approach to reporting more palatable for teachers and the SLT. This school used the 3-point scale for reporting other subjects too, an example of how the standards system may have an influence beyond what was originally envisaged.
6. *The way National Standards interact with Ngā Whanaketanga in schools that offer both.* It will be interesting when we look at the teacher interviews at Kanuka School whether the Rumaki teachers have much awareness of the way National Standards work or whether mainstream and bilingual classes understand Ngā Whanaketanga. Our impression is that there is not much crossover and that the SLT also has their specialisms with the DP dealing with Ngā Whanaketanga and the Principal and AP focusing more on National Standards. Nevertheless they do share similar kinds of graphs for reporting to parents and we also think the way Ngā Whanaketanga has been developed in a more collaborative way may have resulted in some ‘softening up’ of the SLT to National Standards in this school. Put another way, had the Rumaki staff at Kanuka been presented by a fait accompli like the National Standards, it is quite likely they would have been deeply opposed. All of this is a matter for further discussion with teachers and SLT at this school.
7. *The teacher practices and experiences underlying the acceptance of the standards system in this challenging setting. Questions around staff buy in, collaboration, ‘short cuts’.* Kanuka School is a demanding setting in which to teach, both in terms of student backgrounds and in terms of the expectations of the SLT. We need to consider to what extent the staff at Kanuka School have really brought into the message of the SLT that student achievement is all up to the school or are just tolerating it. It can be difficult to shift teachers perspectives to a more ‘can do’ outlook, for instance the CIES study also noted the difficulty of convincing some staff of their agency:

The curriculum leader of a low-decile primary school reflected on the challenge leaders face when some staff are not yet convinced that they personally can make a difference for their students, and where they remain unconvinced that the initiatives associated with the curriculum implementation are worth the hard work involved for them personally. Such teachers appear to be in the minority but this was by no means

the only school where their presence was identified as an issue. (Cowie, et al., 2009, p. 32)

Of course, as pointed out in Section 1.3, there are also some good reasons for not being wholly optimistic. Furthermore, what happens if teachers are unable to promote student achievement as much as desired within the demanding framework of targets and acceleration Kanuka School has set itself? Will we see some shortcuts, some ‘well-meaning deviations’ from more authentic practice? Again this is all a matter for further exploration within the school.

8. *Student/parent perspectives in this kind of predominantly Māori and lower socio-economic setting.* While the Kanuka DP claims that ‘our parents actually love the graphs’, the AP notes that coming through with ‘below’s in all areas...can be a little bit depressing.’ Both may be correct as children and parents’ experiences of reporting probably depend a lot on the achievement levels of children and where they are positioned in relation to National Standards. A problem we have at Kanuka School as at all the other schools is only having interviewed a few children who were regarded as ‘below’ and fewer of their parents. Collecting more of the perspectives from ‘below’ children and parents in 2012 will give us a better idea of the outlook of such families in relation to the National Standards.

Points from Juniper School case study

1. *National Standards being enacted in a highly favourable staffing situation.* Juniper School was described as a ‘school in a bubble’ and perhaps the most important sense in which this was true, where it really was in the ‘best possible’ situation, was in its management staffing. In this small school the Board paid for an extra teacher to keep the principal from being a teaching principal, and one effect of that in relation to the National Standards was to allow her plenty of time for working on the standards system at the level of the whole school, supporting classroom teachers and individual children. This generally worked very well, reinforcing for us that ‘done well’ the New Zealand standards system is potentially hugely demanding of management time as well as teachers’ time and that few schools would be nearly as favourably positioned in this area as Juniper School was.
2. *The pros and cons of a very small roll.* Clearly Juniper’s small roll was allowing the principal to understand the achievement data she was working with in terms of picturing individual students, in much the same way as we would expect of classroom teachers. The acknowledged downside was lack of privacy for children and families as soon as data was broken down further than school level data.³⁶ Ministry advice for boards is not to report data publicly at such levels and to go into committee for board discussions:

Where there are categories of students in small numbers, school/boards need to be able to have discussion, make and record decisions, in a way which will not lead to a breach of individual privacy. Where it is usual practice for a board to hold “open” meetings attended by others in the school community, it would be appropriate to hold discussion “in committee” in circumstances where more open discussion is likely to lead to a breach of individual privacy. (Ministry of Education, 2010e)

Nevertheless this advice opens up a raft of questions around the appropriateness, in practice, of Board members in small communities being invited to discuss the achievement of children down to the level of individual children and families. New Zealand has many small primary schools—was this the kind of activity envisaged in the Tomorrow’s School’s reforms? Is it going beyond the boundaries of a legitimate role for local volunteers who are generally not teaching professionals? Is there the potential here to further stigmatise particular families in small communities? Are there limits to the discussions that teaching professionals should have with their Boards? How comfortable would parents be about their child’s [lack of] achievement being discussed in meetings and do board members themselves want to be involved in those discussions?

³⁶ See also NZEI 2011c.

3. *Where the impetus for 'going with' or contesting the National Standards comes from.* The Juniper principal provides a good case for considering the diverse pressures and incentives that will act on any principal's decisions around the National Standards and should make us cautious about simple explanations for 'compliance' or 'contestation'. In the 'mix' for the Juniper principal are her own enthusiasms for assessment (and related concerns about some aspects of the National Standards), her experiences with her own child, the reaction of the board—and one member in particular—to any suggestion that she might be against the National Standards, her evident pleasure in doing a great job as principal of her school, her evident concern not to upset local parents, her interactions with local principals, and no doubt various other considerations too. Personality factors and teacher education experiences are likely to come into it too, with some principals quite unlikely to ever oppose government policy while others certainly will. Bottery (2007) writes about 'defiance' of policy amongst UK head teachers:

Yet defiance was more than just a matter of planning: it was also a function of personality and perhaps even personal courage...At bottom the ability to defy seemed to be borne of a number of different factors. One was an individual's personal values; another was their experience in the job; a third, allied to this, was the collection of evidence to back their judgement; and a final one was having a personality which dared to do such things. It seemed that where one or more of these factors was missing, then defiance was less likely to show itself. (Bottery, 2007, p.99)

4. *Pressure in small schools to meet the demands of particular families.* Juniper School illustrates how the SLT and boards of small schools may give way over the National Standards in order to 'keep the peace' with influential locals. Even Magenta, a much larger rural school, had concerns in this area. We are not suggesting Juniper School did anything inappropriate in giving way to a parent's request about report formats and as the principal put it, 'it's no skin off our nose'. Nevertheless it is easy to see how a local family with some issue can have undue influence in small schools and how judgements around National Standards provide reasons to have an issue with primary schools that did not exist previously.
5. *Artefacts that are 'in development'.* Juniper School was using a 'mathematical strategies' chart that was pitched incorrectly for the National Standards but still in use for the time being. This is a useful reminder that one price of not trialling the New Zealand standards system is likely to be that schools will often develop and use artefacts—assessment items, rubrics, report formats and the like—that are more about demonstrating work towards the National Standards than being really suited to purpose.
6. *Processes and relationships being damaged through rigid adherence to managerial directives.* The way Juniper School was dealing with the Ministry's deadline of February 1, 2012 for charters demonstrates that unreasonable timelines around the National Standards will often be achieved through compromising school processes and relationships. In this case the principal's enthusiasm to meet deadline was going to only be achieved through token email consultation with the Board around the charter rather than proper discussion at a Board meeting. For many schools it will also be difficult to have end of year data analysed to inform a charter expected by 1 February. The account of the Juniper principal suggests it is rigid adherence to the planning and reporting cycle (as discussed in Ministry of Education 2011a, p. 3) that is driving the Ministry's expectation that charters will be in place by the very beginning of the school year despite this being unsatisfactory in terms of school practice. It is also predictable that some effects of unreasonable expectations on the SLT are likely to cascade down through schools to teachers and children. For instance if schools become generally required to have their charters in by 1 February in future years then principals are often likely to want term 4 assessment for the prior year completed earlier in order to get charters completed before the summer holidays. This will in turn put pressure on teachers and students in term 4.
7. *Alternative policy approaches.* The Juniper principal raises two policy alternatives for improving student achievement. One is the idea (also noted by the Board chair at Seagull) that ERO should have been able to identify underperforming schools for intervention, rather than reforming the

whole system. The other is improving teachers' skill levels through professional development centred on pedagogy.

Points from Magenta School case study

1. *Connections and tensions between the National Standards and the New Zealand Curriculum.* At the outset Magenta was the school in our study most seeking to see National Standards as 'naturally' linked to and part of the NZC, which it had been spending a lot of time developing. The principal preferred to see the National Standards as curriculum benchmarks and was disappointed when the school's charter was rejected as because it was not explicit enough about National Standards. He suggested the school might end up focussing more on numeracy and literacy at the expense of other areas because of between-school comparisons, pressure from parents, the urgency with which National Standards changes were demanded, and poorer curriculum support in other areas where Ministry advisors had been laid off. In many respects the problem for the Magenta principal and colleagues is that when it came to the standards system, their commitments already lay elsewhere. They were like the early adopter schools that Hipkins and colleagues (Hipkins et al., 2011, p. 73) write about:

The demand that teachers meet the requirements of the standards to report against chronological age is in tension with the more student-centred approaches that fit with the imperative in *The New Zealand Curriculum* that schools are responsive to student and community local strengths and needs. This tension is felt all the more acutely because of the personal and collegial commitment that leaders and teachers in early adopter schools have put into *The New Zealand Curriculum* implementation.

2. *School leaders feeling increasingly directed by the National Standards policy.* The Magenta School principal is a good example of a school leader who initially had a favourable view of the Ministry and approached the National Standards as a policy that could be successfully worked with but over 2011 found the Ministry too heavy-handed. He started to hold a more negative outlook on the National Standards policy, particularly after Magenta's charter was rejected on grounds that were regarded as petty by the school. This theme of the Ministry becoming more directive also came through in interviews at Juniper School and at Cicada School of course (and it was a perception at Huia Intermediate as well). The Ministry will have undoubtedly lost some hearts and minds in schools through its assertion of power in 2011: gaining compliance but losing much goodwill in the process.
3. *'Rogue'³⁷ cohorts.* At Magenta School the principal noted a year group that was a lower achieving cohort than usual: in this instance, 'they were identified all the way through'. Such cohorts certainly exist and can greatly upset year on year comparisons in the context of target-setting and the expectation of continuous improvement. The Ministry's advice on target-setting and reporting against National Standards doesn't seem to cover this problem, instead positioning schools as being responsible for any decline in achievement: "As the analysis of variance outlines the difference between the targets that were set and what was actually achieved, your board is able to identify what has and hasn't been effective in supporting student learning". (Ministry of Education, 2011e, p.6)
4. *Concern about wider policy developments around schools.* The Magenta School case illustrates that schools are conscious of changes affecting the provision of professional development, changes within the Ministry and with services like the RTLB. There is a perception here of a 'thinning out' of services to schools as they more frequently work to a business model and prioritise those schools in most need (which do not include this school). There are echoes too of the NSSAG chairs report noted in section 2: "The dominant perception in the sector is that it has experienced withdrawal of what it was accustomed to and had come to think it was entitled to, while perceived promises of funding are not delivered" (NSSAF, 2011). While in some senses the Government has surrounded the National Standards policy with resources, it seems in other respects schools are being left unsupported.

³⁷ In the sense of a rogue wave—A cohort that upsets the usual pattern.

Points from Cicada School case study

1. *Being 'civilly disobedient'—the reasons behind becoming a BTAC school, experiences with the Ministry over 2011, and the energies used.* The Cicada School case provides insights into why schools would contest the National Standards, illustrating just how far they may be from poorly performing schools trying to avoid being accountable. Schools with the confidence to join BTAC and overtly oppose the New Zealand standards system have effectively invited some scrutiny and it would not be surprising if their assessment processes and other processes were strong. In this case the school had clear leadership, was awash with high quality professional development, put a lot of energy into assessment, received a very good ERO report and was meeting multiple accountabilities. An acknowledged weakness was reporting effectively in writing to parents: this would always be challenging given the community served by this school and the relatively new principal had rightly prioritised teaching and learning instead. The school tried on several occasions to engage with the Ministry over the National Standards but remained unconvinced about their merits for its disadvantaged intake. In the end it capitulated but continued to assert its concerns about the National Standards. We note the energies that all this contestation would have taken: it was a principled stance but by no means the easy option compared to complying with the policy.
2. *The use of 78J letters by the Ministry.* Cicada School received a 78J letter, and as this development had not been discussed in the media or in the House, we were interested in finding other schools that had received 78J letters. We wanted to consider the ERO report of such schools to see whether they suggested any real 'cause for concern'. We also wanted to find out what the outcome of the 78J process had been, to assess how seriously the Ministry was really taking the 'cause for concern'. We found a few schools through a regional principals association and then others through the snowballing approach of asking those principals if they knew of any other schools that had got a letter.

In the event we found eight schools that had received 78J letters, examined their latest ERO reports and had some correspondence with their principals.³⁸ All of the schools had got very good ERO reviews, most could be described as glowing. All of the schools' principals had been in place during their most recent ERO reviews. Three of the schools had got 4/5-year ERO returns. One was too early for the differentiated return (i.e. there was no 4/5 year reports at that time). Two seem most likely to have got 3 year returns because they were new principals and two because they had not complied with National Standards. Four of the schools had used the Ministry-supplied target, the other four had made up their own. Only three schools had included duress statements in their charters, the others had apparently triggered the 78J letter in other ways. In most cases the principal reported that the Ministry had been willing to be satisfied by meetings, a little correspondence or the offer of documentation rather than a full-blown investigation. In one school the principal sent off 'a ream' of paper, in another the Ministry came to view 'a tea chest' of documents. Most of the schools had had letters to say the Ministry was now satisfied there was no cause for concern but two were still waiting on formal confirmation.

Based on the ERO reports, it is difficult to see that the Ministry would have had any 'cause for concern' about the operation of these schools. Based on the reported follow-up activities, it seems unlikely the Ministry really thought so either. The exercise seems to have been more about flexing some legislative muscle to force schools to not only comply but to show more willing than they had previously had done. It would be interesting to properly research the experiences of the schools and corresponding perspectives of Ministry staff but the fraught politics around the 78Js makes this difficult at present.

3. *The importance of local politics in supporting overt contestation of the National Standards.* Cicada School illustrates how SLTs and boards contesting the National Standards will have often found support from other local schools. It was clear that the principals of other schools in the area around Cicada had an effective network, often sharing information, deciding on a common course of action and responding similarly to Ministry requirements.

³⁸ Two others advised they were able to avoid letters though last-minute Ministry advice and their own compliance.

4. *That schools overtly contesting the National Standards may borrow National Standards concepts or use a variant of them.* Cicada School was using the notion of making an OTJ. It's possible the school might have voluntarily taken up more features of the standards system if it was not required to adopt the whole approach.
5. *The shifting situation around ELLs and special needs students.* Cicada School has a lot of ELLs and special needs students and the Ministry decision in late 2011 to include them all in National Standards assessment rather than some being exempt raised concern at Cicada in several ways. First, that for ELLs students it would negate the use of the ELLPs, making them almost an afterthought for reporting purposes whereas prior to the change of policy Cicada had been planning to use them as the basis for its reporting of ELLs students. Second, it removed the incentive to work on making assessments against the ELLPS more robust and unpack associated teaching resources, the SELLIPS (Supporting English Language Learning in Primary Schools) and the ELIP (English Language Intensive Programme). Third, there was the concern that for both ELLs and the special needs students who could not make the steps required by the National Standards, it was still important to celebrate their successes, their 'value-added'. Labelling children as failures throughout their primary school years would not provide the necessary sense of achievement, rather it would compound their 'deficit thinking' about themselves.
6. *NZEI supporting competence procedures.* Cicada is a school where NZEI has been supporting the principal and board to take action on the performance of some teachers. This is work that NZEI is involved in across the primary sector and it is worth highlighting when Prime Minister John Key has described the NZEI's positioning in the National Standards debate as that of "a union protecting their members" (quoted in Young, 2010). Instead the situation at Cicada was that 'I've become really hard-nosed with the support of NZEI.... We've had to call people to account ... there's the mana and dignity of the people involved to be respected.... We don't put the rights of the teacher above the rights of the child'.
7. *The potential for the private sector to profit from the National Standards.* We saw that Cicada School used the eTAP student management system (SMS) to manage its data and produce reports and it is likely that other New Zealand primary schools will take up such systems in order to make the standards system more manageable. This raises the more general issue of the standards system increasing the potential for school and parent funds to flow to the private sector. eTAP is one of six SMS vendors recommended by the Ministry on its website³⁹, there are also privately-provided curriculum packages and PD to be taken up by schools, especially as the Ministry reduces and changes the nature of its involvement in PDL. These are forms of privatisation (so is MTL's involvement in the National Standards) and anyone wondering where it might all end up should read *Hidden Markets: the New Educational Privatisation* (Burch, 2009). This book is about the levels and kinds of privatization that have occurred around the 'No Child Left Behind' legislation in the USA. As the title suggests, much of this privatisation has been going on in relatively obscure areas of the school system; hidden because the private firms are taking advantage of second layer policies, detailed rules and regulations under the No Child Left Behind legislation that are not widely understood, and hidden because private firms are typically less transparent than the public sector, even when they are in receipt of public funds. The New Zealand situation is not yet as privatised as the US but this is a space to watch.

Points from Huia Intermediate case study

1. The particular features of intermediate schools (also middle schools, Year 7–13 schools and perhaps also area schools to some extent) that will often make responding to the National Standards more difficult than in contributing and full primary schools. By including Huia Intermediate amongst the RAINS case study schools, important differences between the cultures of teaching and learning in different kinds of primary provision are illustrated.

To begin with, in contributing or full primary schools, most teachers tend to be regular classroom teachers who are largely alike in terms of what they do from day to day. This is why Seagull

³⁹ www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/Schools/Initiatives/ManagedLearningEnvironments/Contacts/VendorContacts.aspx

School, for instance, was so coherent. In contrast intermediates have quite a number of specialist teachers who have been used to developing cultures of teaching their area in subject-specific ways rather than focusing very much on literacy and numeracy. While they were now being asked to do so at Huia, it was all very tentative.

Second, regular intermediate teachers may also often be less well prepared to deal with the problems of children experiencing lower levels of achievement in numeracy and literacy than Year 7 and 8 teachers at full primary schools. They are likely to often have less experience of younger cohorts either personally or through association with colleagues teaching younger children: 'In intermediates we tend to have teachers who have taught at intermediates, so they've got no big picture or understanding of anyone that's beyond the 'at' stage' (DP).

Third, in contributing or full primary schools where teaching young children to read or do basic mathematics is clearly a core function of the school, numeracy and literacy are necessarily a huge focus. By intermediate level, numeracy and literacy are not quite so centre-stage even if policymakers would like them to be. There are new demands on the school day as intermediates try to meet the age-appropriate interests and needs of early adolescents. They do this partly by offering a smorgasbord of activities, events and projects in the kind of depth that will keep children motivated to attend school and prepare them well for secondary school life and beyond. A further strong concern becomes that students are making healthy and safe choices as they get more independence, particularly in schools serving many children from 'at risk' backgrounds. Of course literacy and numeracy are still important but the focus is not the same. At intermediate level there is also a tacit assumption that most children are already reasonably literate and numerate, or if not some particular learning need has not been able to be addressed that the regular classroom teacher will struggle to address. A certain level of competence is assumed and the curriculum becomes broader.

All of these factors are understandable aspects of intermediates, yet will disadvantage these schools in relation to responding to the national standards policy because of its direct focus on numeracy and literacy. This is an important part of what was happening at Huia. It was harder at this school for the SLT and teachers to get a focus on the standards system (and this is reflected in a relatively less coherent case study as well). In the first instance intermediate teachers as a staff group are less likely to be similarly knowledgeable about teaching literacy and numeracy compared to the staff of contributing and full-primary schools. Intermediates are also less likely than contributing and full-primary schools to be concerned about the practices that National Standards are intended to impact on in any case. We are not saying here that intermediates are ineffective. We are emphasising that the predominant age of a school's intake makes a difference to what it focuses on.

2. How some schools will be a long way from the standards system and how their school leaders will struggle to make 'required' step changes. Huia Intermediate represents a school where there is a great deal of preliminary work to be done before teachers could start working with the National Standards in some way that reflects curriculum levels and OTJs based on a range of evidence. As the DP put it, 'our biggest issue at present is actually getting teachers' content knowledge up'. At Huia this will be at least partly related to being an intermediate as discussed above, but there are many reasons why a school could be badly placed including socio-economic pressures, issues around staff or SLT performance or staff recruitment problems. An issue for such schools is that being pushed into the standards system before they are even remotely on the same page may hinder rather than help school development by distracting from more fundamental concerns. This is what the SLT at Huia understood and were trying to deal with by 'keeping the temperature down' around the National Standards while working on other areas of teacher effectiveness. Nevertheless if schools feel forced to demonstrate mastery of the National Standards, this will be difficult to achieve when a lot of other PLD needs to occur first. In such instances schools can be expected to be under particular pressure to take 'shortcuts' rather than grappling with the time-consuming issues of curriculum, teaching, assessment and moderation necessary to make a more informed and genuine shift. Huia's SLT was reporting more pressure to address the National Standards in various ways but it remains to be seen how Huia's processes become affected by such urgency.

3. Whether National Standards will help provide better information about children who are transferring or transitioning schools. The SLT at Huia Intermediate clearly held the hope that National Standards would allow them to better characterise and compare the students arriving from the numerous schools that contributed to their intake each year. A likely problem with this is the between-school comparability of judgements around the National Standards already raised in relation to Seagull School. A further problem is that the National Standards categories are so broad. Knowing that students are 'at', 'below' etc would not provide sufficient differentiation for decisions around student support or grouping. Underlying data would need to be provided as well.
4. *Substantial changes to the curriculum as a response to the National Standards.* We saw that Huia Intermediate was a school that was refocusing its curriculum on literacy and numeracy in four ways: holding back worthy but 'extra' activities, 'streamlining' the curriculum to focus more on literacy and numeracy, encouraging attention to reading, writing and maths across the curriculum including in specialist subjects and focused teaching time on these 'basics' for two hours every morning. The Huia SLT was not arguing that it had done this in response to the standards system, rather 'it was in our progression, it was in our big picture, where we were going, and so I don't know if National Standards have necessarily pushed it, its part of where we were going anyway as a school' (DP).

Given what we have said about the National Standards policy not occurring in a vacuum, and about teachers and school leaders preferring to think their practice is not being 'directed' by policy, we can both accept this explanation to some extent *and* recognise that clearer evidence of the curriculum being narrowed to meet the National Standards might not be forthcoming. Nevertheless the question remains whether Huia Intermediate would have taken these steps without the National Standards: we think it is unlikely. We saw that some Seagull School teachers had concerns about how the National Standards might exacerbate emphasis on curriculum 'basics' at that school but that was a school with a very different starting point, an already 'tight' and 'pushing' curriculum whereas Huia has had a less structured approach. Whether these changes improve the balance of the curriculum at Huia Intermediate or make it less likely to meet the needs of students is something we can explore with Huia teachers and children through existing interview data and through more research at Huia in 2012. We will discuss what we find in our next report.

Next steps: Our research agenda for 2012

As indicated in Section 2.5, 2012 will be the interim year of the RAINS Project in which we can explore a range of matters before returning to all the schools discussed in this report in 2013 to repeat the research activities carried out in 2011 in order to see whether much has changed. During 2012 we expect to

- further analyse the teacher, child and parent interviews already carried out in each of the schools;
- try to interview more children considered 'below' or 'well below', and their parents;
- explore the issue of between-school comparability of judgements against the National Standards;
- continue investigating the way teachers and schools are enacting the National Standards, particularly those in the most challenging contexts;
- carry out more interviews with ERO reviewers; and
- Focus particularly on at Huia Intermediate while our cohort is still there.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Martin Thrupp

Martin Thrupp is Professor of Education at the University of Waikato. His research interests are in education policy sociology with a particular focus on how policy plays out in schools in diverse contexts. After five years secondary teaching in Levin and Porirua, he lectured at Waikato and then spent six years working in the UK where he was Reader in Education Policy at King's College London and Senior Lecturer in Education Management and Leadership at the Institute of Education, University of London. While in the United Kingdom, Thrupp was convenor of the Social Justice group of the British Educational Research Association, served on the executive of the Society for Educational Studies and undertook large-scale research projects in England and Europe. Back in New Zealand since 2006, Thrupp has mainly continued to research and write about the influence of school contexts, New Zealand education policy and the politics of educational research. He has published numerous articles and some books including *Schools Making a Difference: Let's be Realistic!* (1999, Open University Press), *Education Management in Managerialist Times: Beyond the Textual Apologists* (2003, Open University Press) and *School Improvement: An Unofficial Approach* (2005, Continuum). He has also recently co-edited *Another Decade of New Zealand Education Policy: Where to Now?* (2010, University of Waikato). Thrupp serves on various international editorial boards including the *Journal of Education Policy* and the *British Journal of Educational Studies* and has also been an editor and editorial board chair for the *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*.

Having recently lived and researched in England, Martin Thrupp quickly recognised potential risks in the National Standards policy. He raised a range of concerns in a 2007 conference paper, discussed them in a meeting with Anne Tolley prior to the election in 2008 and publicly supported the NZEI and NZPF campaigns against the National Standards in 2009 and early 2010, including writing articles and presenting at numerous public meetings. By 2010, with the standards system starting to have a presence in schools, it was becoming clear that in-depth research would be needed. Thrupp raised the idea with NZEI and the RAINS project began. Thrupp had previously written a report funded by NZEI and PPTA on professional standards for teachers. Since becoming involved in debate over the National Standards, Martin Thrupp has been described as 'a know[n] agitator' (Cameron Slater—'Whaleoil'), a 'hired gun' (Waikato Times) and even likened to Gaddafi (David Farrar—'Kiwiblog'). Nevertheless, Thrupp has never been involved in any political party and has made no financial gain from his advocacy or research work around the National Standards. He would like to spend more time agitating for those causes he is involved in, the Quality Public Education Coalition and the Child Poverty Action Group.

Ann Easter

Ann Easter is an experienced primary teacher who has taught in a number of different schools and held a variety of leadership positions, including as senior teacher and curriculum leader. She has particular interests in gifted and talented education, inclusive education, and teacher professional learning and development. During the past 12 years, Ann has worked as a gifted education advisor to schools in the Waikato/Bay of Plenty region (2000–2005) and has facilitated several Ministry of Education contracts in both gifted education and special education. Until recently, she held the role of National Coordinator: Gifted Education Advisory Support (2003–2009), as part of a team based at the University of Waikato. Ann is an elected Board member of giftEDnz: The Professional Association for Gifted Education and was a member of the former Ministry Advisory Group for Gifted and Talented Learners (2006–2009). She has spoken at national and international conferences, presented numerous lectures, and contributed articles and chapters to gifted education texts and journals. Ann is currently a doctoral student at the University of Waikato and has been working part time as a research assistant on the RAINS project.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(In all cases these were the key questions but there were also supplementary questions to clarify points or seek further detail).

Principal (initial interview)

1. How long have you been principal here and what other schools you have taught in and for how long?
2. Can you tell me about this school? How would you describe it to an outsider? How would it compare to other primary/intermediate schools around this area?
3. Can you tell about the children you get in as new entrants—what kinds of profile do they have and how do they typically progress through the junior years? (Huia Intermediate - Can you tell me about the children you get in at start of Year 7—what kind of profile do they have and how do they typically progress?)
4. What about children who arrive or leave subsequently—student transience. Is there a lot of that here and what kind of profile do those students typically have?
5. Class/ethnicity/gender/special needs.
6. Can you tell me about the parent body, are they very involved in the school?
7. What is happening with the roll of the school, would you say you are competing for students with any other schools?
8. Can you tell me about your Board? (makeup/relationship)
9. Staffing – how easy to recruit, what kind of profile?
10. Thinking now about student achievement and progress, prior to National Standards what approaches has the school been using to consider, describe, report and respond to levels of student achievement:
 - in reading
 - in writing
 - in mathematics
11. What professional development and learning has supported that?
12. National Standards - need a bit of history here. Can you remember when you first heard about the National Standards and what did you think at the outset?
13. What involvement have you had with the development of the Standards, consultation, debate?
14. Where (else) have you been getting information about the Standards?
15. What's your personal view of the National Standards?
16. What range of views are there on staff?
17. What is the Board's view?
18. How would you generally describe the schools response to the National Standards so far?
19. Are the National Standards bringing about any changes in these areas
 - Assessment and reporting?
 - Curriculum and teaching?
 - Leadership and governance?
 - Relationships within and beyond the school?
 - Motivation (staff, board, pupils, parents)

- Resources?
- Anything else?

Principal (mid-2011)

So here I'm really just catching up on developments since we last spoke

1. How has it gone this year in terms of the way the school has been approaching National Standards. Have there been any particular challenges or issues?
2. Any changes in the way you are going about things this year compared to previous years that are related to National Standards?
3. How did you find the process of setting National Standards targets in the charter and annual plan?
4. What about professional learning issues around the National Standards themselves, moderation?
5. Checking and monitoring?
6. Are National Standards affecting relationships with staff?
7. Are National Standards affecting relationships with Board?
8. What's happening externally, relationships with NZEI, other principals?
9. Are parents showing any more interest than they were last year?
10. Are there any questions you still have about the National Standards?
11. Where do you think it will go from here? [Do you think National Standards will become more important for schools or fade away over time?]
12. [At Cicada these questions were replaced by a general discussion about the situation of that school in relation to National Standards].

Cohort teachers

1. Teaching background
 - How long have you been teaching here and what year levels?
 - What other schools you have taught in and for how long?
 - How you done any other jobs before you went teaching?
 - Is teaching in the family, what did your parents do for a living?
2. Teaching perspectives
 - What are some of the things that make for good teaching in your view?
 - Are there things you find rewarding about teaching?
 - Is there a downside, things you don't like about teaching?
3. Politics
 - Have you ever got involved in teacher politics, NZEI campaigns, that kind of thing?
 - What about other political or social causes, are there things that you feel strongly about and have got involved in?
4. Can you tell me about this school? How would you describe it to an outsider?
5. What about the children here, are there particular approaches that work best with them?
6. I'm wondering if you can start talking me through different areas: maths, reading, writing, science, PE, art and so on and what you do to teach and assess and report in those areas. And

as we are going along I'll be asking you if there's been any changes over the last year or two, whether because of National Standards or anything else. [Last phrase omitted at Cicada].

7. National Standards

- Can you remember when you first heard about the national standards and what did you think at the outset?
- Have you had any involvement with the development of the standards, consultation, debate?
- Where have you been getting information about the standards?
- What's your personal view of the National Standards?
- How would you generally describe the school's response to the National Standards so far?
- Do you think the National Standards are bringing about any changes to teaching or learning in this school?

8. I'm interested in how you think the children in your class will fare in relation to National Standards this year. At this stage whether you think they will be well below, below, at, above or where you just aren't sure? [At Cicada this question was asked in relation to the school's own standards]

'Other' teachers

1. Teaching Background

- How long have you been teaching at this school? What year levels? Current class?
- Do you hold any positions of responsibility within the school?
- What other schools have you taught in? For how long?
- Have you ever been involved in teacher politics, NZEI campaigns – that kind of thing?

2. National Standard

- Do you think National Standards are bringing about any changes to this school in relation to:
 - Assessment and reporting?
 - Curriculum delivery?
 - Teacher workload?
 - Teacher motivation?
 - Relationships with colleagues?
 - Student motivation?
 - Relationships with parents
 - Leadership within the school?

[Cicada teachers were asked to comment on these areas and what might have to change if the school did start doing National Standards]

- How would you describe the school's response to the National Standards so far?
- What is your personal view of the National Standards?
- Do you have any other comments about the National Standards?

Board of Trustees

1. How long have you been on the board here and something about what you do in the rest of your life?
2. (For any one who was on the board prior to last year's board elections)

- Can you remember when you first heard about National Standards and what you thought?
 - What issues did the National Standards raise in that year before the last Board elections, 2009?
 - (For anyone who came on the board last year) What did you know about the National Standards before you came on the Board?
3. What issues have the National Standards raised for the Board over the last year, what discussion have you had about them?
 4. Have the National Standards created any tensions between the Board and the principal or with other staff?
 5. How would you describe the schools response to the National Standards so far?
 6. What do you personally think about the National Standards?
 7. Where do you think it will go from here? [Do you think National Standards will become more important for Boards and schools or fade away over time?]

Children

1. Can we have a look through your learning portfolio together? Which things did you enjoy doing most?
2. What are you learning about in maths? Reading? Writing? Science? Art? (etc.)
 - Do you enjoy reading? Why/why not? What does a good reader do?
 - Do you enjoy writing? Why/why not? What does a good writer do?
 - Do you enjoy maths? Why/why not? What does it mean to be good at maths?
3. What does your teacher do to help you to learn better?
4. How do you think you are getting on at school?
 - Are you a good learner?
 - Do you think you are doing well at school?
5. Is there anything you would like to change about school?

And for older children:

1. What kinds of tests do you do in class? Do you like doing them? Why/why not?
2. Do you think you do about the right amount of tests or would you like to do less or more?
3. (As appropriate) Tell me about your learning portfolio/student/parent/teacher conferences? Do you like those conferences? Why/Why not?
4. Tell me about your school reports. Do you like those reports? Why/Why not?

And (as appropriate):

1. Tell me about the National Standards then. What do you think about the National Standards?
2. Where are you placed on the National Standards for reading? Writing? Mathematics? What do you think about that?

Parents

1. So tell me, how does your child get on at school? Does s/he enjoy it? What do you think about the teacher and the school?
2. How do you think your child sees her/his learning at school? Do you think your child believes s/he is achieving?

3. (Where relevant) So what is the school doing to help your child improve? (and/or) So what is the school doing to extend your child?
4. Do you know what kind of assessments they actually do in your child's class? Do you think s/he likes that? Do you think they do about the right amount of assessment, or too much or too little?
5. Tell me about the student led conferences. Do you like those conferences? Why/Why not?
6. Tell me about the reports that come home from school. Do you like those reports? Why/Why not?
7. I'm interested in the National Standards that have started to be used by schools. Have you come across the National Standards yet? What do you think about them? Do you think the National Standards are having any effect on your child? In what way? [And at Cicada School, 'What do you think about the stance this school has taken on the National Standards?']

ERO reviewers

1. Could you start by talking to me about what you are actually looking for in relation to National Standards when reviewing in primary and intermediate schools? Also how you go about it?
2. Thinking specifically now about (a RAINS school)'s approach to National Standards, what were your findings there?
3. What advice, if any, did you give to (a RAINS school) related to National Standards?
4. What other observations could you make about (a RAINS school) after reviewing it?
5. Do you have any other comments?

APPENDIX B: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY GROUPS

New Zealand academic advisory group

- Dr Sue Dymock, University of Waikato
- Assoc. Prof. Deborah Fraser, University of Waikato
- Ngarewa Hawera, University of Waikato
- Dr Mary Hill, University of Auckland
- Assoc. Prof. Margie Hohepa, University of Waikato
- Prof. Terry Locke, University of Waikato
- Prof. Clive McGee, University of Waikato
- Logan Moss, University of Waikato
- Dr Cathy Wylie, New Zealand Council for Educational Research

International reference group

- Prof Stephen J. Ball, Karl Mannheim Professor of Sociology of Education, Institute of Education, University of London
- Prof. David C. Berliner, Regents' Professor, Arizona State University
- Assoc. Prof. David Hursh, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York
- Prof. Meg Maguire, Professor of Sociology of Education, King's College London
- Prof. Diane Reay, Professor of Education, University of Cambridge
- Prof. Bob Lingard, Professorial Research Fellow, University of Queensland

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Table C.1. Interviews with Children and Parents by School and Gender

RAINS Schools	Cohort Class 1				Cohort Class 2				Cohort Class 3				TOTAL			
	Children		Parents		Children		Parents		Children		Parents		Children		Parents	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Cicada	4		1		3	7		1					7	7	1	1
Huia	4	2		2	3	4		2					7	6	0	4
Juniper	5	1		2	2	4	1	3					7	5	1	5
Kanuka	2	4	(1)		2	7	(1)	(1)	2	3		2	6	14	2	4
Magenta	5	2		4	3	2		2					8	4	0	6
Seagull	7	3		3 (4)	5	5		(2)					12	8	0	9
() = Skype interviews													47	44	4	29
TOTAL													91		33	

Table C.2. Interviews with Children by School and Ethnicity (as Provided by Schools)

Ethnic Groups	RAINS Schools						TOTAL
	Cicada	Huia	Juniper	Kanuka	Magenta	Seagull	
Asian	1					1	2
English		1					1
European		1		5			6
Fijian	1						1
Indian	6	2					8
NZ Māori	2		3	10		3	18
NZ European	1	7	9	3	12	16	48
Samoan	2	2		1			5
South African		1		1			1
Tokelauan	1						1
Tongan		1					1
TOTAL	14	14	12	20	12	20	92

Table C.3. National Standards Student Achievement in Reading by School and Year Level

Year Level	RAINS Schools	National Standards: Reading				
		Well Below	Below	At	Above	Well Above
Y1	Cicada**	2		3		
	Juniper			2	4	
	Kanuka			1		
	Magenta		2	2	2	1
	Seagull			10		
Y2	Juniper					
	Kanuka		2	1	7	
Y3	Juniper				3	
	Kanuka		1	3	4	
Y4	Cicada**			4	4	3
	Juniper		1		2	
	Kanuka				1	
	Seagull				10	
Y6	Magenta			3	2	
Y7	Huia		2	3	9	
TOTAL		2	8	32	48	4

** Data from the school's own tracking system—not using the National Standards

Table C.4. National Standards Student Achievement in Writing by School and Year Level

Year Level	RAINS Schools	National Standards: Writing				
		Well Below	Below	At	Above	Well Above
Y1	Cicada**		1	2	2	
	Juniper			2		
	Kanuka			1		
	Magenta		2	4	1	
	Seagull			10		
Y2	Juniper			4		
	Kanuka		2	4	4	
Y3	Juniper			3		
	Kanuka			5	3	
Y4	Cicada**	1	1	1	5	3
	Juniper			3		
	Kanuka				1	
	Seagull			7	3	
Y6	Magenta			5		
Y7	Huia*		1	3	3	
TOTAL		1	7	54	22	3

* Data not available for one cohort class

** Data from the school's own tracking system—not using the National Standards

Table C.5. National Standards Student Achievement in Mathematics by School and Year Level

Year Level	RAINS School	National Standards: Mathematics				
		Well Below	Below	At	Above	Well Above
Y1	Cicada**			5		
	Juniper			2		
	Kanuka			1		
	Magenta		2	3	2	
	Seagull			10		
Y2	Juniper			4		
	Kanuka			5	5	
Y3	Juniper		1	2		
	Kanuka		2	4	2	
Y4	Cicada**	1		3	7	
	Juniper		1		2	
	Kanuka			1		
	Seagull				10	
Y6	Magenta			3	2	
Y7	Huia	1	1	5	7	
TOTAL		2	7	48	37	0

** Data from the school's own tracking system – not using the National Standards

Table C.6. Summary of National Standards Student Achievement Data in Reading by School

RAINS Schools	National Standards: Reading				
	Well Below	Below	At	Above	Well Above
Cicada**	2		7	4	3
Huia		2	3	9	
Juniper		1	2	9	
Kanuka		3	5	12	
Magenta		2	5	4	1
Seagull			10	10	
TOTAL	2	8	32	48	4

** Data from the school's own tracking system – not using the National Standards

Table C.7. Summary of National Standards Student Achievement Data in Writing by School

RAINS Schools	National Standards: Writing				
	Well Below	Below	At	Above	Well Above
Cicada**	1	2	3	7	3
Huia*		1	3	3	
Juniper			12		
Kanuka		2	10	8	
Magenta		2	9	1	
Seagull			17	3	
TOTAL	1	7	54	22	3

* Data not available for one cohort class

** Data from the school's own tracking system – not using the National Standards

Table C.8. Summary of National Standards Student Achievement Data in Mathematics by School

RAINS Schools	National Standards: Mathematics				
	Well Below	Below	At	Above	Well Above
Cicada**	1		8	7	
Huia	1	1	5	7	
Juniper		2	8	2	
Kanuka		2	11	7	
Magenta		2	6	4	
Seagull			10	10	
TOTAL	2	7	48	37	0

** Data from the school's own tracking system – not using the National Standards