



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

Second Report: Understanding New
Zealand's Very Local National Standards

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OVERVIEW OF THIS REPORT

1. This is the second report of the Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards (RAINS) project, a three-year study of the introduction of National Standards into New Zealand primary and intermediate schools. The report builds on the first report published in March 2012 and is best read in conjunction with that earlier report.
2. The report reviews national developments in the policy and its contestation over 2012. It considers how the National Standards policy became less contentious in 2012 as it became overtaken by other events. However, the public release of National Standards data by the media and Government in September 2012 was a much-contested development that is reviewed here. Other more ‘under the radar’ developments discussed include the growth of business involvement as the policy has become targeted by for-profit providers of relevant products and services, and changes to Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori, the assessment system for Māori-medium settings which is being developed alongside the National Standards.
3. The report argues that it was irresponsible of Government and media to release such poor quality data for comparative purposes and in the case of special schools, such obviously inappropriate data too. The initial release was rendered relatively impotent by the form of the data, the extensive qualifications wrapped around it as the media sought to justify its role and the decrying of the release and the data by most principals and others. But the release of the data was not just a passing event; it remains available in a reasonably convenient and unqualified form for comparing between schools on several Fairfax websites. For this reason the release of the data will be more damaging than many people probably recognise. It has also potentially opened the door to further releases, depending on what government is in power in years to come.
4. Aspects of the RAINS research undertaken in 2012 are reviewed including various kinds of fieldwork, dissemination and the politics of the research.
5. A key issue explored by this report is whether or not the comparability of teacher judgements against the standards (called OTJs—Overall Teacher Judgements) can be improved to allow ‘apples with apples’ comparisons of student achievement across schools. It is argued that variation is often a symptom of the deep reach of school-specific factors (school context) along with the incremental processes of change that are all that schools can realistically manage. This mix of context and incremental change is referred to here as creating particular local school *trajectories* that will not be easily turned. The research discussed here indicates that variation in OTJ-making often relates back to these trajectories.
6. The Maths Technology Ltd research on OTJ-making commissioned by the Ministry of Education is briefly discussed before the report goes on to offer a more comprehensive conceptualisation and illustration of the reasons for variation between and within schools. Sources of variation at three related levels are considered: national/regional, school and classroom. The discussion provides a multi-faceted explanation and some rich illustration of why National Standards are actually very local.
7. Even if some of the national and regional sources of variation could be addressed, there are many sources of variation at the ‘local’ level that are impossible to set aside when it comes to making OTJs. National Standards may be a Government aspiration but they are not national and never will be while there is so much potential for local variation. It is almost comical—if it weren’t so serious—that OTJ data representing such variation has been put into the public domain for comparative purposes when there are such important differences in what it actually represents.
8. If the Progress and Consistency Tool to be made mandatory by the Government is mainly intended as a form of national moderation for OTJ-making, then it can be expected to be an expensive failure. This is because it will not be able to address many of the various influences and pressures on schools and teachers illustrated by this report that will lead schools to take different ‘readings’ of the National Standards and of OTJs.
9. The report provides an update for each of the RAINS schools for 2012. Matters covered include each school’s development of National Standards and perceived impacts, as well as particular activities related to the policy, such as the forwarding of National Standards data to the Ministry

and the release of National Standards data by the media and Ministry. The schools' relationships with the Ministry and views of the wider policy environment and likely prospects for the future are also discussed.

10. The experiences of the six RAINS schools in 2012 as reported by members of their Senior Leadership Teams and the outlooks of those SLTs were still mainly in line with the trajectories noted in the first RAINS report. Most of the schools were not making major changes to their approach to the National Standards. The most abrupt change was Kanuka starting to use 'well below', which was a change required by the Ministry but one that was resented. When it came to describing the impact of the National Standards, it was also only the Kanuka SLT that really viewed them in a favourable light, albeit not the use of the 'well below' category.
11. None of the SLT members interviewed in the RAINS schools were positive about the public release of National Standards data. They provided numerous arguments against this development and most had resisted forwarding data to the media. They were also mostly sceptical about PaCT to the extent that they knew about it, but those who had seen it were more positive about the new required template for National Standards reporting.
12. Those interviewed in the RAINS schools were generally unhappy with the way the Ministry was relating to schools, in some instances their own school's specific relationship to the Ministry and in some cases more generally. Deep mistrust and a sense of being misunderstood were dominant features of SLT accounts of the Ministry. It was also clear that wider policy developments were often being viewed with concern by the schools and that they had also distracted from National Standards. Yet all of those interviewed provided nuanced accounts, ones where they were willing to take a favourable view of some developments and give credit where they thought it was due.
13. The report illustrates that popular views in some quarters about National Standards bringing accountability to the school system—views that have been encouraged by Government discourses around the National Standards—are often quite unrealistic. Despite some compulsory elements, the National Standards policy has so far turned out to be more of an exhortative policy than a disciplinary policy. Nevertheless there is growing evidence of schools 'doing it to themselves', i.e., the growth of a damaging performativity culture in schools around the National Standards.
14. There will be further research in the RAINS schools in 2013, leading up to the next and final RAINS report.

GUIDE TO ACRONYMS USED

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
ELL	English Language Learner
ERO	Education Review Office
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FRSSNZ	Federation of Rudolf Steiner Schools in New Zealand
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
GloSS	Global Strategy Stage (Numeracy Project assessment tool)
IKAN	Individual Knowledge Assessment for Numeracy Literacy
MCSFoRA	Ministerial Cross-Sector Forum on Raising Achievement
MoE	Ministry of Education (also referred to as ‘the Ministry’)
MTL	Maths Technology Ltd
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
OIA	Official Information Act
ORS	Ongoing Resourcing Scheme
OTJ	Overall Teacher Judgement
PAI	Public Achievement Information
PaCT	Progress and Consistency Tool
PAT	Progressive Achievement Test
PD	Professional Development
PLD	Professional Learning and Development
PRT	Provisionally Registered Teacher
RAINS	Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards
RTLb	Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour
RTLit	Resource Teacher: Literacy
SAP	Student Achievement Practitioner
SES	Socio-Economic Status
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 (Ministry of Education website)

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1. INTRODUCTION: NEW ZEALAND'S VERY LOCAL NATIONAL STANDARDS

Over the last few years, the New Zealand Government has been trying to establish National Standards for student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in New Zealand primary and intermediate schools. For various reasons—good and bad—the policy is highly idiosyncratic, so much so that international observers would often struggle to even recognise the New Zealand approach as a National Standards system.¹ Furthermore, the policy is continuing to be developed as the Government's aspirations around the National Standards policy become clearer. An important development in 2012 was the announcement mid-year that the Government intended to release schools' National Standards data, the subsequent and controversial release of data in September 2012 despite its widely acknowledged weaknesses, and the related announcement of new plans to ensure better quality data in the future.

All of this created much debate, continuing the controversy that has surrounded the National Standards policy since 2009 (see Thrupp & Easter, 2012). An issue at the heart of the controversy is whether or not the comparability of teacher judgements against the standards (called OTJs—Overall Teacher Judgements) can be improved so that public release of the data would allow 'apples with apples' comparisons of student achievement across schools. (Note that this is still not the same as 'fair' comparisons as the New Zealand National Standards system is based on 'raw' data that doesn't try to account for intake and other contextual differences between schools). From the perspective of Government and the research programme it has commissioned, there is considerable variation in OTJs, and this problem is seen to be caused by the weak ability of individual teachers to make OTJs (Ward & Thomas, 2012). In contrast, the Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards (RAINS) project discussed here illustrates that comparability between schools in making OTJs has to be seen as more than just a matter of individual practice. This is because variation is often a symptom of the deep reach of school-specific factors (school context) along with the incremental (i.e. rather than more fundamental) processes of change that are all that schools can realistically manage. This mix of context and incrementalism is referred to here as creating particular local school *trajectories* that will not be easily turned. The research here indicates that variation in OTJ-making often relates back to these trajectories.

It is this issue that this report addresses most, as part of the wider RAINS research programme into how schools are responding to or 'enacting' (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012) the National Standards policy. An understanding of how local context and incrementalism colours schools' approaches to the National Standards has profound implications for the development of the National Standards policy. Attempts to shore up national comparability across schools by a mandated reporting template from 2013 will be illusory if the underlying judgements are being heavily influenced by school-specific factors. The same issue can be expected to limit the effectiveness of the Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT), an online platform intended to increase the consistency of teacher judgements across the country. PaCT is being trialled during 2013 to be ready for 2014 and will become mandatory from 2015. While PaCT might be expected to address some types of variation between schools due to individual teacher judgements, there are other sources of variation between schools discussed in this report that it is unlikely to address, nor will it address the underlying reasons for these variations.

The rest of this introduction provides a brief account of the National Standards, an overview of the RAINS project and its initial findings, and signals the content of this second report. The report focuses on developments in the schools and nationally in 2012; readers are reminded that the first RAINS report (Thrupp & Easter, 2012) contained much detail about the National Standards policy and its contestation up until the beginning of 2012 as well as further details of the RAINS research design methodology and previous findings. Other information about how the standards system is intended to work and be progressively 'rolled out' can be found on the Ministry of Education ('Ministry') website and on TKI (Te Kete Ipurangi), the Ministry's portal website for schools.

¹ This has been apparent at conferences where I have needed to explain the New Zealand approach to international audiences.

1.1 A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

New Zealand's National Standards were introduced in 2009 and 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 (i.e., 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 therefore 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 and in relation to exemplars and assessment tools, tasks and activities. The National Standards policy also requires schools to report to parents about a child's achievement against the National Standards twice a year. 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 has been one of the most controversial school-level educational developments in New Zealand for decades. Although there are many reasons for this,² a key issue has been the way National Standards represented such a sharp break from earlier approaches to primary assessment because New Zealand had previously avoided high stakes approaches to assessment and the associated curriculum narrowing and other perverse effects of performativity that have been found in other national settings (Alexander, 2009; Au, 2009; Ball, 2003; Comber, 2012; Hursh, 2008; Lingard, 2010; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Stobart, 2008). During the decades prior to the election of the current National Government in 2008, there had been an emphasis on formative assessment, backed up after 1995 by the National Educational Monitoring Project (NEMP), which provided a national overview of achievement by sampling all areas of the curriculum over consecutive four-year assessment cycles. There had also been a tradition, especially up to the end of the 1980s, of sector representatives such as teachers and principals being heavily involved in the curriculum and assessment policy development. But the National Standards were legislated for and developed by the present Government with little consultation (Thrupp, 2010) and threatened to take New Zealand down a high stakes path that most educators had been pleased to be avoiding.

Yet whether New Zealand's system of National Standards would lead to the unfortunate outcomes of high stakes assessment found elsewhere was not straightforward. As can be seen from what has already been described, teachers' judgements against the National Standards were to potentially draw on many sources in an apparent attempt to avoid teachers 'teaching to the test'. As a senior Ministry official put it in 2010:

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)

Nor was it clear at that time that the National Standards data would be publicly released. As discussed in more detail in Section 2.1, the Government has vacillated on this issue, initially saying in 2009 that the data might have to be released because of the requirements of the Official Information Act (OIA) and then promising by the end of that year (when opposition to the National Standards had intensified) that the Government would not create 'league tables' of school performance. But then in August 2012 the Government's 'Public Achievement Information' (PAI) policy was announced. An almost

² See Thrupp & Easter (2012) p. 10.

immediate effect of this (September 2012) was to make the 2011 end-of-year National Standards data from nearly all of New Zealand's primary and intermediate schools available on the Ministry's Education Counts website, www.educationcounts.govt.nz. At about the same time some media (i.e., Fairfax Group and the APN-owned *Herald On Sunday*) also released data in newspaper tables and in the case of Fairfax, a search and compare online database. The Education Counts data does not rank schools in any way and in the struggle to legitimate their involvement in the face of considerable criticism, the newspapers avoided obvious ranking of schools as well.

What New Zealand has been left with then is an assessment policy for primary schools that was initially presented as a flexible and relatively low stakes assessment system, albeit with very crude categories, but one that within three years is becoming the basis of publicly released assessments of schools, assessments that are also likely to become more comparative and high stakes in future. At the same time, the policy has so far developed little structure to support high stakes assessment, although the Ministry is now working on this as part of the PAI policy. There has been little professional development (and generally only for the senior leaders in schools, not for all classroom teachers), no requirement to report in a consistent format (but this will be required from 2013) and no national moderation (although in 2014 the Ministry will be bringing in the PaCT assessment tool mentioned above).

1.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE RAINS PROJECT AND ITS INITIAL FINDINGS

At the heart of the RAINS project is the recognition that schools never just 'implement' policy. Rather RAINS is concerned with policy 'enactment': how the standards policy will be translated and reinterpreted at the local level by individuals and groups in different ways amidst the messy complexities and uncertainties of diverse school settings and numerous other educational policies and practices (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). One important reason to think about enactment is that the idiosyncratic features of the National Standards policy mean that context will be very important in how it plays out in schools. For instance, the general paucity of professional development around the National Standards means schools can be expected to draw on their existing approaches to assessment while the OTJ approach, along with the absence of national moderation, allows for a great deal of local variation in how schools choose to approach the standards. Another reason for taking an enactment perspective is that the National Standards can be expected to require new performances by those in schools 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. Based on the international literature on performativity already noted, New Zealand teachers, principals and boards can be expected to be looking for advantageous assessment practices and curricula shifts if they want their schools or particular groups of children to perform well in the standards. They can be expected to look for ways to increase the proportions of children 'at' or 'above' through the decisions they make around the National Standards, such as choosing 'easier' tests. Related to both of the above, a third reason for seeing National Standards as enacted is because it has been such a heavily contested policy. Even if schools are now apparently mostly complying with the standards policy, this does not mean it has captured 'hearts and minds' amongst principals, teachers and boards. Their varying perspectives and concerns will continue to influence the way schools approach the National Standards.

These concerns are reflected in the project's research questions:

1. How are boards, senior leadership teams and teachers in different school contexts *enacting* the National Standards policy?
2. To what extent is *performativity* apparent in these enactments of policy?
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?

In-depth qualitative research has been required to investigate these questions. The RAINS research design has involved case study research 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 (Bassey, 1999; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). They are a “prime strategy for developing theory which illuminates educational policy and enhances educational practice” (Sikes, 1999, p. xi). The ways in which Board of Trustees, the senior leadership team and individual teachers in the six RAINS schools are enacting policy as well as responses of children and parents are all being investigated. The views and approaches of other education professionals such as ERO reviewers are also of interest where they are in contact with the schools in relevant ways during the period of the research. Semi-structured interviews 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.

The six schools were introduced in the first report and are discussed again in Section 3.1 of this report. They were chosen primarily for their diverse characteristics in terms of the socio-economic and ethnic make-up of their intakes, school size and rural or suburban locations. While they vary in their level of support for the National Standards, only one (Cicada School) obviously resisted them. All the schools have had successful ERO reviews in recent years and they all enjoy reasonably favourable (and sometimes excellent) reputations in their local communities. Another feature of the research has been the involvement of an experienced teacher from each school—the RAINS ‘lead teachers’—in the research team. These teachers were chosen by the schools and have a role in facilitating the progress of the project in their respective schools and providing 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 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.

As noted above the RAINS research has taken place against the background of intense contestation of the National Standards. The project has also been controversial because it was funded not by the Ministry but by the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI). The effect is that the politics of the project are sometimes pushed more to the fore than in other research. The RAINS response to this situation is to be as reflexive as possible about issues such as media coverage of the project, academic activism and freedom, the effects on fieldwork, quality assurance, the political positioning of other research on the National Standards and the continuing debates around the policy, all of which are being explicitly discussed in project reports.³

One of the central findings of the first RAINS report (Thrupp & Easter, 2012) was that the changes around National Standards over 2009–11 were typically incremental rather than representing substantially new departures from what schools had already been doing. Reasons for this included the way the New Zealand standards system was not yet particularly ‘high stakes’ in terms of reputation, change in schools being tempered by what already-busy teachers could deal with and schools already having a major focus on numeracy and literacy as a result of policy over the last decade. Just as Cowie and colleagues found that the New Zealand Curriculum “did not arrive in a vacuum”, (Cowie et al., 2009, p. 7) the same was true of the National Standards. The effect was that even the most obvious responses to the National Standards, such as report formats, tended to involve modifications of what the schools had already been doing.

Another key finding was that the RAINS schools’ approaches to the National Standards were “intimately shaped and influenced by school- specific [contextual] factors” (Braun, Ball, Maguire, & Hoskins, 2011, p. 585). Such contextual factors include both intake differences (such as socio-economic make-up, ethnicity, transience, the proportion of pupils from migrant families or with

³ See Sections 1 and 2 of Thrupp & Easter (2012), especially pp. 41–43.

special needs) and other school and area characteristics (urban/rural location, market position compared to surrounding schools). There are also important internal contexts, such as the history of approaches to teaching, assessment and school organisation, reputational or recruitment issues and significant staffing changes. This is not an argument that leadership and teaching can't make an important difference. Instead it recognises that there are internal school factors, especially historical ones, that can advantage or weigh heavily on schools even if there is little that schools can do about them (Lupton & Thrupp, 2013; Thrupp & Lupton, 2011).

1.3 THE REST OF THIS SECOND REPORT

Section 2 provides further background relevant to the 2012 RAINS research and the issue of comparability. There is a discussion of developments in the National Standards policy and its contestation during the year, looking at both the matters that attracted media attention and some developments that went more 'under the radar'. This section goes on to detail the research activities undertaken as part of the RAINS research in 2012. It also reviews the recent MTL research on variability between teachers in making OTJs, both for its substantive findings and for what it tells us about the limited way this research programme, and the Key Government who commissioned it, is viewing the problem of consistency and comparability between schools.

Section 3 is concerned with better characterising and explaining variations across schools in terms of how OTJs are made. This section does some scene setting by reminding readers how the RAINS schools differ and by providing a flavour of the way their different features have led to varying responses to the National Standards, including different school decisions around the 2011 OTJs. The discussion then provides a more detailed account at national/regional, school and classroom levels. In each there are sources of variation that are usefully illustrated by the cases of the RAINS schools. Overall, and as the title of this report suggests, the discussion provides a multi-faceted explanation and some rich illustration of why National Standards are actually very local because of the effects of context and related trajectories on school processes around OTJs.

Section 4 then provides a further update for each of the RAINS schools for 2012. Matters covered include each school's development of National Standards and perceived impacts, as well as particular activities related to the policy, such as the forwarding of National Standards data to the Ministry as part of each school's annual report in May 2012 and the release of National Standards data by the media and Ministry in September 2012. Each school's relationship with the Ministry and views of the wider policy environment and likely prospects for the future held by each school's senior leadership team (SLT) are also discussed.

The report concludes (Section 5) by reflecting on the main points discussed and signalling matters that remain to be researched and/or discussed in the final RAINS report at the end of 2013. The RAINS research will also be a significant resource for the forthcoming 'Primary Education: Taking Stock, Moving Forward' Conference to be held in Wellington in January 2014, see www.education2014.org.nz/

2. FURTHER BACKGROUND

The first RAINS report (Thrupp & Easter, 2012) provided extensive background about the National Standards policy and its contestation, the research being undertaken for the Ministry by Maths Technology Ltd (MTL) and the research design and methodology of the RAINS project itself. This section essentially updates that earlier discussion, covering relevant developments in 2012.

2.1 DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NATIONAL STANDARDS POLICY AND ITS CONTESTATION OVER 2012

The introduction of National Standards became in some ways less contentious

In 2012 there were further indications of the spreading influence of the National Standards policy. More web pages of primary and intermediate schools were mentioning the standards system. There was also more influence from the Ministry as reflected in the expanding coverage of the standards system on its websites as well as the way that the policy was becoming targeted by businesses as they began to see opportunities in the perceived demands from schools and parents (both discussed later). Also noteworthy was that the requirement to forward National Standards data to the Ministry by May 31 as part of schools' annual reports went almost without incident when compared with the tensions around submitting National Standards targets in charters the previous year. This was despite an NZEI warning in January 2012 that schools might boycott the previous of data ('Schools may refuse to hand over student data', 2012). Finally, and related to this apparent acquiescence by schools, whether or not schools would 'implement' the National Standards policy was no longer a matter for almost continuous media coverage as it had been.

To what extent did these patterns signal the National Standards becoming accepted or embedded in schools? It seems clear from the media coverage that accompanied the release of the National Standards data that some schools and teachers were genuinely enthusiastic about National Standards in 2012 and the RAINS research has also picked up some of this enthusiasm. Yet schools such as Kanuka—the most positive about National Standards amongst the RAINS schools—were not 'buying into' the policy in any simplistic way: their enthusiasm was contingent on it working for their children and community. Furthermore most of the 2012 media coverage of schools suggests it is more often the case that they continue to see the standards system as a problem but are learning to live with it. The first RAINS report illustrated some of the complexities of this uneasy accommodation as experienced by the RAINS schools and this report reveals more.

Introduction of National Standards overtaken by events

The debate over the introduction of National Standards was also being pushed aside by new developments in 2012. First, a new Minister of Education, Hekia Parata, had been appointed as part of the Cabinet reshuffle after the Key Government had been re-elected for a second term in November 2011. Parata had not been associated with the early defence of the National Standards policy and so the campaign against the National Standards lost the lightning rod for discontent that her predecessor, Anne Tolley, had provided. Second, there were new Government proposals to release National Standards data and so when it came to National Standards the attention of the profession, the media and others tended to focus on these, as well as the eventual release of the data in late September, and closely related matters. Third, there were a series of highly contentious education policy developments in other areas of schooling, especially a Treasury-inspired proposal to increase class sizes (and the need to back down from this after public resistance), the development of 'Partnership' (charter) schools, the wholesale 'reorganisation' of schools in and around Christchurch following the earthquake there, the intended closure of some 'special' schools (unsuccessfully in some instances) and major problems with a new pay system for those working in schools, Novopay. By the end of a tumultuous year, Education Secretary Lesley Longstone had resigned and the Minister's future was also looking uncertain.

These new developments dominated educational politics in the primary sector in 2012, helping to further explain why schools' responses to the National Standards became less contentious. For instance, returning to the requirement to forward National Standards data to the Ministry by May 31, this occurred at a time of intense debate and concern over class sizes and primary principals are likely to have been picking their battles. The same may be true of the embattled Ministry as well. Even by the end of September 2012 about 9% of schools (188 out of 2087) had still not provided the Ministry with National Standards data that could be put on the Education Counts website (Tapaleao, 2012c). Such schools were said to be 'liaising with the Ministry' (ibid) with about 25 said by the Minister to be "having difficulty complying"—indicating the schools were withholding data in an apparent boycott (Trevett, 2012b). But such cases were dealt with quietly rather than the schools being publicly 'named and shamed'. The new developments also had the effect of making the handling of National Standards by the Government seem relatively successful. For instance, a *New Zealand Herald* editorial written just prior to Christmas listed "errors that have embarrassed the Government in education this year". These included class sizes, the Christchurch school closures, the ongoing Novopay debacle and the attempt to close Salisbury School, a school for girls with special needs. ('Parata lucky to stay after year of errors', 2012). The National Standards policy is not mentioned, even though the public release of National Standards data was also controversial.

At the same time, National Standards were never far from discussion about these other developments and surfaced regularly in related commentary and blogs. For those opposing the broad direction of the Government's education policies, developments like charter schools came on top of National Standards and were often seen as part of the same neo-liberal package, the so-called GERM—Global Education Reform Movement. For those supporting the new developments, the National Standards policy continued to be identified as that which would bring the accountability that teachers and their organisations were refusing to face by their opposition to the Government's wider educational reform agenda. (In fact such outlooks are deeply challenged by this second report, a point reiterated in Section 5). National Standards were also incorporated into some of the policy responses to the growing tensions in the sector. An example was that the NSSAG became inactive but PAI became the focus of a subgroup of the Ministerial Cross-Sector Forum on Raising Achievement (referred to hereafter as the MCSFoRA). This was a forum set up by the Minister for consultation with key sector representatives and other selected individuals after the Government's backdown over class sizes.

The lead-up to the release of the National Standards data

The events that dominated media coverage of the National Standards in 2012 were those around the publication of National Standards data online and in newspapers. On this issue the Key Government had initially said in 2009 that the data might have to be released because of the requirements of the Official Information Act, promised by the end of that year (when opposition to the National Standards had intensified) that the Government would not create 'league tables' of school performance (Tolley, 2009), then argued in mid-2010 that league tables had become 'inevitable' after an advisory group had failed to come up with a means to prevent them (Hartevelt, 2010). In February 2012 plans for the release of the data were raised again when the new Minister of Education Hekia Parata raised the possibility of a Ministry website similar to the Australian 'My School' website, with schools compared within the same decile grouping (Hartevelt, 2012a; Young, 2012a), but by May she was still not committing to launching a website in 2012: "I am not going for haste over substance" (Shuttleworth, 2012). Yet on 18 June, shortly after the Government had had to make the embarrassing backdown over the increased class sizes policy, Prime Minister Key mentioned—casually at a post-cabinet briefing, see Brown (2012a)—that he supported some kind of government league table of National Standards results (Vance, 2012). Key argued that parents were "desperate" for comparative information on student achievement and that as the media could get the data from schools under the Official Information Act at any rate, it would be better if Government became involved in the public release of the data. This suggestion quickly firmed up into a decision to release the data in some form in September (Young, 2012b) despite a much-quoted admission by Key in early July that the early data would be "very ropey":

The earlier data, in my view, is unlikely to be terribly satisfactory for anybody so it does need a bit more time.... It's extremely patchy and it's in different forms and that

will make it very difficult to interpret.... But over time, the Government's hope would be that it would be more consistent because the purpose of having better information is to give parents, I think, a better sense of how their school is performing. (cited by Hartevelt, 2012b)

The next two months leading up to the eventual release of National Standards data by media and Government saw more plans to release the data announced along with some intense debate over the merits or otherwise of releasing it. In July the MCSFoRA met and considered a report from the PAI subgroup that agreed to "the pro-active publication of National Standards achievement information at the school, regional and national level in September 2012" (MCSFoRA, 2012a, p. 2) and noted that "through a process of continuous improvement over time, the quality of the information will improve and be increasingly useful" (p. 3). Representatives of NZEI, NZPF and PPTA dissented or expressed reservations about the report of this subgroup. A Ministry briefing on 'Progressing The Government's Education Priorities' involved a target of "100% of schools ... reporting high quality achievement information" by 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2012a), an uncompromising target presumably also intended to underpin the Government's stated aim of "educational success for five out of five learners".

On 8th August, while the Olympics were under way, the Government revealed how the National Standards data was to be released online in September as part of its continuing 'Public Achievement Information Plan' with various steps towards "incrementally improving the quality of the data". (Ministry of Education, n.d.-a, Office of Hekia Parata, 2012a). These other steps included mandating the use of a standardised reporting template for the Ministry in 2013, schools' electronic upload of National Standards data to the Ministry in 2014 and schools' use of the PaCT tool in 2015.

The intended release of the National Standards data was generally supported by newspaper editorials (e.g., 'Publish league tables,' 2012), and newspapers also began to seek data directly from schools in order to publish it themselves. This started with the *Dominion Post* newspaper (Fairfax Media group) but a letter to schools in the Wellington region elicited only ten replies, especially after the NZEI and NZPF advised schools not to respond ('Schools refuse to release national standards information', 2012). This led in turn to Fairfax Media complaining to the Office of the Ombudsman, a ruling from the Ombudsman that schools must release their data under the OIA and advice from the Ministry to all primary and intermediate schools in the country that they must comply (Brown, 2012b). Nevertheless Fairfax was eventually only able to obtain data from about half the schools. It was John Hartevelt, a Fairfax journalist who had been reporting on the developments around league tables and covering for several years a range of views, who became the person to lead Fairfax's publication of the data. The *Herald on Sunday* request to schools for the data came later and did not evoke the Official Information Act. As a result this newspaper was only able to publish data on around 600 schools.

There was support for the release of data from right-wing bloggers such as Slater (2012b) and Farrar (2012a) and from pro-market lobby groups the New Zealand Initiative ('Parents "hungry for information"', 2012) and the Maxim Institute (Thomas, 2012a), although the latter also cautioned against the poor quality of the data (see also Thomas, 2012b). There was also support from Pem Bird, president of the newly formed Iwi Educational Authority ('Iwi Education Authorities supports league tables', 2012), a member of the MCSFoRA and president of the Māori Party (National's coalition partner). Bird had previously been highly critical of what he described as the "political self serving scaremongering humbug NZEI are dishing up" (Heuber, 2010). On the other hand, Lorraine Kerr, head of STA, and also a member of the MCSFoRA, was less supportive of the release of the National Standards data than she had previously been of the introduction of National Standards: "We support the rights of parents to know how well their school is meeting their children's needs.... We are not convinced that National Standards data is the best, or indeed the only relevant way of doing this" (Kerr, 2012). It also emerged that the Ministry itself had advised the Minister against premature publication of National Standards data:

In a report sent to Ms Parata in June this year, the ministry warned against the wholesale release of the information. It said she should instead release it as part of a detailed report, outlining the problems with the data and how the issues would be addressed in the future. The officials said if Ms Parata released the information alone, she would risk losing buy-in from teachers and education groups and provide

justification for opponents of national standards. ('Parata warned against publishing national standards data', 2012)

Stronger public opposition leading up to the release of the National Standards data came from the NZEI and NZPF (numerous media releases and local activities as part of the 'Stand up for Kids' campaign), NZPF (numerous media releases and advice to members), the Greens and Labour (especially MPs Catherine Delahunty and Nanaia Mahuta, questions in the House, media releases and blogging), bloggers such as Russell Brown and Kelvin Smythe (e.g., Brown, 2012a; Smythe, 2012a), academics including those in the Assessment Academy (see Johnston, 2012) and the author (Thrupp, 2012a, b) and many principals. In an exceptional case of academics unifying behind a cause, an open letter organised by the author along with John O'Neill of Massey University was eventually signed by over 170 academics (Thrupp, O'Neill, et al., 2012; Young, 2012c). There was a similar open letter signed by 277 Auckland principals (APPA, 2012) and further public support from principals elsewhere (e.g., Smythe, 2012e). Other forms of resistance prior to the release of the data included school principals and boards refusing to give their National Standards data to the media both before and regardless of OIA requests and many principals making comments in the media and in school newsletters despite being warned by Parata against using school newsletters for political comment (Sutton, 2012).

The release of the National Standards data

The release of the National Standards data gained intense coverage in both traditional and social media: what follows is not comprehensive but does cover many of the main developments.⁴ The release began on Friday 21 September 2012 with a press release from the Minister. The main points of this release were that 76% of primary-aged children were at or above standard for reading, 72% for maths and 68% for writing, with a "concerning number" of Māori and Pasifika children not achieving the Standard and boys over-represented amongst those not achieving the Standard in reading and writing (Office of Hekia Parata, 2012b). Although the release was scant on detail, it would have gained some publicity and ownership of the release of data for Government ahead of the media's more substantial coverage at the weekend. As it turned out, it also constituted most of the Government's public analysis of the data since it was just released by Government in the form provided by schools, discussed further shortly.

The next day, Saturday 22 September, saw the Fairfax release on the Stuff website and in its various regional newspapers. There was no ranking of schools but rather an approach that allowed easy comparisons, through both a searchable online database and tables of data from local schools in the newspapers. The accompanying commentary provided both assertive justifications of the release and frank concessions around the flawed nature of the data:

Many people told us not to publish the information you see on this site.

They fought to stop us. Some sent us bills for the privilege of their school's data. Others buried the figures we asked for in complex matrices and pages of indecipherable bumph.

Many more gave up their school's National Standards data with a grave note of caution about the reliability and usefulness of it. We have not been deterred by the criticisms and the cautions, but neither were we unmoved by them.

Anyone who read the National Standards results as a proxy for quality would be quite foolish. We wouldn't do that and we don't suggest you do, either. For starters, they are not moderated, so one school's "well below" may be another's "at" or "above". There is just no way of knowing—yet—exactly how the standards have been applied across schools....

So why publish National Standards data at all? Our critics have already suggested this is a "business decision". An official in the Education Minister's office charged that it

⁴ See Edwards (2012) for another broad discussion of the media coverage around the release of National Standards.

was “solely aimed at gazumping” the Government’s own website. Both accusations reflect the bias of their authors—and both are wrong. Of course we want people to look at what we have published here; to talk about it and to debate it. But that does not mean our decision to publish National Standards data was a “business decision”. This project has been led by journalists from the beginning....

If there are problems with the National Standards—and it’s pretty clear that there are—the Government, teachers, parents and education leaders are going to have to figure out how to fix them. If they have to be scrapped, then those that would have them scrapped will have to win the argument. In the meantime, the public should expect that the media will work to turn over National Standards information and report on it as best it can.

We cannot lose faith in our readers so much that we feel we have to censor them from information just because it is challenging. They are smarter than that and they deserve better. (Hartevelt, 2012c)

The Fairfax approach also includes case studies (of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ achieving schools), ‘health warnings’, tips for choosing schools, the facility to download the data, statements from various of those opposed to the release of the data and some contextual data such as school decile and links to ERO reports on the searchable database.

The *Herald on Sunday* published its data and commentary the next day (Sunday 23 September). The Herald’s approach did not include a searchable database or put the data online. Its tables were organised by deciles and regions and again there were various justifications, qualifications, tips and some (shorter) case studies and professional and other perspectives. Some of the professionals and academics cited supported the release⁵ but most were against (Wynn & Jillings, 2012). The *Herald* made up for its inclusion of fewer schools with larger claims, particularly that “children in bigger classes and bigger schools get better grades”. Its editorial praised the president of the Waikato Principals Association who, unlike all the “tunnel-visioned ideologues”, was “courageous enough to listen to the arguments” and “on discussion, had accepted it was better to talk through school results with parents than hide information from them” (‘Won’t someone please think of the children’, 2012). On the other hand, in an article called ‘Lessons from the motherland’, deputy editor Jonathan Milne complained about the calibre of what the *Herald on Sunday* had nevertheless decided to report:

England’s stringent assessment regime has been widely panned. Yet strangely it is actually better in some respects than New Zealand’s new and shonky national standards. At least in England, the test results are checked and moderated before the inspectors print off the spreadsheets and decide which schools to close down. English schools are ranked on value-added data—how much children improve from one year to the next—rather than having the raw test results of privileged kids from the leafy suburbs compared directly with those from the concrete council estates. (Milne, 2012)

The schools that were most obviously devalued by the way the data was reported were special schools for children with various kinds of intellectual disability. As the *Herald on Sunday* put it, “despite being told they would be exempt from national standards ... many show a line of noughts for the numbers of pupils achieving at or above standards” (Wynn & Jillings, 2012). This was referring to a change of Ministry of Education policy in late 2011 that saw all students at state schools, regardless of background characteristics, having to be entered for the National Standards or Ngā Whanaketanga, the Māori-medium assessment system. In the *Waikato Times* (Fairfax) published on 22 September, one of the schools in the table of Waikato schools (p. 4) was Hamilton North School. It stood as the only special school in the table as it had 100% ‘well below’ in all categories. The *Waikato Times* tried to put some context around this online by providing a sympathetic case study. But the case study and accompanying video clip was not in the hardcopy version of the paper containing the offending table, just a short quote from the principal: “‘We’ve talked about national standards, we know they’re there and we know that, due to the intellectual disability of our students, none of them are actually going to

⁵ Liz McKinley, the only university-based member of the MSCFoRA apart from Gary Hawke, was found to be in favour.

attain level one,' [the principal] said. 'It's disappointing that we should be lumped in with all those other schools.'" ('How our region's schools stack up', 2012). Oddly, this school was included when many other local schools were not included because of privacy issues around their data. The video clip accompanying the online case study even discussed how parents of the children at this school had made it clear to the school that they did not want to be told three times a year in personal reports that their children were 'well below' standard; the school's data still got put in front of the public anyway. As with the approach of the newspapers more generally, there was huge faith in qualifying commentary being able to make the publication of such data acceptable, a point taken up in Section 5.

The week following the media's release of the data was marked by much commentary and analysis as to what conclusions could be really drawn from it, if any. There was further discussion of the various claims highlighted by the newspapers (e.g., 'National standards data confirms boys are lagging behind', 2012) and new coverage of the theme that children at lower decile schools were less likely to achieve at or above the standard. While some, including some opponents of National Standards, were gratified that at least the National Standards seemed to reflect the strong relationship between social inequalities and achievement (e.g., Hartevelt & Francis, 2012; McLauchlan, 2012a), there were numerous warnings from principals and bloggers, including some statistical analyses, that the data was not to be trusted (e.g., Crampton, 2012; Manning, 2012; McLauchlan, 2012b; McLauchlan, 2012c; McNabb, 2012; Ng, 2012). Cases also came to light where newspapers seem to have simply misreported the figures as provided by schools (Mahuta, 2012). Meanwhile the Minister continued to point to support from parents for the release of data (Hansard, 2012) and suggested that National Standards could eventually form part of a performance pay system (Hartevelt, 2012d).

Edwards (2012) claimed that, "... the blogosphere really added value to the debate. Shallow or self-serving analysis will be ruthlessly examined by people who know their way around a scientific calculator and/or a classroom". Russell Brown's *Hard News* blog considered the various claims from media and other commentators around what the data was showing and how misleading those claims might be (Brown, 2012c). He suggested that the release of the data could have been worse if there hadn't been such contestation of the National Standards policy:

Opponents of the standards process might wish to reflect on what they have achieved in the process that began when John Key's new National government shoved through national standards under urgency shortly after winning the election in 2008. Neither of the big newspaper groups has actually published a 'league table' of schools: both made positive decisions not to do so. It's doubtful that we would be seeing so many obvious caveats on the reporting had the issue not been pursued.

On Friday 28 September, a week after the initial release, came the Government's release of individual school data on the Education Counts website. As it turned out, this simply involved providing a pdf of whatever schools had sent the Ministry, sometimes even including handwritten notes. The website also provided some contextual information such as school decile, student ethnicity and ERO report, as well as a pop-up 'health warning' before the data could be accessed. Although Edwards (2012) had predicted "a fresh round of analysis", there was relatively little. Fairfax remained resolute about the value of release (Hartevelt, 2012e), but the *Herald* was beginning to question whether a little knowledge could be a dangerous thing (Cumming, 2012). Within a few days the release of National Standards data had been overtaken by the story that research had found most teachers unable to make reliable OTJs (see Section 2.3).

Other National Standards developments as highlighted by the media during 2012

Stepping back in protest: Reported in mid-February, there was news of the resignation of Louis Guy, principal of New Windsor School in Auckland, in protest of National Standards. Guy, who had been critical of National Standards, went to work for NZEI. A statement from the Minister implied Guy's stance had been unprofessional:

If Mr Guy feels he is unable to require the teachers under his authority and 'leadership' to implement Government policy, then he has made the right decision to

step aside and leave the position to a committed professional leader who is able to work with teachers. (cited in Tapaleao, 2012a)

What is missing here is any recognition of extended professionalism, the kind of professionalism that goes beyond compliance and leads those being wholly professional to question and contest what they believe are inappropriate developments in their field.

OECD report: A report by the OECD, covered by the media in late February, had both supported the National Standards and raised concerns (Romanos, 2012). The New Zealand country report for the OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education advised that “[a]lthough there may presently be difficulties related with the implementation of standards ..., the reasons why they have been developed and the objectives they aim at are congruent with what is currently recognised as good practice” (Nusche, Laveault, MacBeath, & Santiago, 2012, p. 46). At the same time, amongst a wide range of assessment issues, the report raised specific concerns about the divisive manner in which the National Standards policy had been introduced, its potential for narrowing of the curriculum, labelling, school comparisons or league tables and the difficulty of matching up “existing procedures and tools” to the National Standards. While much of the discussion is very general, the report offered the useful insight that New Zealand schools already had a curriculum that was narrowing towards numeracy and literacy prior to the introduction of National Standards. This suggested the National Standards policy could extend an existing imbalance:

While the national curriculum emphasises the development of broad competencies, the introduction of Standards increases the risk of a narrower focus on numeracy and literacy in primary schools. Such a trend already exists, as it is far more common for schools to identify low achievement in literacy and numeracy than in other areas (ERO, 2007). As standards are presently limited to these domains, their introduction may contribute to accentuating of such a trend. (Nusche et al., 2012, p. 53)

ERO reports relevant to National Standards: In 2012 ERO continued its practice of putting out national reports about National Standards. There were several such reports (ERO, 2012a, b, c), one on Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori (ERO, 2012d) and others that were broadly relevant, such as one on science in primary schools (ERO, 2012e). Through the launch of these publications, ERO became an important part of the national debate over National Standards, often triggering some media discussion. ERO’s approach to the National Standards in the RAINS schools and at a national level will be discussed in the final RAINS report.

Government, Minister and Ministry: As noted above, one of the reasons National Standards had a lower profile in 2012 than the previous year was that the new Minister did not put the same emphasis on them and become identified with them as Tolley had done. Nevertheless Parata and the Key Government continued to be largely uncompromising in support of National Standards through 2012. Aside from the ‘ropey’ comment regarding the release data mentioned above, the typical message from Government was that the National Standards were being successfully ‘implemented’:

In education, National Standards are in place and we’re firmly focused on raising achievement so kids have the skills they need to succeed in the modern world. (Key, 2012)

However, other comments illustrated the extent to which National Standards had become a catchcry for National. Responding to Labour leader David Shearer’s criticisms of National Standards (see below) and an intention to increase Reading Recovery provision, Key argued that “if David Shearer was prepared to back National Standards, then I think you could take him seriously on the Reading Recovery issues because National Standards is the flag for assessing whether a child actually needs Reading Recovery” (cited in ‘Labour’s education policy “out of date”’, 2012; see also Trevett, 2012a). This may have been a useful political response but was hardly realistic in terms of how schools and teachers would assess the need for Reading Recovery. Indeed it would be unusual for a child to have got to the ‘after one year’ judgement without teachers being well aware that intervention was needed.

As for the Ministry of Education itself, outside of the release of data and the PAI, National Standards were largely presented as ‘business as usual’ in 2012. The Ministry’s website shows only one 2012 media release to do with National Standards (compared with seven on the ‘reorganisation’ of

schooling in Christchurch and 13 on Novopay). This release was about an opinion poll showing support from parents for increased achievement information from schools and it was released on 20 September, the day before the Minister started to release the first of the National Standards data (Ministry of Education, 2012b). In general though, 2012 passed without much comment from the Ministry on National Standards, nor was any particular personality championing them as, for instance, Mary Chamberlain had done during the early years of the policy. The *New Zealand Herald* suggested the Secretary of Education, Lesley Longstone, had never offered a personal perspective on the standards system ('Educators exposed as guilty of complacency', 2012) although she was, for instance, reported as "believ[ing] moderation and other initiatives will iron out any manipulation of the system" (Cumming, 2012). Nevertheless there were occasional signs that the Ministry was being more strategic around the National Standards than suggested by its low-key approach. There was the already-mentioned advice to the Minister about the risk of losing buy-in and providing justification for those opposed to National Standards ('Parata warned against publishing national standards data', 2012) and apparent awareness within the Ministry that the opposition was considerable:

Asked to recommend an educational expert to explain the benefits of the national standards regime, the Ministry PR adviser pauses, laughs and asks: "Have you tried the Minister?" (Wynn & Jillings, 2012)

Labour and the Greens: In a speech in March 2012, Labour leader David Shearer described National Standards as a "distraction" but did not comment further. This was part of a speech that also contained some of the language of the "politics of blame"; for instance, emphasising the "long tail of failure" and wanting to "put badly run schools on notice" (see Shearer, 2012a). By September, after much media coverage of both National's backdown on class sizes and the potential costs of releasing National Standards data, Shearer's argument had become more supportive of schools and teachers and more openly critical of National Standards:

But let me tell you what I don't want. I don't need to know whether my school is better than the one across town on the basis of a bunch of shonky figures that even John Key says are 'ropey'. What I don't want to see is millions being spent on a complex moderation system and teachers incentivised to rot their test scores to make their class or school look better for a league table. (Shearer, 2012b)

Yet it had also become apparent that while Labour was not supportive of National Standards, it was taking the view that so long as the policy had electoral appeal, it would need to be retained to at least some extent. As Gordon Campbell put it:

The Labour Opposition has clearly read the writing on the wall, and recognised that wholesale resistance to national education standards would be a liability at the next election....

For now, the national standards dispute offers an interesting reversal of the usual positions. It is a centre-right government enforcing a centrally-driven and standardised system of measurement reporting, while the centre-left is championing individual choice by schools.

No wonder the public may still be feeling confused by the twists and turns of this debate. (Campbell, 2012)

Meanwhile the Greens were much franker in their opposition to National Standards. Following a 2011 election policy to remove National Standards (Migone, 2011), Education spokesperson Catherine Delahunty issued several press statements against National Standards and the release of the data over 2012 (e.g., Green Party, 2012).

NZEI, NZPF and Principals Associations: While there was little evidence of these organisations warming towards the National Standards over 2012, their concerns with the standards were often pushed aside by other policy developments as already discussed. In the latter part of the year the NZEI began using the notion of the GERM (Global Education Reform Movement), as coined by Pasi Sahlberg, to make sense of a raft of policy developments in the school sector, including National Standards.

Research on National Standards: Both the first RAINS report and an MTL report gained some media coverage. This research is discussed in Sections 2.2 and 2.3.

‘Under the radar’ National Standards developments

While the above section focuses on issues, events and perspectives that were highlighted by the media, there were numerous other developments that were not often covered but also important in terms of understanding the development of the National Standards in 2012.

Continued expansion of Ministry online coverage of National Standards: The Ministry’s online presence around National Standards continued to grow rapidly in 2012, both the material on the National Standards site within the Ministry’s portal website, Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI), and in other areas such as those for educational leaders, boards and parents. At present a search on ‘National Standards’ retrieves some 1100 results on the main Ministry site and 5000 on other Ministry sites.

Increasing business involvement: In a similar way to patterns seen internationally (see especially Burch, 2009), by 2012 the National Standards policy was becoming targeted by for-profit providers of professional development, educational publishers, consultants and after-school tutors, who began to respond to the perceived demands from schools and parents. As well as the involvement of Fairfax Media and APN News & Media as already described, some examples include

- From the website of ‘IT’s Eazi’, a private professional development provider: “Steph’s been looking closely at the impact of National Standards and has been busily ensuring school training sessions are being developed with this in mind.”
- From the website of Pearson, an international publisher: The “Pearson mathematics assessment tool” with associated professional development courses is marketed on its website as “Invaluable for teachers who report on progress against National Standards”.
- From the website of Sonia White, a Gifted Education consultant: “I can ... interpret and help you understand National Standards reports in Numeracy & Literacy.”
- From the website of ‘Find-A-Tutor’: “Has your child been identified as being ‘below National Standards’?”
- From the website of Academic Edge, a Wellington-based after-school tutoring company: “We assist your child to meet and surpass the compulsory National Standards in literacy introduced by the Government for 2010. Come have a look around our tuition centre and see how we can help your child reach and exceed the National Standards.”

A central feature of all of this for-profit activity is that none of it is questioning of the National Standards; rather it is being assumed the policy is in place and schools and parents will want to buy related services. Somewhat cynically, the last of these websites suggests as a reason for potential business partners to look at Academic Edge that “it is a high growth industry—the introduction of National Standards in primary schools has increased parental anxiety, and tutoring is a cheaper option than private schooling”.

Another area of private participation in the National Standards ‘market’ involves student management systems where ‘vendors’ such as ETAP, MUSAC and KAMAR have begun to support National Standards reporting. As pointed out by a principal of one of the RAINS schools, such SMS vendors are likely to have been required to develop National Standards capability if they want to retain their preferred vendor status with the Ministry: “... she’s a manager now, I think, she said it was a Ministry requirement...” (Principal, Juniper School). There have also been consultancy opportunities at national level off the back of the National Standards policy. The continuing Maths Technology Ltd contract to evaluate the National Standards would be one of these, as is work Squiz Web Content Management Solutions did on the Education Counts website to ensure it could “sustain the increase in traffic”, i.e., cope with public demand for schools data (Squiz Ltd, n.d.).

Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori: Compared to National Standards, this assessment system for Māori-medium settings was little discussed in the media over 2012. There were, however, a number of developments that were pulling it into line with the National Standards. As ‘mainstream’ schools had

been doing one year earlier, kura and schools teaching the Māori-medium curriculum, Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, were required to set targets in their charters in 2012 and are being required to report the school-level data in their 2012 annual reports, due in May 2013. This is no small ask as Māori-medium schools have much less time to respond to Te Marautanga o Aotearoa before being asked to get to grips with Ngā Whanaketanga than was the case for the NZC and the National Standards in mainstream schools. The issue of taking account of time in immersion, a concern that had been raised around Ngā Whanaketanga since their initial development, has also not yet been resolved. At the 27 August meeting of the MCSFoRA, the Māori-medium PAI subgroup ‘agreed in principle’ to the publication of Ngā Whanaketanga data but pointed out that year-level data in Māori-medium settings gives a flawed picture of achievement both because learners enter immersion settings at different stages in their schooling and because Ngā Whanaketanga are designed to align to Te Marautanga o Aotearoa levels, which are not defined by year levels. They therefore recommended that achievement information be reported in relation to years in immersion as well as year levels. (MCSFoRA, 2012b). However this recommendation was not taken up. In the Ministry planning and reporting documentation for Māori-medium settings published in October 2012, it is only in the notes on their Analysis of Variance that kura using Ngā Whanaketanga are encouraged to mention where lack of time in immersion has been a problem: “Two of the Year 6 boys who have only been in immersion for two years have had difficulty with the complexity of te reo Māori Pāngarau requirement” (Ministry of Education, 2012c, p. 28). Also worth noting from this guide is that while Ngā Whanaketanga uses a four-point scale like that of the National Standards, the language of the scale is more developmental and less stigmatising. ‘Well below’ and ‘below’ standard are matched by “Me āta tautoko ... requiring tailored support to achieve national expectations” and “Kei te eke tonu ... working toward achieving national expectations” (ibid., p. 27).

Changes to the NAGS and reporting: Following close on the release of the National Standards, changes to National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) meant reporting changes for schools, particularly the use of a standardised reporting template for National Standards data that will need to be submitted to the Ministry by 1 March each year along with the annual charter update. The reporting template requires reporting for each of reading, writing and maths for the overall intake and by gender, Māori and Pasifika for this overall intake and also at the points National Standards are measured, i.e., ‘after 1, 2, 3 years’ and then end of Years 4–8 (but not by gender, Māori and Pasifika within each of these, see Ministry of Education, 2012d). Most of the RAINS schools had been providing as much or more detail so will not find the template particularly demanding, but its significance is in allowing the Ministry to collate apparently comparable data when compared to the publication of diverse summaries as occurred this year. Also noteworthy is that privacy concerns associated with small numbers of children have been addressed by separating this confidential return to the Ministry from the annual reporting in May each year, which is a public and community document. The March template return must include data on all children whereas the annual report can and must omit data on groups which are too identifiable. Presumably this will also have the effect of giving the Ministry more control over the confidential and authoritative version of the data whereas the media will be forced to use the public and incomplete version. One positive for schools is that the charter update has been moved back a month, allowing more time over the summer months for consultation with board and staff. This helps to address the concern raised in the first RAINS report about school consultation processes and relationships being damaged through unreasonable timelines.

Revision of tests, ethnic prioritising and the inflation conspiracy theory: Towards the end of 2012 it was becoming apparent that recent revisions to e-asTTle Writing and STAR were leading to a different profile of students able to do well in these tests. This, along with insufficient PD around the changes, caused confusion and concern in schools and some believed it was a deliberate tactic to help students achieve more easily against the National Standards and therefore make the Government policy appear more successful in the lead-up to the 2014 general election. It was not until 2013 that this issue boiled over into mainstream media, at which point NZCER staff refuted the charge that they had been put under political pressure to make the tests easier (Woulfe, 2013). There were related concerns about reporting procedures for annual reports that prioritised ethnicity in the same way as on school roll returns, such that “if a learner identifies themselves as Māori in any of the ethnic groups, then they are recorded as Māori” (see Ministry of Education, 2012d, p. 5; also Section 3.2 of this report). Concerns about all of these issues were brought to wider attention by Kelvin Smythe’s blog

Networkonnet (Smythe, 2012a, b, c), which continued to perform a useful service for those concerned about recent education policy but with a cast of heroes and villains who were always larger than life.

The PaCT tool: Lying behind concerns about the inflation of key assessment tools was also the question of how this might affect the online Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT), part of the Ministry's plans to make OTJs more comparable within and across schools. According to the PAI information released in August 2012, PaCT, will be trialled in 2013, released as a prototype in 2014 and made mandatory in 2015. The intention to make PaCT mandatory and its likely dominance in the 'toolbox' used by teachers because of its central use for assessment raises all sorts of potential concerns. For instance, it may become a kind of script for teachers that changes their practice in unforeseen and potentially damaging ways. It could even become an attractive high-tech distraction from interacting with children, a sort of primary teachers' *Call of Duty* (PlayStation game). But this all remains to be seen as PaCT is 'under development' with revisions likely before it is eventually rolled out.

National Standards Sector Advisory Group (NSSAG): This group had been set up in September 2010 with the aim of "attracting the confidence of the sector both in NSSAG and in the process of change being experienced in the education sector" (NSSAG, 2010). It seems to have stopped meeting in early 2012 (the last meeting recorded on the NSSAG website was 23 February 2012). It is hard to know whether it was put on hold because a) it solved a political problem which was no longer seen to exist i.e., that "Political campaigning against National Standards as a concept has mostly been relegated to the past" (the first point of Chair's Report from the 23 February meeting, NSSAG, 2012); b) one Minister's consultation solution had been overtaken by that of another (the chair, Gary Hawke, and several members moved to the MCSFoRA); or c) some other reason. What is apparent is that by 2012 the scepticism around the purpose of the group that led to the withdrawal of the NZEI and NZPF had become borne out by the chair's meeting reports. By the last meeting issues raised about the National Standards were just as quickly dispelled and the report was full of assertions and fudging; for instance, "The Progress and Consistency Tool is the right strategy on which to rely", "The central political and policy sensitivities of comparability [of Ngā Whanaketanga], whether at the level 2 NCEA end point and for transitions of students between Māori medium and English medium, are being addressed", and "[the OECD review] suggests some exploration of further developments, including specific issues in the design of National Standards and how they fit into wider processes" (NSSAG, 2012). The report was also peppered with the simplistic catchall notion of 'implementation' (see Thrupp & Easter, 2012, for a critique).

Steiner schools: The Federation of Rudolf Steiner Schools in New Zealand (FRSSNZ) came to an agreement with the Ministry that integrated Steiner schools would report against their own 'Learning Steps' assessment rather than National Standards from 2012 in order to protect their special character (FRSSNZ, 2012). This memorandum of agreement did not get a lot of publicity but was an important success given that the previous Minister had been threatening in 2011 to remove these schools' integrated status (and therefore government funding) if they did not comply with the National Standards policy (McKenzie-McLean, 2011).

2.2 THE RAINS RESEARCH APPROACH IN 2012

2012 was the 'intermediate' year of the RAINS project in two senses. First, it was a year spent focusing mostly on the case of Huia Intermediate, with less research in the other five RAINS schools. Second, it was the intermediate or middle year of RAINS as a three-year study, a year which therefore allowed some space to follow up the main issue reflected in this report, comparability of OTJs across the schools. These features of the 2012 research are discussed below, along with quality assurance, dissemination and the politics of the research.

Research at Huia Intermediate

It will be recalled that RAINS is looking for changes in the culture of schools over time that may be related to the enactment of National Standards. Doing research in year one of the project (2011) and then returning in year three (2013) allows comparison over time and so this is the approach that is being followed with most of the RAINS schools. But it was useful to return to Huia Intermediate in 2012 because, as a two-year intermediate school, the Year 7 children we observed and spoke to in year one would have already left to secondary schools by year three. There were also other advantages to do with the chance to trial the approach that would be taken in year three in the other RAINS schools and making best use of the research assistance resource that was available to the project. Finally there was the greater complexity and therefore added difficulties of research at Huia: the opportunity to really focus on it in 2012 was therefore welcome.

Research at Huia started with a presentation to all staff at a morning briefing early in Term 2 (May), reminding the staff of the research and asking for their help with research activities during the rest of the 2012 year. This was followed by a focus on three Year 8 classes where several children from the cohort ended up in 2012. As the year progressed there were multiple interviews with the teachers of these classes, a day spent in each cohort class and a number of other group and individual teacher interviews across the school and with the SLT (28 staff interviews in total). There was also continued collection of school documentation and photographic recording of wall displays in classrooms across the school.

Late in the year attention turned to interviewing Huia children and their parents, an exercise in which it was necessary to ‘pull out all the stops’. In part this was because the previous year we had struggled to get interviews with many families, especially lower SES families, and wanted to increase the number and range of interviews. It was also partly because it was not until the last day of the school year that the first reports from this school that actually referred to National Standards went home to parents. There was little point in interviewing parents prior to these reports going home but this meant undertaking most of the interviews on December 21, the Friday before Christmas (two had to be left until the New Year). Anticipating a poor response rate, we asked every parent of the children in the three cohort classes and some others we had interviewed in 2011 to give permission for interviewing their child and themselves if possible. For those who gave consent, we then did some interviewing of children before school finished and to respond to those parents who agreed to be interviewed, we assembled a small team of WMIER researchers to do last-minute parents interviews on December 21. Finally we provided a small incentive for being involved (‘movie-money’ vouchers for an adult and a child) in recognition that the timing was inconvenient for many families. Some parents brought their child to the interview and they became included in the discussion. Through these efforts we managed to get 19 interviews with children⁶ and for 13 of these children we were able to interview a parent as well. These 13 parents were less than 20% of all those approached but represented a much better response than in 2011 when we had only been able to interview four parents.

The case study of Huia Intermediate will be reported in the final RAINS report along with the other five schools. It turned out to be a rewarding case study in terms of uncovering the complexities of enactment within this large school, showing some interesting differences of perspective and practice and related tensions amongst ‘policy actors’ within the school in relation to National Standards. It will also illustrate the impact of national policy developments over the year in this school, in particular the way the class size debacle created a lot of disruption, setting back the cause of National Standards to some extent. More generally Huia Intermediate will provide an example of how peripheral the National Standards policy may have been to the day-to-day concerns of many schools thus far, delivering little professional development or other resources, and not much incentive to change either.

⁶ Including eight of the 14 interviewed in 2011 and the same four of their parents who had been interviewed in 2011. Of the other children, four did not return forms so could not be interviewed and two had left the school.

Research in the other five RAINS schools

Interviews with principals, accompanied in some cases by other SLT members, were undertaken at the five other RAINS schools. These interviews, reflected in Section 4 of this report, were mainly about keeping up with changes in the schools around the National Standards and how those in the schools were reading changes in the wider policy environment. There was one round of interviews in the middle of the year at about the time that National Standards data needed to be submitted and another towards the end of the year after the release of the data by the media and the Ministry. In one school a third interview was required. There was a list of interview questions and prompts (see Appendix 1), but in practice discussion tended to be wide-ranging around the same areas. With the research relationship now becoming a more familiar and trusted one, conversation usually flowed naturally as those being interviewed stressed what was of most importance to them and as the points they were making were probed and clarified. As happened for the first RAINS report, the schools were also able to check and correct the account of their school. None asked for more than minor changes.

Two of these RAINS schools also had ERO reviews in 2012. One of the review teams was interviewed during the year and the other early in 2013.

The comparability of OTJs

The extent to which OTJs across schools would be comparable has been a key concern in the debate over the standards system. We canvassed some of the issues in the first RAINS report:

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 area⁷. Of course all of this also assumes schools are taking seriously the need to have 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 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'. (Thrupp & Easter, 2012, pp. 134–135)

In order to research the question of comparability, the matter was discussed at a RAINS lead teacher meeting in April 2012 and a volunteer was chosen to be the 'comparability lead teacher' for 2012. Drawing on the first RAINS report as background, this teacher visited the other schools for a day each, investigating how teachers in each setting used assessment tools and practices, moderated their assessments and made OTJs in reading and writing. The comparability lead teacher reflected on her own setting to write a similar description of that school, which was also used as a benchmark (but not a model of best practice) in order to make comparisons between schools easier and clearer. The intent

⁷ Personal communication with Professor 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.

here was to tap into the detailed craft knowledge held by an experienced teacher as a means of highlighting the sometimes subtle differences in how schools go about their day-to-day assessment practices. It was apparent too from the data collected that having conversations between practising primary teachers had made it easier for teachers to discuss the ‘nuts and bolts’ of their assessment practices.

Overall it was a very useful research strategy, bringing some good data and examples to the question of why ‘apples to apples’ comparisons between schools are likely to remain elusive, as reflected in Section 3 of this report. Although the comparability lead teacher saw no advantage in being identified (especially as this would also identify a RAINS school), it is important to acknowledge the considerable contribution her work has made, including notes on each school, informal reflections and the student achievement expectations table (Table 1, p. 44), which was conceived and developed by the comparability lead teacher.

Quality assurance

In April 2012 the RAINS lead teachers met at the University of Waikato, providing feedback on the first report and discussing the research strategy for the coming year. There was also a November meeting of the New Zealand academic advisory group, again at Waikato, which allowed discussion of emerging findings, themes and implications. Finally the international reference group were also kept informed of developments in the research. Attendance at the Australian Association for Research in Education conference in Sydney in December 2012 allowed face-to-face conversations with two reference group members, Profs David Berliner and Bob Lingard.

Dissemination

In addition to the first report, the following papers based on the RAINS research were presented or submitted for publication during 2012:

- Thrupp, M. (2012). *The first RAINS report on National Standards: What were we thinking?* Presentation to NZEI Auckland Area AP/DP network meeting, Kohia Education Centre, Auckland, 17 May.
- Thrupp, M. (2012). *The first RAINS report on National Standards: Themes, issues and responses.* Address to Auckland Primary Principals Association Sponsors’ Breakfast, Ellerslie Events Centre Auckland, 23 May.
- Thrupp, M. (2012). Behind the RAINS: A closer look at National Standards. *New Zealand Education Review*, 25 June.
- Thrupp, M., & Easter A. (in press). ‘Tell me about your school...’: Researching local responses to New Zealand’s National Standards policy’. Paper accepted by *Assessment Matters*.
- Thrupp, M. (2012). *Researching amidst the heat and noise of political debate.* Paper presented at symposium on ‘Academics as public intellectuals: problems and possibilities’, Creative University conference, Hamilton, 15–16 August. (Paper also accepted by *Policy Futures in Education*.)
- Thrupp, M. (2012). *The RAINS project on National Standards: Themes, issues and responses.* Presentation to Otaki-Kapiti Principals’ Retreat, Masterton, 22 November.
- Thrupp, M., & ‘Other, A’. (2012). *National Standards and OTJ’s: Just how far are we from an ‘apples to apples’ comparison?* Paper presented at the annual New Zealand Association for Research in Education conference, Hamilton, 29–30 November.
- Thrupp, M. (2012). *National Standards for student achievement: Is New Zealand’s idiosyncratic approach any better?* Paper presented at Australian Association for Research in Education conference, Sydney, 2–6 December 2012. (Paper also accepted by the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*).

Politics of the RAINS research in 2012

The first report (Thrupp & Easter, 2012) was completed in late January and after minor edits was released on 15 March with some media coverage (*Breakfast*, Radio Live, Radio New Zealand and the *New Zealand Herald*). It was well received by those in the sector and their organisations and the feedback from the RAINS schools was also very positive. While some of those who had been interviewed were surprised at seeing so many of their direct quotes in print, there was general agreement that it was a fair account and there was no apparent unwillingness to continue to address sensitive topics during 2012:

I think it described where we were at. It was interesting to hear everybody else's journey that they were on and they all were different but we were all pretty much drawing the same conclusions in our own way for our context. (Principal, Magenta School)

I think we appreciated the time going over [the case study within the report] first and being able to sit down and review it before it got to that point [i.e., published]. (Lead teacher, Seagull School)

No surprises [with the report] as such.... And the more time goes on and there's more dialogue with schools around it and you find you all have the same issues with it. (Principal, Seagull School)

The response from the central agencies, on the other hand, was underwhelming. It seems that for the Government and Ministry the fact that the research had been funded by the NZEI and was not clearly 'on message' meant that it should not be acknowledged, whatever lessons it might contain. Yet while the first RAINS report was welcomed or ignored, it was not criticised. It is as if those who had levelled criticisms at the mere idea of the project at the outset (see Thrupp & Easter, 2012), were unwilling or unable to get purchase on the detail of it.

At this point the author moves to the first person to discuss the politics of being both a researcher and an academic activist in matters related to National Standards over 2012. I considered that the mid-year announcements around the release of the National Standards data needed my public response as an academic and would still be reverberating long after the RAINS research finishes. For the two months leading up to the release of the data I was therefore frequently in the media, jointly spearheading a large group of academics who publicly opposed the release of the data (Thrupp, O'Neill, et al., 2012) and supporting the NZEI as a speaker at public meetings. It did not seem prudent or appropriate to put out lots of in-progress findings from RAINS during this campaign. For this reason, I tended to avoid talking much about RAINS or kept my comments about it to passing references.

During this time it also became clear that involvement in the RAINS research might be used as an excuse to try to undermine my contributions to the wider debate. An article in the *New Zealand Herald* about league tables that quoted me as an "expert" (Tapaleao, 2012b) was criticised by influential bloggers for not reporting that I was "funded by NZEI and a prominent campaigner against the Government on education policy" (Farrar, 2012b; see also Slater, 2012a). This was accompanied by what New Zealand's Tertiary Education Union described as a "torrent of ill-informed blog abuse" (Tertiary Education Union, 2012). However the argument that a 'health warning' should accompany my public comments seemed to have little effect as media outlets continued to publish them. Meanwhile I was confident I would be making the same research-informed points regardless of who was funding my research, or which political party was in power for that matter. The 'independence' of the bloggers themselves also made it necessary to take their indignation with a grain of salt. For instance, Drinnan (2012) notes that "insiders say in the past the Government has fed negative stories to Whale Oil [i.e., Slater] to put them into the public domain".

What became more of a problem over this time was being quoted in a way that reflected how I saw the issues rather than how the media wanted to portray them. The print media, in particular, seemed to prefer to engage in relatively general and abstract arguments about whether or not parents have the right to the information rather than focus on the important issue of harm, of why releasing the data is likely to be destructive. An example was a *Herald* editorial ('Flawed school data no reason not to publish', 2012) that started off by pointing out that I had argued that "schools will use tricks to portray

themselves in the best possible light in National Standards results that will be published next month”. By leaving out the details of what had been reported previously, this carried the implication I could be criticising those in schools, which I certainly wasn’t. (What I was consistently saying was that if the aim was for schools to be honest and authentic then we shouldn’t incentivise them to be otherwise by making the data public.) To counter this problem I began to prepare written scripts to speak from and then quickly released them as opinion pieces on Scoop, an independent news website (Thrupp, 2012a, b). The main advantage of doing this was to make it harder to be misquoted when the public could read the whole argument online.

2.3 THE MTL RESEARCH ON OTJ-MAKING

The Ministry has commissioned research on the National Standards, the School Sample Monitoring and Evaluation Project (2009–2013), being undertaken by Maths Technology Ltd (MTL). This project and its general assumptions and approach were discussed and critiqued in the first RAINS report (see Thrupp & Easter, 2012, pp. 33–37). What is of most relevance here is the release of a report in 2012 which was largely concerned with the ability of teachers to make OTJs (Ward & Thomas, 2012).⁸ Released in early October, just after publication of the National Standards data, this report attracted media attention (e.g., Hartevelt, 2012f) because it found much variability in the accuracy of teachers making OTJs:

The study collected information about teachers’ ability to rate individual pieces of student work in relation to the National Standards, and to collate several pieces of assessment evidence that had already been rated against the standards to make an OTJ.... There was considerable variability in the accuracy of teachers’ ratings against the National Standards for individual work or assessment samples. In writing, accuracy ranged from 3% to 89% over the samples, while accuracy in mathematics ranged from 18% to 90%. This is a cause for concern as it is these individual judgements that are the basis of OTJs. (Ward & Thomas, 2012, p. 2)

While variability in the OTJs of individual teachers is no doubt of some importance, what is of more interest here is the limited conceptualising of variability in OTJs that the design of this research represents. It is apparent from the report that MTL is mirroring the Ministry’s discourses by casting concerns about comparability or consistency as primarily a problem of teacher or school assessment practices. This is clear from the methodology used, which is centred on ‘assessment scenarios’ that are artificial and decontextualised. The concern with individual teacher practice is also apparent from the intended outcomes and performance criteria the research is supposed to address:

- Intended outcome: Teachers make defensible, trustworthy judgments against the National Standards.
- Performance criteria: Teachers use their knowledge of the National Standards in the process of making OTJs.
- OTJs are informed by student achievement information that is relevant and current.
- Teachers make OTJs efficiently.
- Schools use processes and systems to ensure OTJs are consistent.
- Moderation decisions are informed by the National Standards in reading, writing, and mathematics.
- Moderation processes are efficient and effective.
- Teachers make dependable OTJs (Ward & Thomas, 2012, p. 6).

These research goals suggest that if teachers were just more knowledgeable, more data informed, more efficient and more systematic then variability in OTJ-making would all but disappear. Yet what is it

⁸ The rest of the report looks at reporting to parents, student achievement targets, identifying students for intervention, charters, and principal and board perspectives. A second report published in 2012 presented results from a survey of parents and whānau (Thomas & Ward, 2012).

that prevents teachers from being as it is imagined they should be? The consistency or comparability of OTJs has to be seen as more than a matter of individual practice because like so many issues and processes in education, context comes into play. Indeed the difficulty with making OTJs in schools is that teachers are not dealing with artificial assessment scenarios. They are dealing with real scenarios that are heavily influenced by school specific factors and instrumentalism leading to different school trajectories and variability at multiple levels. Section 3 will illustrate this complexity.

3. UNDERSTANDING WHY NEW ZEALAND'S NATIONAL STANDARDS ARE SO LOCAL

As just discussed in Section 2.3, the recent MTL report on the National Standards commissioned by the Ministry of Education (Ward & Thomas, 2012) casts concern about comparability of OTJs as a problem of individual teacher practice. This is because it provides only a decontextualised discussion, centred on artificial 'assessment scenarios' of how teachers fail to make dependable OTJs, rather than being able to illuminate the reasoning behind the different approaches being taken within and across schools. But in focusing on teachers' individual abilities and understandings, the MTL research also reflects what is probably the most common way people think about why National Standards are not comparable across and within schools, and this is found in the RAINS schools as well. For instance:

As you become more knowledgeable about it you tend to get a bit harder, I think, and I think that is how we are in our school. (Principal, Juniper School, 2012)

What [a child] writes for me and she may sacrifice surface features for deep messaging and I get really excited about that. Someone else may say 'I'm not that interested in the deep messaging, I can't read it'. (Principal, Cicada School, 2012)

[B]ecause writing is marked purely by teachers, [that's] where the subjectivity comes into it, my 1A could still be quite different than [another teacher's] 1A ... Maths is more black and white if it's a test. But you have to remember ... [testing] tools are only supposed to be a small part whereas the conversations and the observations and the actual classroom practice on a daily basis is supposed to inform the bulk of your [Maths] OTJ. (Comparability lead teacher, 2012)

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'. (Teacher, Seagull School, 2011)

Nevertheless the last of these quotes also starts to raise the issue of context; it is recognised that teachers are not just working as individuals, hence the characterisation "at my school that would be a four". The Seagull teacher is saying here that OTJs made by teachers will vary by school, with one school's teachers typically being less demanding about what they expect from students to meet a particular curriculum level than at another school. The reach of school context into individual teacher practice might result variously from the press of particular kinds of learning needs, from being acculturated into a particular school culture, from school-wide assessment and moderation processes and from the interventions of the senior leadership team.

In short, we need a more comprehensive conceptualisation and illustration of the reasons for variation in OTJ-making between and within schools. This is what this section begins to offer, drawing on both the author's research in the RAINS schools (especially at Huia Intermediate, the focus for 2012) and the lead teacher's work in 2012 for the 'Comparability of OTJs' sub-project, which focused mainly on reading and writing (see 2.3). Drawing partly on material from the first report, Section 3.1, 'Six schools, six different accounts', does some scene setting by reminding readers how the RAINS schools differ and by providing a flavour of the way their different features have set the scene for different responses to the standards system, including different school decisions around the 2011 OTJs. Sections 3.2–3.6 then go into more much depth. Here sources of variation are seen to occur at three related levels: national/regional, school and classroom. In each of these areas there are a range of sources of variation that are usefully illustrated by the cases of the RAINS schools. Figure 1 below provides a schematic overview of the various sources of variation discussed here and the relationship between them.

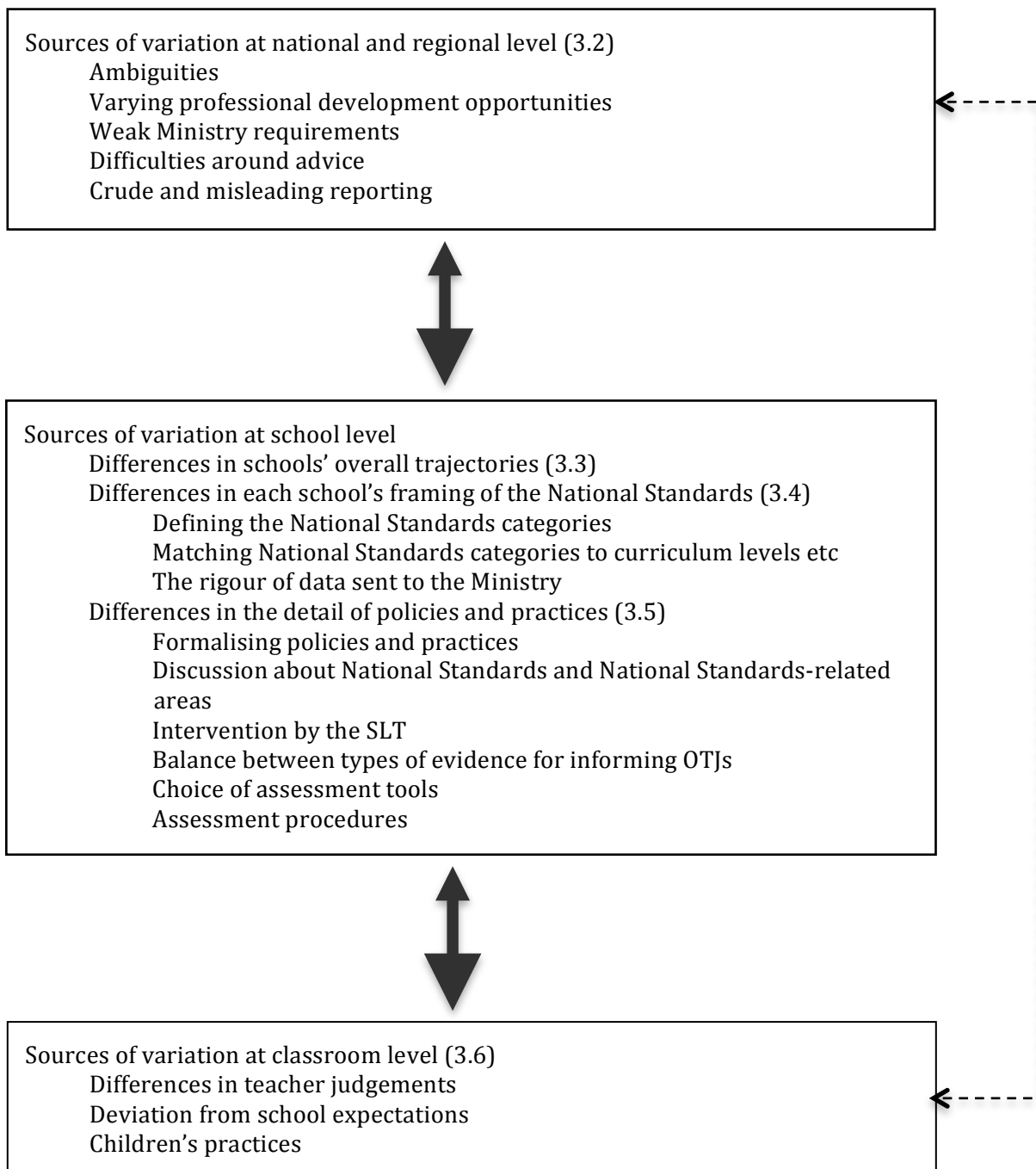


Figure 1: A schematic overview of the various sources of variation in OTJs and National Standards data discussed in this section

It can be seen from Figure 1 that sources of variation at school level are seen to be influenced by national and regional level sources of variation, and to act back on them to some extent. School-level sources of variation then influence classroom-level sources of variation (again with some feedback), although some classroom influences will also come directly from the national or regional level (for instance, when an individual teacher's practice is influenced directly by an MOE resource or website). It will also be apparent that there is going to be more detailed discussion here of sources of variation at school level rather than national/regional or classroom level. This is not to imply that variations at the school level are more important than at the other levels in explaining variations in OTJs, but it is at the school level that the RAINS research will offer the most insights and where school-specific accounts can act as a corrective to the view that the lack of comparability of OTJs and data available to the

Ministry is all about the judgements of individual teachers (or indeed, that it is all about features of the national and regional ‘roll-out’ of the policy; for instance, professional development). Overall, the discussion provides a multi-faceted explanation and some rich illustration of why National Standards are actually very local. To what extent this can be expected to be a continuing issue is discussed in Section 5.

3.1 SIX SCHOOLS, SIX DIFFERENT ACCOUNTS⁹

(Readers are reminded that further details of each school are available in the first RAINS report and also in Section 4 of this report.)

Juniper School

Juniper School was a small Year 0–6 school of about 50 mainly Pākehā (New Zealand European) pupils. It was in a rural location and served families that were from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds but nearly all involved in farming in some way. Described by one teacher as a “school in a bubble”, perhaps the most important sense in which this was true had to do with Juniper’s staffing. In this small school the board of trustees had taken it upon itself to fundraise enough to employ an extra teacher to keep the experienced principal from having to be a teaching principal, allowing her much time for working on the National Standards at the level of the whole school, supporting the three classroom teachers and individual children. Few schools would be nearly as favourably positioned, and the principal was also a self-confessed enthusiast for assessment. As a result, assessment and reporting were already very highly developed at Juniper School prior to National Standards being introduced.

Reflecting these advantages, Juniper School soon made numerous changes to policy and practice to ensure it was ‘on top’ of the standards system. Indeed it was in many ways the kind of school that the Ministry and ERO would probably regard as exemplary in relation to National Standards (although the principal and staff would quickly reject the exemplary tag and were quietly critical of many features of the policy). While obvious changes in the balance of the curriculum were not required (since this school already had a curriculum that was strongly focused on literacy and numeracy), changes included modifications to student portfolios, assessment rubrics, reports for parents and the school charter. In reporting to parents, Juniper used careful wording to avoid the four-point scale. (The Ministry regards this as good practice but the complexity—linguistic gymnastics—of avoiding the scale is not attempted in most schools.) Yet in some respects Juniper was ‘jumping the gun’ by using artefacts that were ‘in development’. For instance, it was using a ‘mathematical strategies’ chart that was acknowledged as being pitched incorrectly for the National Standards but was still in use for the time being. Juniper also illustrated how small schools may be under particular pressure to give way to parents over the National Standards in order to ‘keep the peace’ with influential locals. It acceded to a parent’s request to put some more ‘hard data’ in reports where it would have otherwise taken a different approach. As the principal put it, this was “no skin off our nose”.

Juniper’s 2011 OTJs were very close to the national percentages provided for reading by the Ministry (these are 7% ‘well below’, 17% ‘below’, 40% ‘at’, 36% ‘above’), but it had a few more students ‘at’ and ‘above’ compared to the national percentages provided for writing (these are 8% ‘well below’, 24% ‘below’, 51% ‘at’, 17% ‘above’). Juniper used the widest range of tools and practices of any of the RAINS schools and also demonstrated the most rigour, largely because of the principal’s enthusiasm and ability to give her time over to OTJ processes. For instance, the Juniper principal personally supervised key tests across the whole school in order to ensure consistency and also heavily supported many other school-wide processes and procedures.

⁹ An earlier version of this section is being published in the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* (in press).

Seagull School

Seagull School was a large Year 0–6 suburban school drawing on mainly middle-class Pākehā and Asian families. Seagull was zoned and oversubscribed, transience was negligible and there were few children with serious special needs. Seagull had a very experienced senior leadership team (SLT) and stable staffing and had spent many years fine-tuning highly developed processes, including those around any children at risk of not progressing well. It had a broad curriculum as well as a substantial focus on literacy and numeracy and long before the National Standards were introduced it was already doing sophisticated target setting and assessment. Seagull's reports to parents offered a wealth of information centred on information from assessment tools such as STAR and asTTle, in which most of its students performed well compared to national norms.

Given this situation, the staff, SLT and board at Seagull School saw the standards system as a retrograde step compared to what the school was already doing, although they did not see any point in overt resistance to the policy. Hence while they pursued what they thought was worthwhile, such as moderation of writing samples across the school to achieve more consistent practice, in many ways Seagull School treated National Standards as something better 'bolted on' to existing practices rather than replacing them. For instance, the reporting of National Standards was done in the most minimal way through an A5 sheet given out in addition to existing report formats. Perhaps because it was a large school, Seagull used the four-point scale to report to parents rather than trying to report using different language as at Juniper School. Seagull also demonstrated the most obvious concerns of any of the RAINS schools about the labelling effects of the 'below' and 'well below' categories as well as the most anxiety around being misjudged. Concerned about the data becoming more high stakes over time, it was taking steps to avoid being found wanting in comparison by pulling back highly aspirational targets to levels that would be more readily achieved.

When it came to making OTJs in 2011, Seagull School based its judgements on a wide variety of 'hard data', supplemented by teacher judgements. It tended to be conservative in its 'above' judgements and staff recognised after moderation with other local schools that they may have been comparatively 'tough'. On the other hand, Seagull School was struggling to take comparisons with other schools very seriously when the SLT perceived that assessment was being done so differently across different schools and was not nationally moderated, meaning that it wasn't 'honest data'. The SLT also objected to the way the school's data had been 'dumped' on the Education Counts website as just a PDF of pages from the school's annual report, arguing that the results were not treated with due respect. In all of this, Seagull School's outlook was flavoured by its confidence around assessment practices and by being a high socio-economic school with many high-achieving students. It rated almost all its children as being 'at' (31% reading, 54% writing) or 'above' (66% reading, 39% writing) the standard.¹⁰

Kanuka School

Kanuka School was a large Year 0–6 suburban school, catering mainly for low socio-economic Māori families and with about 40% of children in total immersion or bilingual classes. At this school there were a wide set of social problems to be addressed, transience was a significant issue and there were high levels of special needs. The school had seen improvements in local reputation, student behaviour, parental involvement and recruitment of staff, but in all of these areas had come off the low base typical of low socio-economic schools. Kanuka School had also been in transition under a new principal since about 2009, creating the element of a 'new broom sweeping clean'. Prior to the introduction of National Standards, the school already had a strong focus on numeracy and literacy, used a range of assessment tools and was experimenting with the uncompromising graphs that would come to dominate the reporting of National Standards at this school. Another important feature of this school was an emphatic stance that student achievement was the responsibility of schools rather than society: this was illustrated by the SLT preferring the wording 'financial stress' over 'poverty' to describe the problems faced by families.

¹⁰ All percentages are approximate only.

Of all the RAINS schools, Kanuka School was the one that most embraced National Standards, using it as a basis for refashioning reporting and bringing new urgency to the issue of ‘accelerating’ students, which was undoubtedly a considerable issue at this school when so few of its students arrived ‘school-ready’ compared to those in middle-class communities. National Standards was also part of a new drive for consistency within the school. In short while the standards system was being harnessed to the task of reforming and improving this school, the support seemed to come as much from perceived wider organisational or cultural benefits to the school as from the merits of the National Standards per se. Kanuka School was also using *Ngā Whanaketanga*, the Māori-medium assessment system, which has had more consultative processes and has more flexibility, providing National Standards with a more positive slant in this school compared to the others.

Also contributing to that positive slant, and in line with its concerns about deficit thinking, Kanuka decided not to use the ‘well below’ category. This means that until mid-2012, there were no students in this school categorised as ‘well below’, either in terms of data provided to the Ministry about its 2011 OTJs or in terms of internal discussion within the school. Nevertheless this passed without comment in the 2012 public release of data and it was not until mid-2012 that a Ministry ‘senior advisor’ told the school it must use ‘well below’, which it was starting to do by late in the year. On the higher points of the scale, a feature of this school’s OTJs was that while writing was reasonably in line with the national pattern (51% ‘at’, 16% ‘above’), reading saw just 20% ‘at’ and a massive 56% ‘above’. On investigation this was found to be because reading was assessed using PM Benchmarks, a fairly basic assessment of reading, mostly suitable for younger children. By mid-2012 the Kanuka DP acknowledged the ‘above’ was inflated and that based on a handful of asTTle-tested children it would be more realistic for only 5–10% of children to be classified as ‘above’.

Magenta School

Magenta School was a ‘full primary’ Year 0–8 school with a mainly Pākehā intake in a rural location about 30 minutes drive from the nearest city. It served a mainly middle-class community, with parents comprising a mix of commuting professionals on lifestyle blocks and local farmers. The school had little transience, no students with serious special needs and no problems recruiting staff. Magenta very much demonstrated a broad primary school curriculum rather than a narrower one and by 2008 this reflected growing interest in key competencies and values education. At this school much was made of the local response to the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), the ‘Magenta Curriculum’.

Given this background, Magenta School was the school in our study most seeking to see National Standards as ‘naturally’ linked to and part of the New Zealand Curriculum. But as the 2011 year progressed, it became clearer that the National Standards could not be incorporated into the school in that way. For instance, the principal was disappointed mid-year when the Ministry rejected the school’s charter because it was not explicit enough about National Standards. Magenta tinkered with report formats and worked with a local cluster of schools on moderation of writing samples and maths. Yet a central problem for developing the standards system at this school was that its commitments already lay elsewhere, i.e., with the New Zealand Curriculum.

Magenta’s 2011 OTJs had a lot more children positioned ‘at’ or ‘above’ than the national percentages (reading 52% ‘at’, 40% ‘above’; writing 60% ‘at’, 26% ‘above’). This was not surprising for a largely middle-class school but perhaps less predictable in a middle-class school was a complete absence of children who were ‘well below’. According to a deputy principal, the school did use this term but just didn’t have any such children. However the principal also noted in 2011 that “some parents have said, ‘We want to know if our children are well below’, and I have expressed firmly whether that is going to benefit their child”. It seems likely that this is another case of quiet resistance to the ‘well below’ category.

Cicada School

Like Kanuka, Cicada School was a large Year 0–6 suburban school with a low socio-economic intake but Cicada was more ethnically diverse, although it had few Pākehā students. About 80% of students

had English as a second or third language and Cicada also had considerable special needs provision, including a unit that catered for approximately 15 children with very serious needs. The roll was stable but Cicada was less successful in recruiting staff than Kanuka; indeed about 80% of teachers were provisionally registered (i.e., inexperienced). On the other hand the principal was unusually experienced for such a school, with the leadership of three successful high socio-economic schools already behind him. For several years prior to the introduction of National Standards, he and key staff had been attempting to improve the teaching and learning culture of the school, strongly focused on literacy and numeracy, drawing on high-quality external advice and professional development and dealing sensitively but firmly with some underperforming staff.

Unlike the other schools in our study, Cicada School was openly opposed to National Standards so it did nothing towards 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 because of the requirements of the Ministry. Instead Cicada used newsletters and other communications with parents to express concern, and the school also initiated meetings with Ministry officials to discuss why it did not want to comply with the National Standards policy. Context helps to explain why Cicada was more willing to oppose the National Standards than the other schools. In the mix of relevant school-specific factors at Cicada were a very experienced and confident principal, a supportive board and trusting parent community, exceptional concerns around poverty, special needs and ESOL provision because of the intake, and a cluster of local schools that were also opposing the policy and provided support.

On the face of it, Cicada's OTJs had an unusually uniform allocation of grades across the four-point scale (28% 'well below' and 28% 'above' in reading; 16% 'well below' and 29% 'above' in writing). In reality it seems achievement was skewed low in this school, as might be expected, but the high 'above' figures represented Cicada working off its own local five-point scale, which was the one it used to report to parents (i.e., compressing its five-point scale into the four-point one by simply collapsing the two highest categories into one). There was a further problem with not submitting data for all students, initially a mistake but one that was never properly rectified because the Ministry did not demand accuracy. It seems that having been made to 'comply' with the National Standards, Cicada remained unwilling to give the policy more attention than it had to. Another feature of this school worth noting was that some of its formal expectations of the levels needed to meet the standard were pitched lower than all the other contributing or full primary schools (see Table 1). For instance, Cicada expected PM level 9–14 in reading after one year whereas all the other schools aspired to level 12–14. However, its writing expectation after two years was a little higher: 1A compared to 1 P/A. This could be interpreted on the one hand as stretching the categories a little to better cope with a lot of children who are less ready for school and, on the other, as a lack of attention to the expectations because this school had been mainly resisting the National Standards or because of pressures related to its social context.

Huia Intermediate

Huia Intermediate was a large ethnically and socio-economically diverse suburban intermediate (Years 7 and 8, aged 11–13) with an intake that drew from nearly 50 primary schools. About half the students were from ESOL backgrounds and it also had a handful of children with serious special needs. It was a popular school with an experienced SLT and stable staff. Huia had long offered a broad curriculum with more emphasis on many areas other than literacy and numeracy than the other RAINS schools. In part this reflected the school being an intermediate, where children were exposed to the offerings of specialist teachers in technology (ICT, food technology, materials technology) and the arts (visual arts, drama, music, dance). Prior to the introduction of National Standards, the school had been working on improving curriculum and pedagogy; it was these areas rather than assessment that preoccupied the SLT.

By the end of 2011 Huia Intermediate had made a few changes towards the National Standards, including some minor changes to reporting. In 2011 the school timetable was also changed to require children to always be in class from 9–11 a.m. each day and for that to be uninterrupted time spent on literacy and numeracy. This was a significant 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. But in general Huia Intermediate represented a school where there was a great deal of preliminary work to be done before teachers could start working with the National Standards in some way that reflected curriculum levels and OTJs based on a range of evidence. As the DP put it in 2011, “our biggest issue at present is actually getting teachers’ content knowledge up”. Many of its specialist teachers were not used to focusing on literacy and numeracy as a significant part of what they taught.

Like Cicada, this school also had a five-point scale which it used for reporting to parents but in fact the National Standards assessments, as forwarded to the Ministry from the school, were based solely on asTTle test results, as it was argued by the SLT that the data teachers were generating for reports was not dependable enough. There was nothing covert about this reliance on a single test as it was clearly stated on the Huia Intermediate annual report, but the Ministry didn’t object. Yet asTTle (the older version) is a fairly uncompromising assessment tool compared to others and reliance on it meant that while reading in this mid socio-economic school was reasonably in line with national percentages, a full 50% of its children were ‘below’ or ‘well below’ in writing (approximately equally spread across these two categories). While the SLT argued that this was just being realistic about the ability of the students, it of course ended up being reported publicly and the school would have compared more favourably against others had it chosen a less demanding approach. The first report this school provided parents that explicitly stated it was reporting against National Standards was not until December 2012. But even then it was still a five-point scale that included a ‘well above’ that the standards system doesn’t actually include.

3.2 SOURCES OF VARIATION AT NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

The ‘national’ in the National Standards policy has to be regarded as largely aspirational as schools are not being exposed to the kind of national and regional conditions that ensure they could all adhere to the same understandings of even the most central elements of the policy. The RAINS schools illustrate problems with ambiguities, getting advice, PD support, weak Ministry requirements and crude reporting.

Ambiguities

A frequent criticism of the New Zealand standards system is that central elements contain ambiguity. First, and most often raised is what it means to be ‘at’ or ‘towards’ a particular curriculum level. This is the wording used in the National Standards documents (the maths ones use ‘at early’, which is slightly better). It is very broad and open to interpretation and we show below how end of year ‘at’ expectations varied in important ways amongst the RAINS schools (3.4). A second problem area has been the transition from ‘after 3 years’ to ‘at the end of Year 4’ where, depending on when they started school, some children who were ‘at’ could very quickly become ‘below’. The Ministry has provided advice but it is left to “the prerogative of schools and teachers to make a reasonable judgment as to what is appropriate based on individual student context and the reporting requirements in the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs)” (Ministry of Education, n.d.-c). In practice this would often require some judgement of ‘best fit’ that could vary from school to school, teacher to teacher. Third, the language of the mapping of performance to the National Standards categories ‘above’, ‘at’, ‘below’ and ‘well below’ (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b) may be confusing when translated locally. For instance, the author and comparability lead teacher thought for some months that Seagull staff meant by ‘two years below’, two or more years below whereas in fact what they meant was in the second year below, i.e. between one year below and two years below. Finally, it is important to acknowledge ambiguity in the assessment tools that are used to help make judgements against the National Standards. For instance, Juniper’s principal was having a few issues with the (recently revised) Gloss test:

She Gloss-tested, obviously, and then they went to the intermediate and the intermediate came back and said none of our kids got stage six, whereas here some of them are on seven or eight. So I then went and I talked to an advisor—well, why are there anomalies, let’s look at the Gloss test. One teacher was saying you have to have

two strategies written in on the thing, another teacher is saying something different, and what about the cluster—what is that saying? You see, and so she came back and I said no wonder there are anomalies because the test itself, which is supposed to be quite prescriptive, isn't clear, so people are interpreting them differently, you see.... I've got one teacher who said, 'Right, read it here, it says you've got to have two strategies' so [that teacher] is on each question, up to stage six, 'give me another strategy'; whereas the other one says, 'No, no, it doesn't say that you have to have two strategies'. So then I asked the numeracy advisor and she said, 'Yes they do have to have two strategies but not on the same question'. So I'm saying, 'But where does it say this in the Gloss test?' She said, 'You have to use another question.' And I said, 'So what, we have to go to another Gloss test, an old one maybe, and ask them the same question but using a different...' She said no, she said, 'You've got to use it in one of the questions next up, so they've got to use a different question say on the [...] one than they would use on the other' and I said, 'Man, that is just totally ... what's the word, ambiguous.' It's very ambiguous and everybody's going to be interpreting this very differently.... And it was a whole thing, are they instructional or are they achieved data that you're putting down, you know? There's the odd question ... and [the consultant] said, 'Think about it, this is what we ask children to do in their everyday work and then look at the test question, does it fit, is there good alignment there?' Well, in actual fact, there is not. And we are not supposed to be tricking kids. (Principal, Juniper School)

Varying professional development opportunities

In the earlier report, we found the RAINS schools senior staff disparaging about the initial nationwide PD given by Ministry facilitators; the lead teacher found the same views in 2012:

That came across in every school I went into, the hideous so-called professional development, it was pretty much a joke, the poor old facilitators and nobody blamed them but they were only a page ahead of the presentation. (Comparability lead teacher)

But subsequently the Ministry has been in 'catch-up' mode and the situation has become more complex and unequal in a way that means that while on the face of it there is great deal of relevant professional development, schools' experiences and take-up of PD are likely to vary widely. At one level professional development is available through Ministry and other websites but browsing the web and going into webinars and online tutorials is rarely as good as interacting with someone knowledgeable:

You go into NZMaths [website] and it's really just having the time, because you know what the day to day reality of a school is like, it's people, and 'you don't know what you don't know' and so having someone with knowledge in that area, it's helpful but you do need to go into it and be discerning at the same time. (Comparability lead teacher)

Moreover PD that is really worthwhile requires particular kinds of relationships and a great deal of patience:

[T]he basics of writing, reading and maths, they are so complex in nature [that] to be an expert or even have a reasonable understanding takes a long extended period of time and ... facilitators are just that, we have all the answers as long as they can help us a little bit to unpack it all. And it is time consuming, it is labour intensive, we don't want somebody to package an answer because we have to be part of a process to really understand it but it does take time. (Principal, Magenta School)

But while there are now a lot of seminars and courses available that touch on the standards system in some way,¹¹ quality, cost (including the cost of relievers in many instances) and location will impact

¹¹ The Juniper principal thought some opportunity would cross her desk about once a week.

these opportunities. According to the Juniper School principal, ‘very few’ courses or seminars are free but most of the schools still had some involvement with a Ministry PD contract of one kind or another and arrangements such as school clusters can be cheaper when local teachers take the sessions. It is a semi-marketised provision of PD where what schools get will depend on their capacity to make informed judgements, to be able to afford what is on offer, and sometimes to have the right criteria to be targeted for some kind of Ministry support:

The Ministry advisor said ‘no put it in, you’re the kind of school’, cos we’ve been doing [an unfunded programme] for a couple of years now ... they also want to use us because they need success stories, the more success stories it validates Government processes and policies. So they have been good like that. (Principal, Cicada School)

Relevant professional development will again involve not just the National Standards per se but other assessment practices and tools too. The issue is not just the recent and controversial revisions of tools such as STAR and e-asTTle (see 2.1) but that any assumption that other tools have been well covered by previous PD going back many years are challenged by comments and complaints from the schools as well as other problems discussed in this section, such as inappropriate choice and uses of assessment tools and the limited way that some of the schools disseminate their PD compared to others:

What they need to do is fix up the blimmin tools, cos the tools are still highly contentious and there’s been not enough PD around the tools. (Principal, Cicada School)

Nothing’s happened. Still doing the old one ... [the SLT] just hasn’t got round to it, I guess. (Huia teacher talking about follow-up from two staff attending an e-asTTle course some months earlier)

Difficulties around advice

I have noted the proliferation of National Standards-related material on the Ministry website as new material adds to or replaces old and is often undated. Given this it would be unsurprising if busy school staff struggled to find particular kinds of advice or were using out-of-date guidance: “I do find TKI hard to use unless you know exactly what you’re looking for” (Principal, Magenta School). The RAINS schools also provide a number of examples where Ministry staff or those offering PD for the Ministry were unable to give advice, gave unclear advice or where the source of information was unknown. To the Juniper principal this was because the Ministry was “shambolic”: “Right arm doesn’t know what your left arm is saying and they have had so many changes.” Kanuka’s principal had a query for their senior advisor about the definition of ‘well below’: “My question to the Ministry is what is the criteria for ‘well below’, I haven’t seen any definitive criteria for ‘well below’”. But several months later Kanuka was still awaiting an answer to this query as their senior advisor had resigned (this school is now onto its third one). Juniper’s senior advisor was able to provide helpful advice about not having to include any children in National Standards data if they arrive at the school after 1 November—but the frustrated response of the Juniper principal was “so where is that written, I’ve never seen it”. Advice offered in a Ministry seminar on the new reporting template was unclear:

He showed us this template, which was very basic, and said, ‘That’s what you need to do with your reporting’. So [another principal] who is very knowledgeable put up her hand and said, ‘So clarify for me, do we not have to do an analysis of variance?’ And he said, ‘No, you know, you can choose.’ So that didn’t sit well with me and I went back and read because they gave us quite a thick pack of requirements and yes the template was in there but it said you *may* use that. And I thought, ‘No, my one is actually in more depth.’ So I looked at another document and I thought, ‘Well you do have to do it [analysis of variance]. And I emailed [the other principal] and said, ‘I think he gave us some conflicting advice’ and she said, ‘Yes, you’re right.’ (Principal, Juniper School)

Part of the problem here is likely be the inability of Ministry staff to be frank about not knowing or about their own personal view:

I was intrigued, I thought there was quite a change in tone from hearing him speak when he was working for [the Ministry]. I think he had more licence and he said that, he said it very clearly, ‘I can say this now I’m not [working for the Ministry].’

In the circumstances it is not hard to see why many of those in schools would often proceed as they saw fit rather than use precious time by taking up issues with the Ministry. To the comparability lead teacher: “It’s because we haven’t had any faith in the Ministry to help us; that’s pretty much what it comes down to.” But as discussed below, it is also clear that many school-based decisions are unlikely to be ever found wanting, because Ministry oversight is weak.

Weak Ministry requirements

A further national and regional-level reason for variation is that the Ministry is not being particularly demanding in what it requires from schools around the National Standards. The effect is that schools have been able to avoid even some of the central planks of the policy. An example already noted is that Huia Intermediate was allowed by the Ministry to submit data for 2011 based only on asTTle scores rather than proper OTJs. The Huia principal also reported at the time the data was publicly released in September 2012 that: “I’ve been told [another local school] didn’t have their ESOL kids in there whereas we did. We were told every child has to be included in this [but] many schools have taken out their ESOL kids”. Another example is a mistake made by Cicada in not providing data on all students (discussed shortly). While the Ministry picked this up, it was still willing to accept a less-than-complete sample because it uses a threshold percentage rather than requiring schools to be really accurate. In such loose circumstances it would not be surprising if the 2011 data already represented an inflated picture. (Comparability lead teacher: “There were some schools with 76% above and I just did a bit of a chuckle.”) It is a long way from similar requirements being carefully pursued across schools in order to achieve similar criteria.

Weak Ministry requirements around the standards are likely to have a variety of causes. They may reflect recognition of the developing nature of the National Standards in schools and may also be a way to respond to contestation of the policy. They may be due to limited resources at the local level as well as being preoccupied with compliance in the wrong areas. Some of these problems are illustrated in discussion of the RAINS schools’ relationships with the Ministry in Section 4.0. Of course ERO is another agency that monitors the individual and collective compliance of primary and intermediate schools with the standards system. To what extent its processes can offer a realistic picture will be considered in the next report.

Crude and misleading reporting

A further national and regional issue impacting on comparability across schools is that the Ministry has needed to consciously limit its recognition of some features of schools in order to allow National Standards data to be reported in relatively simple ways. Examples provided by the RAINS schools included lack of reporting on marginalised ethnic groups other than Māori and Pasifika and the way the detail of particular learners is obscured by such crude reporting demands:

I understand Māori and Pasifika are the national priorities but they are not the only priorities, and with us with [a large proportion] of our community being Indian I would have expected we should be able to report to the Ministry [but] the Ministry are saying, ‘We are not interested.’ (Principal, Cicada School)

I suppose because they’ll get a bottom line, how many kids there, there, there and there but they don’t know the picture behind those. They don’t know that my two ‘well belows’ in reading or writing are two ESOL children who only came here last October, you know? They don’t know that. We know that, and we know that one of them that’s now on this accelerating literacy intervention is almost reading ‘at’. (Principal, Juniper School)

Another instance of misleading reporting is the requirement to prioritise ethnicity on the required template for National Standards data as already mentioned in 2.1. Although none of those in the

RAINS mentioned this as a problem, the principal at Magenta raised another variant on the same theme:

With the ENROL (School Student Enrolment Register) and on Classroom Manager (a MUSAC tool for recording, reporting and analysing student learning data), the first [ethnicity] mentioned is the ethnicity of the child. So we have eight identified Māori students but only three have put Māori as first choice so the computer and ENROL only recognises three. So we will tell parents next year, “Please put the one first that you want to be identified with for Ministry reasons”. Why do we need to know this dominant one or ‘the one’? It’s to make it easier for computer systems to understand or interpret ... rather than looking at the complexity of ethnicity and how we relate to the world.

3.3 DIFFERENCES IN SCHOOLS’ OVERALL TRAJECTORIES

Turning now to sources of variation at school level, the RAINS schools are clearly embarked on diverse incremental trajectories around the National Standards that reflect local historical, social, organisational, political, philosophical pedagogical, curricula and assessment contexts, or ‘school specific factors’, that cannot be easily set aside. This is ‘the journey’ each school is on, as mentioned by the principal at Magenta, and it incorporates the way the schools respond locally to the ‘policy soup’ of National Standards, many other policies and various teaching and learning discourses, including those around the New Zealand Curriculum and Māori education. Returning to the discussion in 3.1, it is possible to point to standout contextual features that have undoubtedly mattered in the way each school has responded to or enacted the National Standards. (The discussion below employs some quotes from the schools over 2012; Thrupp & Easter (2012) and Section 4 of this report provide other examples along the same lines.)

Juniper School’s principal had the benefit of more time available for assessment than would be the case in nearly all other New Zealand schools, coupled with great enthusiasm for ‘getting it right’ and for seeking out new opportunities around the National Standards:

Certainly easier for me in a smaller school to physically collate the data, it’s not just an automatic transfer into the SMS or anything, imagine doing that at [a large school in the area], there’s no way I could do that there. (Principal, Juniper School)

Making an OTJ in reading I think is very difficult because it is a very receptive skill—you don’t necessarily see a lot of written stuff from kids, so what’s the evidence in reading? And there’s nothing in the exemplars sort of in reading and so you tend to then drop back to using data, you see. Well, we’re not supposed to just rely on data so we’ve had this discussion with our literacy consultant and ... we have identified a focus for next term.... (Principal, Juniper School)

Well, it’s about being professional, you know, I mean really that’s what it comes down to, to me. I think it’s about knowing what you’re talking about and it’s not just guesswork. Yeah, it’s important to be accurate. (Principal, Juniper School)

Seagull School had been fine-tuning its assessment tools-based processes for years, had tried to make as few changes as possible in relation to National Standards and was particularly concerned to avoid labelling:

.... we have always been telling our parents our data, [the principal] puts out the data in an information booklet to every parent, we have always told them ours will look different than other schools, I don’t think [parents] are so concerned about it, it’s about our school and our culture and that we are open with our data. (Lead teacher, Juniper School)

I’d have to say no [changes due to National Standards this year]. Everything we are doing we would be doing anyway. (Principal, Seagull School)

Kanuka School had a strong aversion to ‘deficit’ thinking and saw an opportunity to get staff focused on ‘acceleration’:

When I was sitting there [on a panel] somebody piped up to say, ‘Yes, but if we just didn’t have to include those children, you know, if we just looked at these children, you know, then we’re world-leading so just, you know, if we just don’t include them, it’s not fair on the rest of us that we should have to bother about those children’, and I thought wow, you don’t have to dig too deep to realise why we haven’t made a difference for those children because people like you are in classrooms. So I think there’s some really good reasons to do things differently and I’m not against change and I think the solutions haven’t been created yet because if they had we would be doing better for those children. (Principal, Kanuka School)

We had Lexia, a reading programme that we were trialling and it actually wasn’t the most effective use of the resource so we [dropped it]. We’ve also tried Success Maker since then and we weren’t particularly impressed with the programme and so we dropped that too.... Rainbow Reading is working really well with the [effect] sizes really good. And [peer reading programmes], both fantastic results (DP, Kanuka School)

Magenta was quietly opposed to National Standards and preferred to focus on its local response to the New Zealand Curriculum:

Just the general impression is [that the Magenta principal] is going along with it sort of under duress, pretty much; wants to be doing some other things ... yeah. (From discussion with comparability lead teacher, June 2012)

I play the game and have reported using the four-point scale in 2011 (Principal, Magenta School, from comparability lead teacher notes, June 2012)

I can understand why some people would like [PaCT] but again it comes back to what is the purpose of assessing and we still believe it is for learning. To put too much emphasis on a summative statement or a summative number doesn’t tell you the real story behind it. (Principal, Magenta School).

Cicada had openly resisted the National Standards and was now struggling to take them seriously:

I think people are living with political realities. I don’t think anyone sees that [National Standards] are of any real use at all. But a lot of people think it’s important to collect good data. And that’s quite a difficult [tension] for schools. (Principal, Cicada School)

Teachers had chosen not to include certain kids in the data and I hadn’t [picked it up], we were missing over 100 kids! But we made just made the figures balance out and sent it back in, we did our best.... (Principal, Cicada School)

Huia teachers were thought to be—and probably were—a long way from being able to make good OTJs:

I don’t think any of the syndicates really put a lot of time into discussion about OTJs is my gut feeling. (DP, Huia Intermediate)

[Our] PLD has been to look at the whole effective teaching practice we had and getting consistency. I suppose National Standards is meant to be a consistency tool so it’s dovetailed in where it needs to but it’s not a big feature at this point because we’re still looking at our own practices in regards to assessment and how we’re making use of it. We’ve done enough to meet the basic requirements and that’s it. (DP, Huia Intermediate)

Nevertheless the responses of schools to the National Standards will reflect not only these most prominent contextual features but the overall mix of contextual influences in their setting. The staff and boards of schools have some agency but their actions and decisions around the National Standards are also being influenced by context in ways that should not be ignored. As different school responses are considered in the following sub-sections, we may not be able to show a causal relationship between any school’s context and some particular decision or practice, but we can usually see contextual influences in the patterns that develop around particular schools. Hence there is little here

that is really surprising given what we already know about each of the RAINS schools, as reflected in the first RAINS report (Thrupp & Easter, 2012). It is much more a case of “Tell me about your school and I’ll tell you about its response to National Standards. And if I don’t get it quite right then you better tell me more about your school...”.

3.4 DIFFERENCES IN EACH SCHOOL’S FRAMING OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

By mid-2012 all the RAINS schools were broadly complying with the policy but, as indicated in 3.1, the schools were often not properly on-message. The following discussion further illustrates how they were often hardly on the same page let alone having the same detailed understanding.

Approaches to the National Standards categories

Until late in 2012 Kanuka hadn’t been using ‘well below’ at all, Magenta was reluctant to use ‘well below’ (and possibly quietly avoiding it), Cicada had simply collapsed the top end of its own five-point scale to create the necessary four-point scale and Huia was still using a five-point scale in reporting to parents against the National Standards.

Matching National Standards categories to curriculum levels etc.

The ‘at’ standard category on the four-point scale may be less controversial than ‘well below’ but different expectations are still apparent across the schools. Table 1 shows how the RAINS schools compared in mid-2012 in terms of reading levels, curriculum levels or numeracy stages as appropriate for reading, writing and mathematics. The contents of Table 1 will be obvious enough for those who are familiar with primary school assessment but may be confusing to others and some explanation is provided here. For **reading**, the numbers towards the top of the table marked ‘L’ are referring to reading text levels. There are 30 levels, broken into a colour wheel, that loosely span six years of achievement at primary school, e.g., it is expected that after one year of school students are reading at the green level equating to Level 12–14 (there is green 1, green 2 and green 3). The levels at the beginning of the colour wheel are easier to move through as they are largely based on repetition of the use of high frequency words, but the higher the level the more complex the text and reading skills and strategies needed to be acquired and demonstrated by the student. Those with ‘yrs’ are referring to reading ages. There are also asTTle (Assessment Tool for Teaching and Learning) assessments based on a curriculum level broken into three phases within the level, i.e., L. 4B (beginning), L. 4P (proficient) and L. 4A (advanced). For **writing** the expectations vary depending on what assessment tool is being used. Some schools refer to the Ministry exemplars while others use asTTle. The exemplars break Level One into three phases i.e. L1i, L1ii, L1iii, then moves into broader two-year curriculum levels (L. 2—Y. 3–4; L. 3—Y. 5–6; L. 4—Y. 7–8). AsTTle levels and phases have also been stated (see description above). The National Standards document states that students are working either ‘towards’ or ‘at’ a curriculum level, as exemplified by the wording used by Kanuka School. For **mathematics** the expectations vary depending on the tool being used. The Numeracy Strategy Stage has largely been used as a reference in the table. This is based on eight stages of development across three domains; addition/subtraction, multiplication/division and ratios/proportions. For instance, as indicated by the table, it is expected that after two years at school a student would have achieved Stage 4. Some schools have used ‘beg.’ (beginning) to indicate they expect their students to be achieving at the beginning of the stage by the end of the year. Once again asTTle levels and phases have been stated (see description above).

A point to note from the table is Cicada accepting a reading level that was lower than any of the other schools as evidence of being ‘at’ after a year (Comparability lead teacher: “and that’s in the National Standards booklets so I’m not quite sure why there is a Level 9”), a numeracy stage (Stage 2) that was lower also (Comparability lead teacher: “After one year you really want your kids to be at Stage 3”) and yet having a writing level for ‘at’ after two years that was more aspirational than any of the others (1A). Also noteworthy is Kanuka’s ‘within level’, ‘towards level’, ‘at level’ in writing, which while it

may reflect the wording of the National Standards documents, is less specific than at any of the other schools. (Comparability lead teacher: “That’s pretty subjective, isn’t it ... ‘towards level 2’, well does that mean 1P?”) Seagull expected asTTle 3P in reading by the end of Year 6, begging the question when students would achieve 3A. The schools also vary around the numeracy Stage 5, which is very broad, but after three years some are looking at the beginning of the stage and others don’t specify this. Other data from Cicada showed that for Year 3 reading it regarded STAR stanine 5 as being at, stanine 6 as being just above, and stanine 7 as being well above, whereas a more typical bell-shaped interpretation would view 4–5–6 as at, with well above (if there was such a National Standards category) not being reached until around stanine 9.

Table 1: RAINS Schools’ student achievement expectations

(based on ‘end of year’ AT expectations)

	Reading						Writing						Mathematics					
	Seagull	Juniper	Magenta	Cicada	Kanuka	Huia	Seagull	Juniper*	Magenta	Cicada	Kanuka	Huia	Seagull	Juniper	Magenta	Cicada	Kanuka	Huia
After 1 year	L. 12	L. 12–14	L. 12–14	L. 9–14	L. 12–14	Not applicable	1i	1B/P	1i–1ii	1P	Within L. 1	Not Applicable	3	3	3	2/3	3	Not Applicable
After 2 years	L. 17	L. 17–18	L. 17–18	L. 17–20	L. 17–18		1ii	1P/A	1i–1iii	1A	At L. 1		4	4	4	4	4	
After 3 years	L. 21	L. 21–22	L. 21–22	L. 21–22	L. 21–22		1iii–2i	2B/P	1iii–2	1A	Towards L. 2		5 (beg)	4/5 (beg)	5	5 (beg)	5 or Beg. L. 2	
End Y. 4	2P asTTle	8.5–9.5 yrs	8.5–9.5 yrs	L. 23–25 8.5–9.5 yrs	L. 24–25 9–9.5 yrs		2i	2P/A	L. 2	2P	At L. 2		5	5	5	5	5 or L. 2	
End Y. 5	2A asTTle	9.5–10.5 yrs	10–12 yrs	L. 26–27 9.5–10.5	L. 27–28 10 yrs		2ii	3B/P	L. 2–3	2A–3B	Towards L. 3		6 (beg)	5/6 (beg)	6	6 (beg)	6 (beg) Beg L. 3	
End Y. 6	3P asTTle	10.5–12 yrs	10–12 yrs	L. 28+ 10.5–11.5	L. 29–30 11 yrs		3i	3P/A	L. 3	3A–4B	At L. 3		6+	6	6	6	6 At L. 3	
End Y. 7	NA	NA	12–14 yrs	NA	NA	4B asTTle	NA	NA	L. 3–4	NA	NA	4B asTTle	NA	NA	7	NA	NA	4B asTTle 6/7
End Y. 8	NA	NA	12–14 yrs	NA	NA	4P/A asTTle	NA	NA	L. 4	NA	NA	4P/A asTTle	NA	NA	7	NA	NA	4P/A asTTle 7

The rigour of data sent to the Ministry

As we saw in 3.1, Huia based its 2011 National Standards data on a particular kind of test data rather than on anything like an OTJ but the Ministry was still willing to put it up on the Education Counts site. Meanwhile Cicada sent in incomplete data and this was also acceptable, at least to some extent.

A key point about all these obvious variations is that they are clearly often reflect more than mere mistakes: they are likely to relate to particular school trajectories as already noted. For instance, Cicada's 'basic error' with the incomplete data almost certainly resulted from its residual opposition to the National Standards, which resulted in a slightly contemptuous or mocking response and lack of attention to detail.¹² But Kanuka, a more National Standards-friendly school, has also made some mistakes. This raises the likelihood that competing pressures in the lower SES schools in the study have made it harder to get the framing of the standards system 'right' in such contexts. The lower SES schools have also (generally) been a little less demanding or specific about what they require of children in terms of end-of-year 'at' expectations.

3.5 DIFFERENCES IN THE DETAIL OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Beneath these obvious differences between the schools' approaches to National Standards, there was further variation, sometimes formalised in documentation and sometimes just informally understood or assumed. Indeed the propensity for the RAINS schools to formalise and document decisions and practices around the National Standards was itself a contextually influenced area of difference between the schools. Other noteworthy areas of difference involved discussion about National Standards and National Standards-related areas within the schools, intervention by the SLTs, the balance between numbers and narratives in the schools' approaches to OTJs, schools' expectations around assessment and moderation, the schools' choices of assessment tools, and schools' procedures related to testing and OTJs. Variation in each of these areas is discussed and exemplified below.

Formalising policies and practices

While the larger schools with their greater organisational complexities might be expected to be necessarily more formalised, the level of time and enthusiasm for assessment and National Standards was also crucial. Hence tiny Juniper School was actually the most formalised and Huia Intermediate one of the least:

I've got the evidence folder sitting up there now that I'm just going to have a little look through with one of the teachers as part of their appraisal and they do know that that helps to inform (a) both their teaching, and the National Standards reporting side of things. (Principal, Juniper School)

Assessment is about teaching and learning, you know? It's evidence of whether the programmes are effective and if the teaching's been effective, you see? And you need those results to show progress and achievement. (Principal, Juniper School)

Of the other schools, Seagull and Kanuka were both more formalised than Cicada, a school that had resisted the National Standards:

Yeah, and then they had to moderate within that to choose what level that child would get on the writing for that term as such, which I thought was good; I mean, we do that too but not perhaps as [formally]. (Comparability lead teacher talking about Seagull School)

[There were] sheets of paper that had all the tools across the top, and they had the kid's name down the side and they had them all listed and so on and then they had a

¹² At Cicada the 2012 mid-year report format used ticks in little 'gingerbread men' outlines to indicate where children were placed on the four-point scale with 'well below' first.

column that said your OTJ term one, term two, term three, term four etcetera. (Comparability lead teacher talking about Seagull School)

Kanuka School has implementation folders but not a specific procedural guideline [for running records, unassisted writing sample etc.]. (Notes from comparability lead teacher)

While Cicada School has assessment implementation procedures, there is little written documentation. (Notes from comparability lead teacher)

Magenta was both a relatively small school and only reluctantly putting National Standards in place. It was probably the least formalised of all:

Professional dialogue between colleagues helps to ensure analysis is consistent. No written procedures to help ensure consistency of practice and analysis. (Comparability lead teacher's notes from Magenta, June 2012)

I mean [Magenta] did actually have a little bit of documentation ... [but] it was quite broad. (Comparability lead teacher)

I wouldn't judge what Magenta school is doing. It was just looser ... I think Juniper and Seagull are just more robust, and more ... yeah, more formal about it, that's the impression. (Comparability lead teacher)

And then I showed some reporting using the National Standards on the wedge graphs and things and [a teacher] was really interested in that, but when I showed [the principal] he sort of said, 'Oh yeah, some teachers might be ok with that, others ... not'. (Comparability lead teacher)

Discussion about National Standards and National Standards-related areas within the schools

Along with being more or less formalised, the schools varied in the extent to which there was discussion around the National Standards and National Standards-related areas (such as testing or reporting) within the schools. At Juniper, there was a great deal of discussion as well as related processes being highly formalised. The same was largely true at Kanuka and Seagull whereas Cicada was less formal but there was emphasis on staff having a common understanding for OTJs through discussion. At Huia and Magenta, informality and limited discussion were more usually the case. At Huia, for instance, two teachers went off to an e-asTTLe course but there was very little follow-up within the school. At Juniper, such PD would have definitely been interrogated and disseminated with the school. At Magenta, one teacher described "a Clayton's version of the National Standards; we sort of know but not really" (notes from comparability lead teacher). But at the same time there was some staff discussion going on and Magenta School was involved in moderation with a local cluster. Moreover the principal at Magenta suggested it was preferable to have a more shared and tentative approach to developing an understanding of the National Standards than to have a supposed expert on staff:

It really seems that some schools have their beacon of knowledge, their expert who gets it right every single time and they will make them stand up and pronounce their expertise, and they are experts, don't get me wrong, but are they actually correct and where's the evidence to prove that they are the right ones and they are specifically right on the button every single time and is it important? And I don't believe so.

Intervention by the SLT

The extent to which the SLT were 'hands on' followed much the same pattern as the formality of the schools noted above with Juniper most hands on and Huia and Magenta much less so.

We had one teacher who tended to err on the upper end and we said, hang on a minute, if they are 2P they are right on target, not above. ‘Oh that’s a bit harsh’. Well it’s realistic, other people might be a bit easy. (Principal, Juniper School)

I asked [the teacher] so when would it be appropriate to put an e-asTTle by the children in reading. She said, ‘Oh, maybe week eight?’ I said, ‘Eight weeks after you’ve been teaching it, you want to wait and see if your teaching’s been effective?’ I said, ‘I would be thinking more like week four—you have four weeks, you assess them, it’ll give you some next steps for your teaching of the course, and then you’ve got six weeks, seven weeks if it’s an eleven week term to address the concepts that come up in the reporting.’ So she’s going to do that. (Principal, Juniper School)

[W]e had quite a bit of to-ing and fro-ing and chopping and changing and just through discussion so I was doing the whole comparison thing and yeah, we did change some of the OTJs and things on the report when there are a couple of heads together. (Principal, Juniper School)

The teacher basically implied that the [Huia DP] just sets the test and you just do it. (Comparability lead teacher)

[The Magenta] principal said that he didn’t really intervene, you know, like he didn’t really have a lot—you know, the teachers made their OTJs and pretty much that was it. (Comparability lead teacher)

Of the other schools, Seagull and Kanuka were more ‘hands on’ than Cicada:

So that has to go to her and I said, ‘Do you always agree with what the teachers have got?’ And she says not always and she said I have overturned some of them before. (Comparability lead teacher, talking about Seagull School SLT member)

Call-back days used to arrive at ‘shared agreement’ of what expectations look like.... SLT randomly collect reading, writing and numeracy samples to determine in-school consistency. (From comparability lead teacher’s notes on Kanuka School)

[L]ast year my year six teachers, two of them, who looked after the writing had about 92% of our kids at or above in writing. When 85% are ESOL you think something’s wrong here and it was interesting talking to them, I can see what they were thinking but they were completely wrong. They were quite stressed out about it so I needed to change what I was doing to try and support them, hence we developed rubrics to try and guide teachers to make those decisions. What the young ones, in fact a number of the young ones, are wanting is really [a] hard, fast set of rules, which I won’t give them, and so it’s not as if they hate me but I know it creates some areas of tension for them. (Principal, Cicada School)

Balance between types of evidence for informing OTJs

Teachers are encouraged to think of OTJs as involving an assessment pyramid, a bit like a healthy food pyramid, with a little standardised testing and a lot of other evidence:

When you come to make your OTJs etc., it’s only supposedly the tip of the triangle, you see, and Magenta did have, they did have that that triangle, they called it the Healthy Pyramid, I think it was, which is just really what we were given at the Ministry training, you know how you use a little bit of data and mostly teachers’ professional judgement, observations and conversations and so on. (Comparability lead teacher)

At the same time the schools varied in the extent to which they relied on asTTle tests or other evidence. As noted earlier, Huia’s data as sent to the Ministry was based entirely on tests but judgements in reports to parents probably varied widely across the school in terms of what was informing them. One Huia teacher thought staff there relied too heavily on specific assessment tools: “That’s the mistake we make here, too many teachers just use one assessment to make the judgement

instead of looking [at the overall picture].” To the comparability lead teacher, Huia teachers when reporting to parents were “a bit vague about the whole OTJ concept...”; their judgement was based on comparisons within their class around who was considered to be ‘high, mid, low’. Seagull was another school that relied heavily on test results to inform OTJs but in this case drew on a wide variety of tests. Kanuka and Juniper drew on both qualitative and quantitative data. Magenta used a triangulation approach, but gave more weight to qualitative evidence:

[The Magenta principal] said ‘I’m not into numbers,’ you know, he said, ‘I’m not into numbers, numbers mean nothing to me’. (Comparability lead teacher)

Moderation within clusters of local schools was one activity that often showed up such variations between schools and the different underlying perspectives on assessment they represented. This was noted by the principal at Magenta School:

We have attempted to moderate across cluster, across schools, and we all have a very different view of the purpose for moderation. Ours is very definitely so we know and understand where a child is at and what are their next steps in their learning while a number of schools are very focussed in on getting a number that is levelled at a curriculum and then within three steps in the curriculum and that’s the end product that is required. Which again, I think is so hard and complicated, does it really matter as long as you know a ballpark of where they’re at?

Choice of assessment tools

Choice of particular assessment tools—or particular revisions—can make it more likely that children in one setting are considered at or above than in another. One instance already mentioned was the use of PM Benchmarks all the way to Year 6 at Kanuka, which resulted in so many being ‘above’ in reading. There was no suggestion this was being done in a gaming kind of way, more perhaps that at the time it offered at least a consistent tool despite it being too shallow (the PM Benchmarks focus mainly on decoding and basic comprehension). A Kanuka teacher noted that “kids can blitz a running record because it’s quite structured but it doesn’t necessarily show what they can apply” (notes from comparability lead teacher). On the other hand Magenta’s reading levels/ages were based on the *Ready to Read* series, which is more difficult than PM Benchmarks and uses far more technical language. There have been no benchmarks developed for assessment with this series.

Other issues are around asTTle. For writing Huia used the older version (referred to at this school as e-asTTle but it was only marked online, not done online) and as a result many of its students came out ‘below’ or ‘well below’ in the 2011 data, remembering that the 2011 data at this school was based on asTTle alone. But in 2012 Juniper was trying out the new version, which appealed because it involves just one rubric across all genres in a way that should help with consistency. However, this school’s experiences (in June 2012) seemed to foreshadow the public debates that would come later over the revised asTTle and STAR tests (see 2.1).

At Juniper we just put an e-asTTle by some children, I ran a bit of an enquiry and the piece of writing was marked using our rubrics and then marked using e-asTTle; with e-asTTle they came out at level fives and we had put them in at threes, three slash four, and so we said to [a facilitator], ‘Why is it so different?’, you know, it was the first time we had really used the e-asTTle rubric. She said, ‘Because it’s weighted, it’s weighted on ideas’, and of course we had been doing a lot of focus on ideas, the actual quality of the writing, and she said, ‘Some of these kids’ work is fantastic’, you know? But yeah, it was much higher than what we had levelled our children ... and I didn’t know about that, when we went to the PD they didn’t say anything about weighting, you know. And so it’s like ‘Oh my God’. I said, ‘You can’t give those back to kids and say you’ve given it a 3B here and it’s got a 5B here’; because why the discrepancy? We’ve got to work out why the discrepancy is. (Principal, Juniper School).

Kanuka was striking problems also:

Mixed reactions [to the new e-asTTLe writing test]. The biggest thing is that our children that are maybe 'at' and 'above', the results have come back quite inflated. We know they are already good and above but they come out at high school levels. But it could be because it was our first time doing it, we did quite good moderation though but we think we have areas to improve. (Lead teacher, Kanuka School)

Also of relevance here, most of the schools had a record of achievement through portfolios or similar. These conveyed evidence of achievement against national norms as well as learning samples that could be used as evidence in relation to National Standards by individual teachers, syndicate leaders (in the larger schools) and the SLT. Cicada was an exception, Cicada children had workbooks but it was not clear how much these formed the basis of OTJ decisions.

Assessment and moderation procedures

Beyond the choice of assessment tools, there are also numerous potential sources of variation related to the procedures used with assessment tools and moderation. One was the extent to which children are helped with writing samples: conferenced or unconfederated. The schools all claimed to use unconfederated (unassisted) samples but varying amounts and kinds of scaffolding was occurring. At Kanuka the children received 'motivation' the day before (and this would vary from class to class). At Cicada teams identified the 'topic' or language experience to use and then scaffolded the procedure over two days, with brainstorming and vocabulary identified collectively within classes and students able to access this during the unassisted writing sample. Seagull and Juniper often allowed children to write about some personal experience with Seagull also allowing vocabulary development practice prior to the writing sample being administered (but removed during the sample). Magenta used writing exemplars (conferenced) for moderation of its own writing samples (unconfederated).

Other issues were (i) whether or not students got a second chance (at Seagull School if the sample wasn't perceived to be indicative of the child's normal writing, the kids were allowed to do it again), (ii) whether or not every student was tested (at Seagull all were tested in numeracy but not in literacy), (iii) the time allowed for tests (Huia's use of asTTLe on paper may buy its children some extra time) and (iv) other particular test conditions. In practice a range of such issues might run together. The way an IKAN test was administered at Huia Intermediate provides a sobering example of why test results used as part of OTJs have to be taken with a grain of salt:

We go to the hall, there are perhaps 150 children sitting or lying on their tummies on the wooden floor, not a chair or desk in sight. A data projector plays the test onto a large screen and a teacher is reading out the questions as well. The questions are fast (as they are intended to be, this is a maths recall test) but with lying on the floor the children's heads have to bob up and down to see both the screen and their answer papers in a way that must be quite tiring. Other class teachers are standing around the walls of the hall. After a short time the test is over and the noise in the hall rapidly increases. After a minute the teacher in charge of the testing asks, "Who couldn't keep up? Who didn't write anything?" (A fairly large number of hands go up, maybe a third.) The teacher then comments, "Well it's incredibly fast, Ms 'Speedy' [the teacher who was reading] couldn't even speak it out fast enough. But we have no control over the speed so we have decided you guys can have it again." And so the questions are projected again and at the end the children swap sheets and mark the answers, also projected on the screen. In later discussion I am told a few children complained about the second chance for the test. The teachers are using an old version of IKAN because it allows the children to self-mark whereas the latest version requires teachers to mark all the tests (from 2011 field notes, Huia Intermediate. Later I find on the IKAN website that "In response to user feedback, and in consultation with the Ministry of Education, the timings have been extended for some questions in the IKAN assessments to allow sufficient time for students to record their answers (18/9/12)". But this seems to be for the new version and it's unlikely the test was ever intended to be administered twice).

3.6 SOURCES OF VARIATION AT THE CLASSROOM LEVEL

Differences in teacher judgements

At the level of the classroom teacher there will certainly be elements of how student achievement translates into OTJs that result more from the experience and outlook of individual teachers than from the context of the school. This is the individual variation and subjectivity referred to at the outset of this chapter, which the MTL approach to researching OTJs over-emphasises at the expense of the other sources of variations discussed in this section. In individual classrooms there will also be more obvious cases of deviation from school expectations as well as student practices that add further inconsistencies.

Deviation from school expectations

It can be recognised that school expectations are often observed ‘in the breach’, simply less than ideal or regarded with antipathy:

It might say you can have 30 minutes, that’s what it might say, but teachers can be, some teachers would stick to that, some would give their kids more so again there’s not very much consistency’. (Huia teacher, 2012)

One late boy, the teacher goes through the test instructions but very briefly: ‘It’s hard when you come in late because you miss the instructions.’ I guess he wants the boy to do the test but doesn’t want to upset the tone of class. (Huia field notes, 2011)

Teacher comes and comments to me that for a lot of the class this asTTle testing is a waste of time, they won’t manage it and she has lots of assessments of their work. Estimates for me that about 40% will ‘fail badly’. Points to one boy with an ESOL background, ‘He will be just guessing all the answers.’ (Huia field notes, 2011)

Another issue is that sometimes a previous teacher may have been bit more generous on OTJ-making and hence when the child transitions to the next class, the evidence may show that the child was below where the previous teacher judged them to be, but for fear of making it look like the child’s progress has regressed, the teacher will inflate the data or OTJ to avoid difficult conversations with parents or the SLT. One teacher at Kanuka School raised this as an issue, but it was not clear whether the teacher was referring to Kanuka School or making a more general point.

Of course deviations from school practice need not always be deliberate (consider for instance a teacher who has just joined the staff of a school and is still getting to grips with ‘how we do things around here’). It will also be much easier for teachers to deviate from ‘school-wide’ practice at some schools than others, depending on the school-level issues already discussed including the extent to which school policies are formalised and the intervention of the SLT. For instance, at Juniper the principal did some school-wide testing such as STAR testing to ensure greater consistency, not an approach that would be possible in larger schools.

Children’s practices

Finally, we should consider children’s responses to assessment used for National Standards as being part of the picture as well; they are not simply passive in the face of what is asked of them. Their responses will impact on the nature and accuracy of assessment; for instance, they can share answers during a test when they are not supposed to:

Some quiet whispers/discussion now. Teacher can’t hear it and doesn’t pick it up. (Huia field notes, 2011)

4. THE RAINS SCHOOLS IN 2012

This section provides some perspectives from senior staff in each of the RAINS schools over 2012. Once again there is variation here that is mainly in line with the trajectories noted in the first RAINS report. As discussed in 2.2, the material in this section is in most cases based on only two wide-ranging interviews in each school. Nevertheless those interviewed did have the chance to read and correct the material related to their school and there is enough here to be able to provide a flavour of how each SLT (and the principals in particular) were seeing the National Standards and related issues as the year progressed. Unless indicated otherwise, quotations are from the principal of the school being discussed. At Huia Intermediate, where most of the year's research took place, much more data was available and so decisions have had to be made about what Huia Intermediate material to report here and what to keep for the final report. To match with the other schools, data has only been drawn from the Huia SLT and discussion has been limited to the same themes. Nevertheless, there are some additional issues around Huia being an intermediate school that are worth reporting here and the September release of data also gets greater coverage here for Huia than at the other schools. This is because it was only at Huia that the author was able to be present and interviewing at the time the data was being released. At all the other schools the release of data had to be discussed retrospectively because the interviews were not until closer to the end of the year.

4.1 JUNIPER SCHOOL

General changes at Juniper

There were no general changes at Juniper over 2012 that need to be noted here.

Development of National Standards at Juniper

The most obvious National Standards-related development at Juniper in 2012 was a change to report formats away from the ambiguity of statements such as 'Developing towards the Standard'. The new format for mid-year reports involved a continuum where teachers could tick beginning, proficient, advanced for each of 'after 1, 2, 3 years' and then for Years 4–7: "we put Year 7 on there [despite not having a Year 7 class] because some kids will be achieving above Year 6". Colour coding was also used to indicate levels of concern:

We use the traffic lights colours ... so obviously red is supposed to indicate they're not quite where they should be but they don't need to be alarmed about it because it's obviously within each level. If students were achieving within the red band at the end of the year, then it indicates they are 'at risk' and need a 'boost'. The purpose of using these colours was to give a visual image of where teachers felt the students were achieving within the expected year level.

The new more visual format proved popular with parents and the same approach was taken at the end of the year as well. Again it was the Juniper principal that had led this development:

I developed it myself and then of course I consult with the staff and the board. If I develop anything new it's "here's the draft, have a little look, what do you think? Do you think this is going to work? Is it a good idea?" Rather than trying to start from scratch and go around in circles. I had aligned it to the STAR reading reporting form that we use.

Another relevant change at this school involved learning conferences where parents were now offered the opportunity to "discuss further school matters without your child". About a third of parents had said they wanted this, but several of them didn't follow through.

Aside from these developments, Juniper continued to be generally proactive about working with new assessment tools and moderation as discussed in Section 3. At this school the principal talked about times of year when the standards system was more to the fore. For instance, they were more in focus

in the first half of the final term when reports were being written and the school was doing end-of-year strategic planning, whereas later in the year, the Juniper principal's attention had moved on to other issues such as Novopay.

Impact of National Standards at Juniper

There was little sense from interviews with the principal at Juniper that National Standards were causing concern there for staff, parents or children: "I'm fairly happy with where we're at; we're always having a look to tweak, to improve." At the same time there were no particular gains noted either. Instead it seemed those at this small school felt they had been able to make a good fist of responding to the policy because of what was already in place: "We believe we have sound formative assessment practices and reporting but also know this was in existence before National Standards were introduced."

Forwarding of National Standards data to the Ministry

The principal at Juniper School noted that it had been suggested at a principals' meeting to report through narratives to try and avoid sending data to the Ministry that could easily be turned into a league table. However:

I didn't because I had completed my analysis of variance at the end of the year, there's no way—I mean, I spent hours on the thing and I had formatted it according to the Ministry guidelines that came out so I said OK, Ministry guidelines, so that's how I had completed and I didn't change it.

Nevertheless, a footnote was put into the analysis of variance to explain some results that would otherwise reflect badly on the school, in this case children with ESOL backgrounds who had arrived at the school towards the end of the year. The Juniper principal also pointed out that the annual report involved a somewhat different and more complex process than submitting a revised charter, suggesting that this might partly explain why principals had not resisted the forwarding of National Standards data through annual reports compared to forwarding of charter targets in 2011:

It's a slightly different thing too, you see. Our accountant is part of that big picture for the annual reports and we have to submit our paperwork to her by X date and then she compiles it ... and then it goes off to the Ministry and she's got something like twenty schools where that's common practice. So it's a bit different from the charter where it's done directly from the school. We have to submit the analysis of variance ... oh, and other bits and pieces obviously.

Release of National Standards data by the media and Ministry

Prior to the release of data (June 2012) the principal of Juniper raised various concerns:

My perception of what the league table will be based on what you can see from secondary schools and the rankings based on NCEA results and everything.... It does not give the true picture of the school, it does not give the progress and all of those sorts of things and they really aren't comparable. But that's what they're going to be used for and it's not going to be a fair reflection of the schools and the quality of the teachers. As somebody said, you might have the school with the enrolment scheme, with the high decile and all of those sorts of things—well who's to say it's the effective teacher that's getting the result there? You're going to get kids, you know, by and large, as a generalisation, that are always going to achieve well. So who says the teaching's better? Who says their progress has been better than a school in decile 1 that still might have 50% of their kids below but they might have had [great progress]?

The school newsletter also covered some points against league tables as provided by NZEI but with no editorial comment from the school. Juniper School provided data to Fairfax but it was not released in the local paper, most likely because of privacy concerns. In the event the release of data caused little

discussion amongst staff and no response from parents. Nevertheless the principal had raised it at the end-of-year assembly:

I said ... 'just be very wary because there will be more National Standards data coming out' and the analogy I used was comparing apples with apes and I said it's hugely variable but that [our school] was on the right track and that that had been endorsed by [ERO].

Template, PaCT and test changes

Juniper School was not too concerned about the form of the new required template for National Standards data; it was considered "not too demanding, quite basic". On the other hand it was also "... another way for them to manipulate data, of course. Because you have to send it [and] they can collate it". The principal was, however, pleased that the date for charters had been moved back from February 1st to March 1st. "They did actually listen a bit, again it [had been] just that whole 'thou shalt' attitude rather than thinking about what is reasonable."

Juniper School was planning to get involved with trialling the PaCT tool in 2013. The principal had gone to a meeting of the Ministry where they had asked for schools to volunteer to trial the literacy aspects of the tool:

I thought, yeah we can sit back and wait until it happens to us or we can be a little bit proactive and have a trial and give some feedback, you know it's going to happen regardless, so why not go and be a little bit more informed.

At least you have a voice, rather than having it dumped on you; at least if it's done through a professional development angle you can identify the positives and negatives.

On the other hand this principal defended those in another area who were boycotting the trial:

I had someone on the board, I think it was a little bit of ignorance, said, "Oh the kids miss out again." Well I don't think any kids are missing out by not having anything to do with PaCT; it's just that [those schools] didn't want to support the Ministry on that ... they feel it's just not the best way to have a balanced curriculum.

Relationship with the Ministry

The principal of Juniper had not met the school's senior advisor until October 2012 when they both attended some Ministry-sponsored PD. Juniper had no problem with the senior advisor per se but the advice she was required to give was what caused frustration. For instance, the Juniper principal had wanted to append notes on some ESOL students but was told to remove them by the senior advisor. More generally, the Ministry was perceived as being 'shambolic' (see Section 3.2) as well as somewhat unreasonable, uncaring and out of touch:

Very dictatorial and people are a bit fed up with it really, which is a shame because people are working flipping hard and it's not because of the Ministry dictating to them, it's because of the kids, you know.

I don't know that [the Ministry] have got people in mind. It's that whole neo-liberalism thing about productive units.

I really think the Ministry, the Government, they need to spend a decent amount of time in schools to see the reality.

Views of the wider policy environment

The Juniper principal felt that other education issues were often overshadowing National Standards by 2012. By the end of the year, it was the Christchurch school mergers and closures, Novopay and the

resignation of Lesley Longstone that were to the fore. Earlier (June), it had been the class sizes proposal, and subsequent backdown, which was the most prominent issue:

I would have to say in Hekia Parata's defence, I think, good on her for backing down but I know there was probably more behind the whole picture than just her, you know. But to her credit she did back down. Whereas Anne Tolley, National Standards, wouldn't back down.

I think there was almost a buoyancy ... I think people are happy. They saw it as a victory; they saw it as a bit of a victory over the Government with the backdown.

Future directions

The Juniper principal argued that after a series of unpopular and problematic reforms the climate of the sector was becoming 'unhealthy' and the outlook amongst schools increasingly defiant. She also felt the Government was out of its depth with the National Standards policy:

I think [the Government] are going to have to do something, there are just too many barbs being flung on schools at the moment and they are going to get some flung back, some resistance. I think if there were to be an election it would be interesting with so many people impacted on, one way or another, by their policies.

The concept of National Standards, trying to have consistency, is fine, cool ... but the process of getting there is far more complex than [those in Government] have any understanding of.

4.2 SEAGULL SCHOOL

General changes at Seagull School

There were no particular general changes at Seagull School in 2012 that need to be noted here.

Development of National Standards at Seagull School

The only obvious development over previous years at Seagull was that the SLT and curriculum leaders had begun to work with a group of local schools to have a dialogue on moderation and learning in general:

We were looking for commonalities, some of the schools were also quite different.

We had common concerns, particularly around the year level things, all our concerns were the same, these were things that weren't working, the faults that we saw.

The positive that came from it [the National Standards policy] was the impetus to have dialogue around what we are doing in our schools as far as assessment goes. It's not because we are suddenly trying to all line each other up but we are having dialogue about what we are all doing in our schools ... it might have got our schools talking a little bit around assessment but at the end of the day arriving at categorising and standardisation is difficult.

All I saw [in the local group] was a lot of variance in what people are doing. (DP)

Impact of National Standards at Seagull School

As noted earlier (3.3), the principal of Seagull School argued there had been no changes at the school in 2012 that were due to the standards system and that everything the school was doing, they would be doing in any case. The DP had much the same view:

It was good for the curriculum leaders to come along to group meetings and see the variance between schools for themselves. But the discussion [at this school], I can honestly say, is about what is right for our children and where are our gaps. (DP)

Forwarding of National Standards data to the Ministry

The 2012 annual report was described as “business as normal”.

Release of National Standards data by the media and Ministry

When interviewed in June, the principal at Seagull said, “We are all waiting and holding our breath to see what’s next and how it might be used by Government, there’s no trust there.” He didn’t respond to the Fairfax request for data and by the time the school would have had to respond under the OIA, the newspapers had already released the data. When it was released he was at a principal’s conference in Australia. The Seagull DP was at school and suggested teachers would have discussed the release informally but it had not been mentioned in staff meetings. It was the last week of term, after all, “and that’s what people do when they put these things out so that people don’t have time to reply”.

The DP at Seagull hadn’t looked at the data on the Stuff or Education Counts websites but did follow the story in the local newspaper: “It just made me think again, how do all these people make their OTJs and what are they using and how can this ever be honest?” She made some further observations about the nature of the data and how it might be being used:

I had a teacher [from another school] in yesterday and she asked, “What do you call this for writing?”, and we found we had a different level, and they had been talking to intermediate schools and they were worried and... If it’s so unfair who cares. I can’t compare them because I just know too much that they are doing different things in every school. So why worry about them. But I do know other people will analyse those lists and take them at face value ... but it’s not honest data. (DP)

[The principal of] one of those schools that put their data [into the newspaper] had been asking me for our data and she wanted to tell her board what our data was, to prove her data [was OK]. And I hadn’t given it and when all our data was put online I laughed because she can access it now anyway! (Goes on to explain that the principal had been under pressure from her board to provide comparative data from another high-decile school to prove the calibre of that school’s National Standards data.) When I looked at her data it was outstanding. (DP)

The Seagull DP thought those who would be most positive about the release of data would be some parents, competitive teachers (“... those who like to think their school is doing better”), some teachers who felt it was right for the culture of their school and new teachers (“... as it’s all they have known. I still think the switched-on ones will wonder what other schools are doing”).

The Seagull principal had looked at the Education Counts website and made some further observations about the data being incomplete and the form of presentation being confusing and insulting:

Some schools just had maths and writing but that was considered OK. We thought that was unfair.

I think there was a lot of misapprehension from schools about how it would come out but in the end I think it was a non-event because the [PDFs of] data are so confusing.

I really felt like our results weren’t treated with respect, the way they were dumped on the website ... they were dumped on there to fulfil a need because the schools were getting all the OIA requests from the media.

Seagull’s principal summed up by saying:

I think the issue is still that National Standards are not nationally moderated standards and that hasn’t changed since when we first talked to you, that still hasn’t changed. And that’s what I communicate to our parents. Really they’ve got to understand that

these are standards we are trying really hard to moderate and that we are in communication with other schools but they are not nationally moderated.

Template, PaCT and test changes

There was no mention of the assessment tool revisions at Seagull but the SLT there had discussed the template and PaCT, in both cases concerned that their uniformity would threaten school culture and how schools shared their learning. They had the most to say about PaCT, which the principal had seen a prototype of at a seminar:

Goodness gracious, if you were going to look at a thing like National Standards wouldn't you have [something like PaCT] all worked out first and bring it in along with your training, it's all just been done wrong.

Reminds me of something out of Dr Who you know. In my imagination I see this weird little machine with lights. Is it that simple? (Laughs).

So you would get back to that argument like, if it took in running records, how they are being administered in the different schools? So if they put that data in to get an OTJ, how has that been administered in a school.... And if you are putting in writing data that's always so subjective even within one school, you imagine [the effects of] people just popping that in. (DP)

So we are sceptical, having seen the introduction and even more sceptical when you find out it's not even coming out for a couple of years and who knows what will have happened by then.

Relationship with the Ministry

Relationships with the Ministry had been a source of frustration at Seagull School over 2012:

It would be nice to meet them. I went to a forum, got invited with my board chair, it would be an hour and a half so my board chair took time off work, off we went, there was to be coffee and biscuits at 9.45, meeting would start at ten, meeting would last for an hour and a half. So there we were, by the time we had a bit of a welcome then at ten it was "Great we'll have a cup of coffee now and come back and make a start". So by 11.30 the meeting was nowhere near finished and we had to go and my board chair needed to get back to work. I just thought that was utter rubbish, I couldn't run a meeting like that at this school.

At this meeting at the start they got up and said the emphasis was on the developmental, "If you are going to be working with us there needs to be a relationship". Not compliance, they reckoned, "we are not about compliance" ... their actions don't show it, they are far more compliance-bound. We have noticed that with the development of our charter this year. We are being told it is an exemplary charter, one that should be held up for others but at the same time "if you just fixed this". And it came down to changing four words in the end. You tell me that's not compliance! So we are getting mixed messages.

Views of the wider policy environment

Interviewed in June, the Seagull principal gave a sense of schools being under pressure from a range of policy developments and proposals, many of which were not well understood by the public:

It's a bit raw at the moment—we are right in the middle of things, aren't we? We had a little win as far as the class ratios go but now it's a matter of holding our breath and seeing where the next attack is going to come from.

Parents are kind of protected and don't realise the narrowing and standardising pressures on teachers.

Indeed by 2012 National Standards were being seen as just part of a wider policy problem:

[In our local group of schools] concern about National Standards has sort of levelled off but in a bigger climate of everything else that's happening.... National Standards isn't the one thing [affecting school atmosphere and morale] so much anymore now.

This government has signalled they are on a particular course, National Standards is one part of that but there is a real concern around performance pay and particularly with a link back to National Standards.

Performance pay was seen as damaging:

It can't work because you've already heard teachers talking, joking about it, you would want to select your own class, wouldn't you? If you are being judged and were a teacher who did an amazing job with low achievers, raising them up, the progress isn't going to be enough, you would want the top class, wouldn't you? And then teachers would lose that collaboration and be worried about sharing their resources, sharing their ideas. And that's a big strength in the New Zealand system, I think, and in our school.

Future directions

The principal of Seagull suggested that schools had reached a kind of plateau with National Standards and were wondering what was to come:

People are still trying to work with them. Now the emphasis has changed to what happens to the data and what is the next step? After league tables do we have performance pay for teachers? What have we got next?

How schools would respond to the continuing release of the data and how much manipulation of data would occur also remained to be seen:

There is a bit more at stake, I suppose, particularly it might be putting pressure on those schools where it doesn't matter how much progress the children make you will still have a good proportion below, and I think that's sad because it doesn't recognise the progress that has been made. I guess the question is whether everyone will follow all the directions from the Ministry around their data, will everyone include all their ESOL and special needs students. Because we have seen this in the United Kingdom, haven't we, where things are manipulated over there because exam results have been high stakes.

4.3 KANUKA SCHOOL

General changes at Kanuka

During 2012, another of the SLT had taken on significant responsibilities in the sector that would generally be regarded as outside the regular work of school leaders. With two of the senior team now strongly involved beyond the school, there was a sense of this school increasingly becoming the dynamic exemplar of how the Ministry would like schools to be these days. Yet while they were often supportive of recent policy developments, the senior team at this school were not simply 'on-message'. Concerns and frustrations sometimes tempered their support. It was particularly clear they saw little value in labelling children 'well below' or releasing the National Standards data for comparative purposes.

Development of National Standards at Kanuka

One significant development with National Standards at Kanuka over 2012 involved changes around standardised testing. This had mainly been prompted by an ERO review that had recommended the school look at new approaches in this area:

We have just made our [reading] judgements on PM Benchmarks ... so we have since put PROBE back in, as soon as a child goes into the 'above' category they get PROBE as well. (DP)

We're going to be bringing in PROBE again, which is something we did in the past ... and the reasoning behind that is the need and the desire to make a really well-informed OTJ. And so we're also going to bring e-asTTle reading into that for children at a certain level from light blue reading and above.

Another important change was that Kanuka School was told during the year that it had to use the 'well below' category it had previously been avoiding (Kanuka's objection to using this category is explained more shortly):

I have actually changed the graph because I had to submit 'well below.' They were already there and you could see exactly where their levels were but I had that whole argument, "Who says this is well below and if I'm saying this is well below and the school beside me says it's something different, then how is that valid?"

There were new developments in working with parents around guided reading:

And we're branching more into both areas, having parent workshops where we're targeting specific parents of children at risk, inviting them personally to attend the workshop but also opening it up to other parents who would like to help their children with reading so with a view that we would love to have parents come in [and take the] Pause, Prompt Praise programme. So it's about trying to build capacity in a variety of people and again engage parents and their children directly in their children's learning. So that while we might do this with their eldest child, they'll then have the skills to be able to do this with all their siblings and hopefully they won't appear in our at-risk column.

Another development was the upgrade of systems for recording, analysing and reporting achievement:

[W]e've had issues with software programmes not being able to filter for the, in particular, after one year, after two years, after three years. It's fine for year four, five, six but for those three cohorts it's difficult to filter for, so we've ended up having to purchase an additional package to our software, \$500 this week, which has allowed us to create these reports, ... I still have to jig around and copy and paste and crop and put it all together in a document but the table itself is created by the software.... Because the Ministry require us to set our targets on data at the end of the previous year, the system can't do it, so we've still not got a system that works perfectly for us without having to do it manually and number crunch them. So that is new and we'll continue with that. We've also got another component of software, [an SMS] which has a National Standards component that we're entering the data into this year and it doesn't do everything we need but by the time we get two years' worth of data in there it will be more useful.

Finally, something not previously mentioned were meetings with the senior teams of other local schools to look at National Standards and e-asTTle. This development had come out of mutual involvement in an earlier contract: '[I]t is a bit guarded when you are sitting there, I guess you could say, but there's an attempt to see that things are flowing [between schools] and what other people are doing.' (DP)

Apart from these developments, Kanuka's response to National Standards was largely 'business as usual' as it continued to work towards an increasingly knowledgeable staff and better approaches for accelerating student progress (see quote, Section 3.3)

Impact of National Standards at Kanuka

When the SLT at Kanuka talked about National Standards it was often to stress that the practices around the standards system had become routine. As the DP put it, 'It's just normalised.' In general the principal was upbeat about the school's experience with the National Standards:

I think from the beginning I thought 'we'll do it our way and we'll do it for our reasons' and it's a great opportunity to increase teacher professional knowledge. Although ideally you want to be doing that regardless of National Standards, it just gave a heightened sense of urgency and focus.

I think there's been lots of good things but it really comes down to your philosophy and how you are going to approach it, and making sure that you're taking control of the process and being proactive and not reacting.

There's a sense of urgency out there. But I think, you know, the discussion that we had in the leadership meeting was 'why are we doing it?' 'What's the information for?' 'How is it helping us?'

You always could do with a lot more [resources] but it's about being innovative and creative with the resources you've got.... So we've managed to achieve a lot and we have a lot of acceleration programmes, the staff get a huge amount of professional development because we've gone back to [the budget] right from the start and strategically resourced.

I think that we're very fortunate with the board that we currently have who keep bringing it back to children.... How is that improving outcomes for children? So keep coming back to that. Keep the [children the] main thing, the big thing.

[The board] absolutely want us to be accountable, they want to be able to look our community in the eye and say yes, we've done the best thing that we possibly could for our children and some things we have to take a long-term view and sometimes we can make short-term gains. But it's always about kids and getting the best possible outcomes for children [while] knowing that there are certain [basic needs] that have to happen before learning can happen.

I was so pleased in our leadership meeting, [a senior teacher] talking about more testing, another test. Wow, I thought that was interesting, usually the argument is 'less is best', and my question was 'Well, why would we do it?' and then the discussion started, you know, 'I don't think we are getting enough data up here', or 'I don't know that this one is hitting the spot'.

This positive outlook extended to Ngā Whanaketanga as well.

[Those developing Ngā Whanaketanga] are wording things in ways so they avoid being like National Standards. I mean it does look similar but they're avoiding some of the things that we are struggling with, some of those milestones like after one year, two years, three years and then to switch to the end of [years] four, five, six.... [The Government] are thinking of it [making Ngā Whanaketanga more like National Standards] but the people who are involved in developing it have their own mind too.

I think the success that we've had so far in the implementation of National Standards and Ngā Whanaketanga is that we didn't sit back and wait for it to be handed to us on a platter, delivered from the Ministry of Education....

As noted above, one thing that had not gone so well in 2012 is that Kanuka had been told they must use the 'well below' category. This did not fit well with the school's stance in relation to deficit thinking:

We're still in two minds about the 'well below'; we specifically said we don't want people getting hooked into that term because my fear is that it will induce deficit thinking—"those children are 'well below', therefore they're not going to make the progress so we'll just focus on the rest of them"—we don't want that. My belief is that

we have 'below', 'at' and 'above' and that's just fine. I have a special needs register, we have our SENCO who manages all of the special needs acceleration programmes, they are on our register, we're constantly reviewing that on a termly basis because children's learning targets are moving and so and that's where our 'well below' children will be. Why do we need [that label]...? We don't want to label them 'well below' and our parents have given us that message from children that, you know, have like globally delayed or whatever their diagnosis is, they don't want to see that on the graph every time.

Forwarding of National Standards data to the Ministry

To the principal at Kanuka the main reason there had not been resistance to forwarding the National Standards data was that "principals are probably confident that the Ministry hasn't got the data to [make league tables] yet". Although "... with the tweaking of the way the data is organised, there are suspicions that that's where it's headed". This school's only 'hiccup' from the data sent in was being requested to provide more information about gender, at one level a petty request but also not so straightforward when asked for retrospectively:

I had someone come back to me and say you haven't done [a column of figures] for just girls. I said, "You haven't asked for it". I said, "Look at the all column, deduct the boys and you'll have the girls. I'm not doing it." You know, if you ask for something I'm happy to provide it but don't ask me six months later when I'm in this year's data and reporting on it and you're asking me to go back into last year's data when we've rolled over our software system. It's not easy for me to pick up. You know, "so get it right the first time and if you haven't got it right then when you ask for the next reporting format then tell me then".

Release of National Standards data by the media and Ministry

Interviewed in June 2012, the Kanuka principal and DP made it clear they were opposed to league tables:

I think there would be a point for me with league tables [a line in the sand]. I just can't, whereas with National Standards I can see the positive side, I really can't see the positive side of league tables so I would have a problem with it.

I'm against league tables. I think that's the most ridiculous thing ever. (DP)

They gave a variety of arguments to support this stance

What I have a problem with is people saying parents are entitled to the information about their children. They have lots of opportunities to get that information—league tables are not about that, league tables are about elitism, in my eyes. They're about justifying why I bought a home in [a middle class suburb], because I'm paying \$200,000 more for my house and I want to know that the reason I'm paying [more] is because I'm in a better area and therefore my children are going to a better school in the league table.

Basically we're against the league tables for the simple fact that we're looked upon as leading education on a worldwide scale because of the scope that we have with our curriculum and our marautanga and the localised curriculum and being able to actually develop that in the different contexts in which the schools are based. League tables would lead to a reverting back to a very narrow, truncated sort of curriculum programme running in schools that teaches kids how to sit tests well and not necessarily have a well-balanced holistic approach to educating a child. (DP)

Not only the pressure on the teaching staff to make sure that their kids know how to answer their tests, teach towards the tests.... When I was over in the United Kingdom [I saw that] when the results from the test come out, the parents sit outside and wait

for their kids to come out with their test results and they compare. So there's a whole lot of, there's another layer of pressure on the students themselves.... And that's definitely not what we want for our kids. (DP)

It would really close down the collegiality between schools as well, I believe. I just came back from [another region] last week and I was with a group of about thirty principals and that was just my group, the schools that we looked at, there were probably about twelve schools that were looked at. How open would those schools be with league tables in a competitive environment? So it's closing down that sharing of best practice across schools as well.

And I guess my question is again, it comes back to why would we do it? ... there's enough information out there through ERO reports where parents will make judgements about schools and where they think their child should go and certainly provide better information and more detailed information than a league table ever could.

Nevertheless it was not long before Kanuka School was getting requests from the media for its National Standards data. In the event it only sent data to the Ministry, not to Fairfax or the *Herald on Sunday*. This was achieved in a low-key way by stalling: "I'll get there, it will just be late." The Kanuka principal suggested the approaches of other local schools to these requests were mixed: "Some people did and some people didn't [send their data to the media]. Everyone [i.e., every school] did their own thing."

When the data was released in the last week of the winter term, the Kanuka SLT were at the principals' conference in Australia. They suggested the release had been 'resoundingly underwhelming' for the school, with no feedback from staff. The local paper not featuring the school or its results, presumably because it hadn't received the data, had helped this response: "[S]o I think that may have well have contributed to that [lack of impact]." The Ministry had sent an email with links to the Education Counts site and so the principal included that in a monthly board report and let staff know it was happening. Yet for some reason there was about a month's delay in putting data about this school up on the Education Counts site. When the data did eventually go up, the Kanuka School SLT were not surprised at seeing a PDF of their variance report:

I knew [the Ministry] had issues with the formatting and in the end their compromise was "just give us your variance report and your data and that's what we are going to put up, exactly as you presented it".

Kanuka's principal had been reassured by links to other materials like a recent ERO report and thought it was good that people could go in and get a more balanced view of the school and from a different source: 'I was pleased about that feature.' But the DP questioned whether there would be much public or even professional interest in the National Standards data that had gone up on the Education Counts site:

I think that our community, I don't think parents would go there to look for the best school, whatever they are looking at, at all. Or myself even, I wouldn't go there and compare two schools. Because you might go and read the ERO review which I would probably do but looking at the data ... it's not always that straightforward. And I know there are plans to make it more straightforward but ...

Template, PaCT and test changes

At the time of the last interview at Kanuka (October 2012), there was an impending meeting about the new mandated report format, so it was a case of 'wait and see'. Nevertheless the reporting format the school had followed for the last two years had been in line with the guidelines so "we don't expect it will look particularly different".

When interviewed in June, the PaCT tool was still largely an unknown. It was regarded as possibly ineffective, possibly a waste of resources, but it still represented a welcome willingness to innovate:

I can understand why they're wanting ... it's this vicious cycle between principals being suspicious about what you're doing with the data and so I'm going to put it in a way that you're not going to be able to do anything with it, really, and therefore the Ministry react by saying, "Right, we're going to give you a tool that everyone has to do this because we need to know what's going on in schools." Again, haven't they got other tools? They've got ERO, they've got other ways of seeing where the schools—they already know who's effective and who's not so effective. They can name them; they just won't do it publicly. And so what are they doing about it? I think that there needs to be a whole overhaul, you know, the whole establishment of the SAPs—there's some good thinking about giving support to those hot spots within the wider education community, but how you actually implement that? ... despite all this change and despite some of the things I don't like, what I will give them credit for is that they're saying, "Some things aren't working so we're going to stop doing those things and we're going to try and do something differently."

By October, the SLT at Kanuka had seen a presentation on PaCT and had decided that there were "some good points about it, some usefulness for teachers". The principal noted that there were mixed messages from the developers and the Ministry about when it would be ready but the Novopay experience was suggesting that "they might take longer and try to get it right".

Kanuka had started using e-asTTle writing and used it once schoolwide by the October 2012. In line with later national discussion about this assessment tool, some inflating effects had been noticed:

The biggest thing is that our children that are maybe 'at' and 'above', the results have come back quite inflated. We know they already good and above but they come out at high school levels. But it could be because it was our first time doing it, we did quite good moderation though but we think we have areas to improve. (DP)

Relationship with the Ministry

Kanuka School's relationship with the Ministry had been variable, sometimes good, sometimes frustrating. The senior advisor concept had not worked well here. The SLT and board never met the first senior advisor allocated to their school:

We were emailed to say she was leaving and we'd be assigned a new one. And could we fill in this evaluation of her and I thought, who are you?

The replacement senior advisor had been the one who had advised on needing to use 'well below'. This had led the principal to query what the definition of well below was. But by October, several months later, there had been nothing back. Instead the second senior advisor had also resigned and at the time of the interview the school hadn't been allocated a new one yet.

Another problem was that the Ministry was sometimes enforcing compliance without doing its homework first:

We were invited to a meeting on reporting and we didn't choose to go to that meeting because we didn't think it was relevant because we knew all that stuff, then received a letter to say, "It's come to our attention that you have not attended this meeting and we'd like to know why you're not attending these meetings" ... and they then actually looked—because they hadn't even looked at our reporting, and said, "Oh I see why you haven't attended because actually you've already done it so you don't need to attend." But I thought the fact that they've sent quite, I thought it was quite a forceful letter, and they hadn't even bothered to check, I thought was quite frustrating.

Despite these problems, and despite the Novopay debacle highlighting a "general mistrust of the Ministry" from schools, the Kanuka principal stressed that if schools wanted to bring about change, they needed to remain willing to engage with the Ministry and Government:

I think the problem with being too black and white is that people have painted themselves into corners and ... yeah, and they've stopped engaging in a constructive way to move forward. So it's about, I sat in a meeting recently where somebody said,

“Oh, we just won’t invite the Minister, you know, ha ha”, and I thought, what a waste of time because if you don’t engage you have no influence and it’s all about influence. Do you want to have an influence? And I know as a principal I have very little direct influence—it’s all indirect through my team, because I’m not in the classroom. And so the same thing with the Ministry—keep engaging.

Views of the wider policy environment

At the time of the October interview the Kanuka SLT had not had time to form a view on the merits or otherwise of charter (partnership) schools: ‘Too busy, right at back of the line. With Novopay it was felt that the problems were both with the system and in schools and their ability to cope with change as well. The area that most animated the Kanuka principal was performance pay:

I like the idea of being able to remunerate high performing staff. I wouldn’t hook that into National Standards. I don’t believe that would be the correct measure to use in our school. Are we talking about end point data, are we talking about progress; and my fear, I guess, is what kind of effect is that going to have on collegiality, sharing of best practice within our school and the culture, the change to the culture of the school. I’m not against remunerating high performing staff, though. You know? I do want experienced staff to stay in classrooms, quality teachers in classrooms, and otherwise it’s moving up the ladder and out of the classroom so that is a concern.

We do it already in other ways by providing release, running special projects. I’ve got two teachers at the moment that are released part of the day to run an acceleration programme for Maths, an acceleration programme for writing. We have limited term unit holders, and those are advertised to the whole staff at the end of the previous year with criteria and so they apply. So there’s opportunities for leadership for all staff, not just for my formal leaders in the school, and that’s remunerated, those units ... [but] ... it would be nice to have some flexibility, only because I like to think creatively and innovatively and if there was a resource that I could do that with then I’m sure I would find ways to do it. But the devil’s in the detail. I’d like to see the detail because when you’re managing a budget, and this will be constrained by budget. There will be a finite budget set in Wellington for performance pay. So what if I have ten teachers that deserve remuneration and I only get enough money for five? Who gets it? ... And if I remunerate for one thing this year but our focus changes—and this happens with limited term units—you know, this year we’re going to be focusing on writing and maths and next year we’re going to be focusing on art and reading. The writing and maths leaders are still there, probably still doing pretty much the same job they were doing before, but they’re not being remunerated for it. Is that fair? Or maybe they will want to stop doing it because they are not getting their unit anymore. You know?

Similar support for remunerating the best teachers and keeping them in the classroom in Māori-medium education was also noted:

It’s the same themes coming through—because we want the best people in front of our kids, we want the best speakers of Māori, we want the best people that know about best practice in Māori-medium education, literacy, mathematics. (DP)

Future directions

For the SLT at Kanuka, change needed to be embraced and would need to continue to be embraced as long as some groups such as Māori and Pasifika were not succeeding in the system. To this senior team, there had to be educational solutions to the needs of these groups. While all the answers might not yet be apparent, the SLT felt they were making progress and that a cynical or defeatist mindset was not going to help (see quote, Section 3.3).

4.4 MAGENTA SCHOOL

General changes at Magenta

Magenta began to struggle a little in 2012, mainly in relation to its roll. Although situated in an idyllic rural setting that people often chose for lifestyle reasons, the school was not unaffected by the economic insecurities of the times. A few families moved out of the area for work, each taking two or three children with them. This was enough to cause problems in a small school. In some cases these were families that moved out of the region, in others they were moving to the nearby city and putting their children into city schools for convenience.

The most immediate effect was that the school would need to combine two senior classes and lose a teaching position in 2013. There was no need for a CAPNA process because, mindful of a potential decline in roll, the school had employed long-term relievers. There were other staffing issues as well with a teacher off with a lengthy illness and another resigning to take up another position late in the year.

The declining roll was also creating some insecurity about the future of the school in the context of the merging and closing of Christchurch schools and the fear that this rationalising approach would eventually be taken across the country:

We are highly likely to be one of those schools put up for rationalisation because we are within 12km of another, slightly bigger school, we are a school that has slightly less children than what it has had, we are a school with old buildings—all of those factors are ones that would tick us as a school to be targeted for rationalisation.

Development of National Standards at Magenta

An obvious step taken to reinforce the National Standards agenda at Magenta in 2012 was to put in the four-point scale in end-of-year reports rather than the previous description under ‘progress in relation to national standards’, whether the child was ‘working towards’ the expected curriculum level, ‘working at’ or ‘working above’. This had been as a result of an ERO review of the school:

We changed that because that was what ERO said the Ministry wanted. We then had a conversation as a staff and said, ‘Can we live with this?’ And we said, ‘It’s only a small portion of the report’, we’ve put it at the end where those who agree with a political view of education and want that descriptor in it can live with it and have it but the rest is what’s important. So we will put it in to be compliant and so we are not told by ERO we are not performing our role or our job.

Nevertheless the principal of Magenta was at pains to stress that the staff there “still don’t believe National Standards are about learning”, but rather had decided to be compliant “so we don’t make a rod for our own backs”. They remained keen to see the National Standards as a supporting document to the New Zealand Curriculum that had to remain the focus, “... otherwise you run the risk of the supporting document becoming the curriculum”. This focus on the curriculum was certainly more than mere rhetoric, it animated discussion of what the school was doing such that even activities like target-setting and moderating in a cluster of schools were being seen through a curriculum lens as much as possible:

We have set our class targets and then school targets according to National Standards because I don’t believe in using multiple things, if that’s a legislative requirement we may as well use that as some kind of benchmark. So we’ve done that. But everything we’re doing relates in and around curriculum development. So National Standards, although they do come to the surface on occasion, it’s around the benchmark that they formulate in terms of target setting. They’re useful in terms of having that benchmark that is a recognised one that we should be striving towards but we certainly don’t want it to limit our performance in terms of under-achieving because we have students that

are achieving beyond. So by keeping them as a benchmark we are not living by them, we are using them as a benchmark.

Our focus is on the curriculum and still will be. So therefore the work we've done with National Standards is under the context of writing moderation, so understanding what the standard is.

Impact of National Standards at Magenta

Although the effects of National Standards were creeping in around the edges at Magenta, and the policy was clearly causing some concern to its principal, it was argued that National Standards were not yet having much impact on this school's curriculum:

We've intentionally broadened our curriculum if anything, not reduced it. We have regular curriculum update parent meetings to say this is what our latest thing is that we're trying to get across. So, informing parents of the reasons and purposes of things. I think a lot of people are realising that schools are setting up and preparing for life and what you need in life is not isolated elements of a curriculum, it's needing to have knowledge of all aspects of it even if you do go into a specific field that doesn't require quite so many.

One of the reasons parents were supportive of a broad curriculum was possibly because of their own diversity of interests and lifestyles:

We are a diverse group. We do have our musicians, we do have our artists, we do have our scientists and our businesspeople.... And collectively everyone seems to get on so therefore must be respectful of everyone's choices of lifestyle and occupations and so can appreciate it is a big world and we need to be a part of it.

It was also argued that by merely raising questions about primary schooling the National Standards policy had prompted useful professional reflection even amongst those who had little time for the policy itself.

The one thing that National Standards has helped schools with is for us to very quickly reflect on what is quality teaching and what do we need to improve student achievement. I believe every school has done something to improve their performance. It's not because of National Standards, it's because an opportunity has opened for us to reflect on our practice, why someone is questioning it in the first place.

Forwarding of National Standards data to the Ministry

The principal of Magenta suggested that the main reason that principals had not contested the forwarding of National Standards data to the Ministry was that given the variation of data being forwarded, they couldn't imagine the Ministry could do much with it: "I haven't actually had a discussion with any other principal but I felt that you couldn't make anything useful out of it so have it if you want it." At a personal level, for this principal it was 'playing a game':

I fulfilled what was required of me. Because they couldn't be aligned perfectly I didn't care about them to be honest, they had no useful value to me; I filled a legal requirement.

Interviewed just after submitting the data, he wasn't expecting any feedback on the data from the Ministry, more a case of 'no news being good news'.

I'm assuming that if there was something that was offensive or deemed to be an incompetent school you would get some pretty quick feedback, get told you need to do something about it, might even be offered support!

Like any data you can manipulate it for the real purpose you want it for so when we know what that real purpose is and get the backlash or the pat on the back then that might be relevant to us.

By later in the year there had still been no feedback on the data, despite it being published on the Education Counts website.

Release of National Standards data by the media and Ministry

Magenta School had not released data to Fairfax. ‘We said, it’s so close to Ministry release, get it from them.’ Consequently this school’s data wasn’t in either the local newspapers or the online Stuff release. Shortly after the data came out, the Magenta principal was asked by a board member what he thought so went on both the Stuff and Education Counts websites. And “I just thought, what a ridiculous waste of time, why would anybody want to spend time rummaging through and trying to work out what it meant?”

I thought the [Stuff] data looks similar, but it’s just numbers that mean nothing. And then I went on to the Ministry website and saw they had scanned exactly a copy [of our analysis of variance]; it was slightly askew and didn’t look like it had much care taken to it. And I thought well if that’s what you really think of our data and is that really working with us? Underwhelmed. Absolutely. And I really don’t understand any logic of how that will educate parents or create any understanding of educational direction or support student achievement in any way.

There had also been some discussion at a board meeting: “So what do you think about this? But no one was saying how does our data compare?” At the same time:

I did have a conversation about how was that beneficial to our students ... [but] they still asked it again. So yes there is a buy-in from parents who wish to have an easy comparison number to look at and go “we must be better than them”.

But then again there were no comments from parents who were not on the board and only two teachers had bothered to look at the data online (both went to the Stuff website). One was the teacher rep on the board, who was responding to a query from a board member. The other was curious as to how the data would be presented. Neither felt the website was informative or of any real value.

Overall, the Magenta principal felt the release of the data had been an anticlimax: “a non-event, no-one is that interested, a lot of the education [about the limits of the data] had gone around.” But he also thought that if in future years the way in which the data was presented became more readily comparable or there were more direct comparisons made on the basis of it then the situation could become very different:

If there’s going to be more analysis or more access to it, something different to it [than this year], then yes, people will play the game.... It’s interesting talking to secondary school colleagues who have openly talked about the game that high schools play and the different systems they use. So that has already enlightened us about how can we play the game, if it comes to that point. But it shouldn’t be about playing a game, it should be about student achievement and outcomes for them.

Template, PaCT and test changes

Interviewed in December 2012, the Magenta principal had not yet looked at the new required template for sending National Standards data to the Ministry, nor did he mention any problems around the revised tests. But he was concerned about the PaCT:

Again, if it’s not going to help our end goal and our vision as determined by our charter we don’t want to be a part of it ... I would say [it] was for Ministry requirements more so than assess-to-learn requirements. So we’ve come a long way from where we were in terms of [use of data and the curriculum] and I don’t want to go down that journey just because there’s a pretty tool that can help.

My thought too was that's a clever way of getting buy-in because we've got an OTJ tool to do it all for us but where is all of this housed? In the cloud somewhere, which means it's a way of accessing the information required or performance pay or accessing professional development subsidised from the Ministry for all those other elements which again I am sceptical about.

He had seen a model of PaCT, most likely one of its earlier iterations that were more focused on formal assessment tools:

I went to an unveiling, just thought this is another vehicle to get data for the Ministry, that the Ministry can use, more than to support an OTJ. Because it is only dealing with numbers from a formal test, not an OTJ. That's how it was explained to me. You put in the test data, it comes up with an OTJ. But an OTJ also includes observation and other tools used to make that decision. Triangulation of data, not just formal tests. There may be another component within it where you put [the qualitative data] in but that would be watered down with the formal test being the dominant descriptor of the OTJ, I would have thought.

Relationship with the Ministry

The Magenta principal had quite a good relationship with the senior advisor allocated to that school. She had visited the school twice, and had been to a board meeting to talk about the school's charter. The Magenta principal had known her previously in another educational role, "so because there's history and knowledge of who they are it has helped". But he was still being cautious:

She has done a lot of PR work and relationship building trying to build rapport, which is great. But until I understand what the end outcome is in terms of the Ministry following what the Minister is directing, I believe I need to be careful about the relationship I have with that senior advisor.

Views of the wider policy environment

The Magenta principal noted that the policy environment around primary schools was becoming increasingly complex but that it was important to see possible connections between developments:

Because there are so many different things going on its hard to see what's a smokescreen for another part, or is it just policies that are becoming defunct because they don't function and so they are falling off the wayside.... Is it distracting schools from other things that are going on like the rationalisation of resources?

It seems funny how this bit works with that bit works with that bit and there's little bits of information that come around....

An example was the area of Special Education where the principal noted what he saw as an increasing gap between the rhetoric of reform and what was happening 'on the ground':

If the tail is what we're really trying to get moving, why is the policy to get rid of learning support teachers? Why is the policy to reduce or eliminate special schools? ... we've got to realise that a lot of those kids who fit into that area are never going to reach NCEA Level 2. So be honest about the fact that not everyone will reach it.... Then the next group up, which is supported by the learning support teachers, new support teachers are gone next year and will be replaced supposedly by extra RTLBs but those jobs haven't been advertised, are they going to start at the beginning of next year? If they're not, is that where the money's going to be saved? So we've got this whole group of kids that will be lost. They are the tail. How are they being supported? How are schools meant to pick up that shortfall, which is the difference? If expert teachers are going to have to help make all teachers into quality teachers, where are these experts going to come from?

The sense that so much was ‘under review’ meant worrying about possible future developments, such as the cutting of Classroom Release Time:

I suppose if you’ve got enough suspicion around the saving money kind of thing, does CRT drop out of it?... One could [see a tension between] CRT with quality teaching because the more contact with the kids the better relationship you have, the better the outcomes. But the fact is that teachers are working harder than what they ever have and if there isn’t either a reduction in workload or expectation there’ll be burnout. And I think there are a number of teachers who are burning out and it is very hard to manage in and around the current environment of suspicion that we’re not doing a good job.

The Magenta principal reported some local principals feeling depressed and overwhelmed while others were concentrating on local matters that they felt they had more control over:

One can feel really bad about the whole situation or one can simply go, ‘OK, I understand this may occur but it’s the here and now and what am I doing for these kids right now that counts.’

He reported one local cluster being more upbeat than another. Adding to the sense of powerlessness was the perception of being both ignored and silenced:

If the Minister won’t speak to us, but will listen to the public, how is that connection going to be made? We’ve got to voice legitimate concerns that we have not because it’s the National Party but because it is a policy that is dangerous for, and certainly not there for the betterment of education, how are we meant to get support to get the Minister to reconsider? And I use the term Minister as Ministry, Government, whoever it is making that decision.

We were emailed ... I believe every principal was emailed and told that ‘you should not use your newsletter as a political forum’.... I believe it was addressed to all principals from the Secretary of Education. And she, I’m pretty certain, although there were a lot coming from all sorts of avenues; I presume she was directed by the Minister....

Future directions

In the middle of the year, the National Standards debate seemed to have gone quiet, perhaps pushed out by the class sizes issue. But to the Magenta principal, it was very much a case of ‘rust never sleeping’:

I believe [the National Standards policy is] on the back burner there somewhere. You wouldn’t have spent the 30 million dollars or whatever it was to roll it out and you do absolutely nothing with it, although people forget very quickly but I’d be amazed if it just dies a death. I think it’s there to be used at a strategic time. But again, if it did die, great. No features or benefit to us as far as I can see.

His concerns for the future lay around National Standards underpinning performance pay and competition between schools:

It’s really a case of I see it in a future that could be performance pay determines school credibility, which means we’re only about promoting ourselves in the best light ... we don’t, I certainly don’t want to be a part of that because if I become competition to neighbouring schools we’ve lost the whole purpose of education.

I believe that [National Standards] will become the measure of a quality teacher.... The government’s using 2009 data to determine that we’re under-achieving and it’s an NCEA level so it’s not even primary-based statistics as far as I understand. So to determine what a quality teacher is there must be some kind of tool to be used and [National Standards] is the only one that I can see the Minister is [preparing].

Any policies that were likely to be damaging had to be considered from the viewpoint of extended professionalism:

Again, explaining concerns around policy, what it means for students and student achievement, if it can be legitimately done then I see that we have to do something. To sit there and do nothing, all it means is that you're supporting a policy. So I don't want to get political, I don't want to rally around but if I do nothing I believe I am supporting bad policy and I can't live with that.

4.5 CICADA SCHOOL

General changes at Cicada

The 2012 year at Cicada did not see any significant staffing or other general changes that need to be raised here. Certainly staffing had begun to stabilise a little, but Cicada continued to be dominated by inexperienced teachers. Despite high unemployment levels, there were only 10 or 11 applicants for two posts that became available and nearly all the applicants were PRTs.

Development of National Standards at Cicada

The most important National Standards development at Cicada over 2012 was the development of some end-of-year goal sheets to scaffold teachers with making OTJs. This was because some staff had been making OTJs that were obviously problematic (see quote, Section 3.5) and because “a lot of people would prefer to make a decision based on a [formal assessment tool] rather than having to triangulate all the information they had on this particular child” (AP). The SLT needed to emphasise a broader understanding of OTJs and the process of making them, particularly in a situation where so many staff were inexperienced and lacked confidence:

What we're trying to do this term, this year, and it's just trialling, is they have to make an OTJ each term [to keep them] confident and I guess what I'm trying to do is I have no problem with people making an OTJ, we've done it for decades and what I'm wanting them to do is back their professional basis but make it an informed thing so the external test, I guess, STAR or PROBE or whatever, is just one of three things. Unfortunately in one area of [our school], two whole teaching teams were using the test as the default position, they started from there and so we've been having lots of conversations around 'Guys, this should not be the starting point, that is something you want to check with'.

Alongside this work on OTJs, Cicada School was also trying to more generally improve staff use of assessment data. The principal stressed that while this might help with National Standards, it was not a result of them. The school had had this focus on using assessment data to inform teaching for several years since becoming involved in the Pasifika strand of the Literacy Professional Development Project (LPDP; see Thrupp & Easter 2012, p. 109).

Impact of National Standards at Cicada

At Cicada the principal and AP gave a number of examples of the school's curriculum beginning to narrow as a result of the National Standards policy:

So we're in a big university contract to do with PE.... Now, we've had to mandate to people [this term], we've provided all the planning, you've all got to take PE a minimum of two times a week. Arts, the visual arts, I'm not seeing visual arts being taken. You go round the school and my last four appointments were all people who had Bachelors of Dance or Visual Arts or Fine Arts, I should say—you know, these are people who are arty so why isn't their passion coming through? ... they feel that the school and I will judge them on the basis of their literacy and numeracy results....

It's more about them, I guess, they want to be seen in a particular way. They think that we're going to make judgement calls about who is an effective teacher. You've also got the Minister talking about cuts in staffing, so [maybe] they think their jobs are at risk?

One of my [experienced] staff sent me an email last term saying that we should cut out all extraneous things in the afternoon so we can focus on numeracy and literacy. I said, 'You're buying into what you and I both hate.' But she's under pressure to improve the results of her kids. And there is pressure put on by the leadership team to improve results, there has to be. Because we are in the business of making a difference.

It's interesting because when you hear teachers speak, and we had another conversation around art, and other areas, and it's like 'well, we don't really have time for that'. (AP).

As can be seen from some of the above comments, the Cicada principal was aware that the messages being given by the SLT might be intensifying the pressures towards curriculum narrowing. He commented further:

I think there has been a narrowing of the curriculum and we're just fighting back now and part of it I've got to blame myself, maybe it was the messages, the hidden messages that I give, you know?

Forwarding of National Standards data to the Ministry

At Cicada there was disappointment but not surprise that schools had not more clearly resisted the forwarding of National Standards data to the Ministry in annual reports:

I think there were two things. One is people thought we have put it in a way that no one can make head or tail out of it; and secondly there was a group who were saying, 'I've run out of energy to fight on this. It's coming in anyway, why bother. We need to make it work'. And I think those are two quite prevalent groups. It's a real shame.

He was critical of a lack of leadership at national level around the forwarding of data and had written a letter to the NZPF about his concerns (he also sent a similar letter about charter schools):

[There's been a failure] by our principals' associations to really drive and they're all patting themselves on the back over how we fought with the Ministry and changed their decision on staffing. To me that wasn't the issue ... I wondered whether that was a red herring—that people wasted a lot of energy on that and at the same time there were two or three big government things going through that sort of went under the radar a bit.

There had also been a more specific problem with the head of the local principals' association:

He doesn't believe that principals should be political, they should just get on and do their job, and I think that impacted at a very crucial time in the direction of our professional body. There was a complete lack of leadership shown by the [local association] over the last twelve months, eighteen months.... He got voted in and basically if you're the vice president you become the president. [His is a] very, very good school, [he is] competent. However, there was a missed opportunity and I think the steam went out [of contesting National Standards].

Cicada School itself did not exactly 'fall into line' around the annual report in 2012. There was the issue noted in Section 3.2 of not entering National Standards data for all children. The principal was also trying to take a broader approach to the reporting than the Ministry allowed:

I got a phone call from [the senior advisor] ... saying "I need your annual report", which we had sent but it wasn't focused on what the Ministry wanted 'cause I had talked about our ten priorities for the year ... I had planned the National Standards but I had put those as part of the ten. And things like attendance was a really big one for

me, Positive Behaviour for Learning, because if kids aren't in school they're not learning and I also think positive behaviour is also about the culture of the school and if I get attendance and culture of the school I'm going to impact on OTJs. But they didn't want any of that so I was a bit saddened by that.

Release of data by the media and Ministry

Cicada school had not co-operated with requests for data from the media:

We didn't send any data to APN, or to Fairfax. I thought 'bugger it'. I expected them to come and see me but I had three emails from one group. But I've had a lot of little regional newspapers trying to get hold of me, 'Can you send us your data'? And what I do is I delete it without opening it ... 'what email?' But if they put it in a letter I'd have to take it to my board and ask for guidance.

The principal suggested the release had been "much ado about nothing at one level":

Very few teachers have actually gone and looked. The only ones are probably the SLT, no one in [middle leadership] claims to have looked at it and no Scale A even knew it was happening.... And with local cluster principals, when I brought it up most of them had not logged on [to the Education Counts website] to look at their school or any other school.

To be fair to the media, there weren't huge amounts, they were very restrained about whipping up a lot of enthusiasm.

The principal at Cicada had looked at the data on Education Counts:

I looked, and I suspect some of the others did too but they are just not admitting to it, because I was interested to see where we sit in relation to other [local] schools in terms of the notion of honesty. Because I already knew their scores at a real level. And there were two schools that were out of kilter and I had to ask why. Every other school in the area was within 5% points across the board [i.e., in reading, writing and maths for the whole school]; there was high degree of consistency. [Goes on to explain that the differences at these two schools reflected socio-economic and white flight and the overall similarities reflect local collaboration and professional development].

He commented on the Ministry release of data as PDFs:

I thought it was appalling, I thought it was unprofessional, I thought the Government should have said, "Why are we even going there?" They should have just stopped and met with the sector to develop some better templates.

[It was about] political expediency. The National Party had said we were going to do this so there was pressure to deliver it. And then they can say, 'We will now work with you.'

This principal made a number of comments about National Standards, the positioning of low decile schools and middle class educational strategies:

About low socio-economic areas I would argue that in a sense those areas have always been at risk, [the National Standards] will just give teachers a reason not to go to them.

I just think that some people are going to win out of the league tables and some people are going to lose so the winners are not [opposing release of data], why would they? Because it's very seductive, you know? League tables will force people to perform and then you get groups like was it *North and South* doing that decile weighting and suddenly [a low decile secondary school] is flavour of the month—well, I know [that school] really well. The bottom line is if you had a child who was going to go to [that school] or to [a high decile school], I mean they've got to get a bit more real than that ... I mean, if parents have choices they don't send them to decile one, two, and three

schools.... [The] decile weighting ... is really without any real value and it actually doesn't help the case because people in middle New Zealand look and think, bloody hell, why is [a low decile school] at the top and [a high decile school] down the bottom? That doesn't help the discussion.

I was at a dinner party in [a wealthy area], and everyone in the room bar me was pro-league tables. And they all said 'But we need to know how good our schools are in comparison.' And I said, 'Why?' And they said, 'So we can decide where to send our kids.' I said, 'All of you send your kids to private schools. So don't give me any rubbish about knowing how good the state schools are.' I said, 'Any of the primary schools in this area you send your kids are going to be superb. They're all good schools.' For a large portion of our parent community, the league tables will not change their decision-making about where they send their kids. And the second factor is we have a thing called zoning and I said, 'Local kids should be able to go to their local school.' The league tables are going to fly but I think they are going to be used to validate decisions for a large group of parents who already sent their kids based on economic reasons and schools that are predominantly Māori or are a brown population ... you know? We've already got enough brown flight out of this area.

Template, PaCT and test changes

The required template for National Standards data was not in itself causing any concerns at Cicada: "I actually don't mind the template because it's exactly what we have worked at anyway, it's very simple." But the PaCT tool was causing more concern:

I'm against [PaCT being made mandatory] personally. I'm not sure how much resource will be put behind it or whether [training] will come out of schools' operations grants, we do not know what it looks like.

Our staff rep on the board attended the session on PACT [at the STA conference] and came away quite incensed about the fact that we're putting so much effort into establishing protocols and building people's confidence around OTJs and then it's not an OTJ it's giving you, it's a median of all the assessment. It defeats the purpose, may as well not do an OTJ. (AP)

There were also concerns at Cicada around the recent assessment tool revisions, with the principal mentioning concern about the new asTTle rubrics inflating student achievement and that this might be intentional. Another concern was a paucity of PD to help teachers use assessment tools well (see also 3.2):

The new asTTle tools were rolled out with very little scaffolding skills to be successful with them. It's only because of involvement in [a university contract] that we have been OK at this school, the staff don't realise they have had more PD than most and would be struggling otherwise.

Relationship with the Ministry

Cicada School had finished 2011 having to comply with a 78J letter (see Thrupp & Easter, 2012, p. 118). It did that and was subsequently congratulated for the quality of its charter:

So the board instructed me to obey the 72J or whatever it was so I did. We then got a lovely letter [from the Ministry], and literally it was a gorgeous letter, saying that our charter was exceptional. And our charter *was* really good because it was really targeted and really focused.

The Cicada principal stressed this had happened more because he was supported by a voluntary organisation involving successful businesspeople than because of National Standards:

... they only want to work with principals and our area of focus is strategic planning. Where they say there's something they can bring to the table. And my mentor happens

to be the CEO of [a very large company] so he knows something about strategic thinking and planning and as a result of that the whole thing has become a lot more targeted. Nothing to do with National Standards.

In fact as indicated above with the annual report, Cicada School was still not always being ‘on-message’ but there were usually specific issues at the heart of why Cicada was trying to do something different:

[L]ike community engagement. Now, that was one of our areas. The Ministry didn’t want to know about that but to me that’s fundamental—if I don’t get community engagement we’re not really going to make the shifts in reading, writing and maths that we think we’re going to make, you know?

From the point of view of the Cicada principal, the Ministry also needed to be more transparent about its recommendations really being expectations:

They had the Kiwi school model. Now, they should have told us that is what they want. It’s not optional. I thought it was optional ... and I gave them lots of facts and figures. And when you go to the Ministry’s website and download the Kiwi School report, it’s actually cut and paste. You cut your report and put it straight in there, it’s a template, and that’s how they want it. And if that’s how they want it, that’s fine, but they should actually not pretend.... [If they had] said to me at the start of the year, well at the end of last year, ‘This is the template, you’ve all got to use it’, it would have saved me hours and hours of work.

Despite these problems, the Cicada principal was working on his relationship with the Ministry. In part this was to keep abreast of policy developments: “I wanted to know what’s coming up in the administrative or what was coming up this year that I didn’t know about that could blindside me in terms of government initiatives.” This proved “a bit of a waste of time” as the senior advisor allocated to Cicada School had been “too new into the Ministry to know really anything and secondly it probably wouldn’t have been her role to tell me anyway”. But in any case another new goal had been achieved, that of trying to have “a positive working relationship with the Ministry people”. It seemed that a key aim was to try to head off criticism that might come from the Ministry in the future:

Sure, I may not agree with Ministry policy and I know that people in the Ministry don’t agree with Ministry policy, but we’re all there about the kids so if I can work with them to have better working relationships, that’s a good thing. We have to work with the Ministry at some point; we’re all in it together. What that looks like I’m not so sure, but the kids in my school—I will only talk about my school—are not achieving as well as I would like. We will be 65–70% at national norms, National Standards, whatever; and that’s not good enough, you know? Long term it’s not good enough. But what was really interesting, and I had wanted to put that on the table to the Ministry from day one, and I wanted them to realise that this is not going to change in twelve months, there’s not going to be some charismatic figure that’s going to whip the troops [into order] and all the literacy and numeracy problems are going to be solved because I’ve inspired them or through planning or reporting processes. It’s damn hard work and it’s going to take a period of time and it’s going to involve huge parental engagement, there’s some issues around poverty, a whole lot of things need to come together. So I wanted to start framing the conversations now, not wait until the league tables come out.

There had been perhaps a dozen email conversations with two senior advisors the school had been allocated during 2012 (the first one was replaced after being transferred within the Ministry). They had also visited the school, once without any warning, but “it’s comfortable, I feel I have nothing to hide”. There was also something of a monitoring role developing:

She said, “Send me your strategic plan and your charter before it goes in and I’ll check it for you.” And she said, “If it fails this time the Ministry’s response will be different.” Which I thought was interesting.

One issue the senior advisor had not been able to respond to was why the Government wasn't highlighting the good news that was available ("... there's been a 92% increase in Pasifika achievement in NCEA Level One since 2005 and I think it's about a 65% or 64% in Māori achievement. Why isn't that being celebrated?") But she had been more helpful about setting manageable targets in a situation where "the Minister said she wants 100% 'at' [i.e., 'at' or 'above' National Standards], so there has to be pressure on [schools]".

[The senior advisor] said you've got your target groups, your three or four target groups that we're focusing on, she says if you can change those four groups you've done something amazing. And I really wanted to be clearer in my own head around that because if I've got 100 kids and I identify 15 of our at-risk kids and I really want to make a difference, if I can make a difference in those 15 kids then that's 15% improvement in a sense ... and it wasn't that she was saying 'don't worry about the other 85', but 'focus in on those target groups', and we have, and that's been really neat.

The Ministry was also offering some resources, in particular 'supplementary support funding' (see also 3.2):

The Ministry is not going away so I have to have a relationship with them. What that looks like may change depending on who is there. But at the moment they have come to us and offered some resourcing to support our strategic plan. At this stage the word 'National Standards' hasn't come into it, it's about children's learning. So I'm happy about that, it's to do with engagement of parents, something I feel passionate about.

It was helpful to have been offered this funding, but the principal of Cicada suggested it represented a kind of pre-emptive strike on the part of the Ministry:

I think it's the velvet glove. I think they know the community is going to say, you know, "What support have you given schools?" And the senior advisor said to me the first question they will get put to them if there are schools failing is, "What have you done for those schools?" This is from the Minister and the Minister's office. And she said, "And that, in effect, is a good question ... so I'm rushing around now making sure you guys know how to access this funding."

There was the further concern that if the school was not seen to be working with the Ministry, an SAP might be put in:

The schools I know with SAPs they haven't been able to get rid of them, even though the contract is finished, for sustainability the SAP still has a significant role to play. And I'm not saying they don't have a significant role to play but we don't need them, we know where our gaps are.

Views of the wider policy environment

In the middle of 2012 the class size debate dominated all:

The young staff are absolutely petrified. Because we have a lot of young teachers who are really worried that their job was going. I was constantly messaging to them, "Don't worry about it, at this stage we've received no information, don't worry." Then suddenly it was all going to happen and then in about two weeks it got overturned. But I'm a bit cynical about it because the intermediates got on board but the only reason the intermediates got on board was because of their specialist teachers. Because their base funding rate hadn't changed. If their specialist teachers hadn't changed, all the primary schools would have lost two to three staff because of it. It was just frustrating because the people looked at it from their own vested interest.

Later in the year it was suggested there was pressure on Ministry to claw back funding lost as a result of the class sizes backdown:

I already see it happening in the way they have organised staffing for next year. In the past if there's been a grey area it's gone in favour of the school. Now it's not.

Charter schools became another issue in 2012. The charter school development had been the subject of some discussion within the school and staff had been to some public meetings. The Cicada AP and principal raised a number of problems with the 'Partnership' schools including not having to have registered teachers and not being subject to the OIA. But they were also willing to see this development in context:

[Having been in the United States] I'm a bit more sympathetic to charter schools now, sadly. When you saw how underfunded and run down the public schooling system was, black parents didn't have, you know, the choices weren't available.

Future directions

Cicada's principal raised two main points about the future. One was that the National Standards remained an unfolding story:

Everyone is waiting to see what happens with this next tier of OTJs. Because it was such a mess, all the reporting, to the extent they have created a template, that's then going to drive what's happening going forward. So everyone's wondering what's going to happen when they actually have got the data more cleanly. I think the Ministry was quite smart, privately probably saying, "This is such a bloody mess. Let's not react to the data they are giving us now, let's wait till we've got the [better] data." And I think that was smart.

The other was that if opposition to policy were silenced, it would likely just be driven underground:

When I was in France a couple of years ago I spoke to a number of principals who had blogs under pseudonyms and that was the only way they could criticise government policy and there was a degree of dishonesty around that, I think.... [B]ut at the same time I applaud those men and women for taking that stance 'cause they were still saying what had to be said.

4.6 HUIA INTERMEDIATE

General changes at Huia Intermediate

After struggling with the CAPNA process over 2011, Huia did not, in the event, have to make any staff redundant. Two valued teachers sought and gained positions elsewhere because the future of their own positions became uncertain and that was enough to address the matter. However, in 2012 the class size issue, discussed under 'Views of the wider policy environment' below, would have potentially meant the loss of nine teachers at Huia and indeed was seen as a threat to the overall viability of the school: "It's a distraction from your core purpose. It's soaked up a lot of time and emotional energy from people" (AP).

Other changes at Huia Intermediate in 2012 included becoming involved in new contracts. One had to do with assessment and was being arranged by Huia's senior advisor for the school to be involved in in 2013. Interviewed in December 2012, the DP was still unsure of the details, for instance which staff would actually be involved, who was facilitating the contract, or how much it would be about National Standards. The other contract was on 'Positive Behaviour for Learning'. This was not in the pedagogy and assessment areas that Huia was wanting to work on but illustrates how the school faced multiple demands including those in other areas that could not easily be set aside:

I was a little bit resistant to it simply on the basis that it's just another thing and I said, "What are we not going to do, what are we going to take out in order to do this?", but I think the need is there and I think it's probably the right time for us to look at that as a school. And it's that whole 'sharpen the axe' thing, isn't it—if a lot of time and energy has been taken up managing behaviours and dealing with the ongoing results

... that's time and energy that can be spent on other things. So if you can reduce that, you are then able to actually put more time into the teaching and learning side of school as well. (AP)

Finally there was a new approach to working with middle leaders at Huia Intermediate with each member of the SLT mentoring just a couple of staff at this level:

So we're trying to actually grow their skills by listening to what they're saying and now our visits are more about supporting what our middle leaders are seeing and noticing and discussing rather than those walk-throughs that principals and DPs and APs make. Because although those are very good for you being 'seen' ... I'm seeing this is much more manageable.

Development of National Standards at Huia Intermediate

As noted in Section 3.3, Huia argued that they had done just enough to meet the basic requirements of the standards system:

Where it's going to go to will most probably look quite different to where it's at now but we had to do something to start. We were looking at the reporting process anyway so it just made sense to work smarter and use what we had to use and get our flavour into what we wanted to use as well. [National Standards] hasn't been a strong driving force but it's been there on the side and until we've all got to grips with it I think it's been more driven by SLT ... in regards to, I won't say protecting the teachers, but in regards to allowing the teachers to get on with their core concern, which has been effective teaching. Because we're not sure where it's going, how it's shaped and looks and we've brought them in at times when we need to but without overloading [staff] either, that's what we've also got to manage, these new changes. (DP)

Huia's specialist teachers of technology and the arts were also being kept 'in the loop':

They're aware of National Standards and I think they've got quite a reasonable understanding but that aspect of assessing reading, writing, maths across the whole curriculum is scary [territory] still. It will definitely have, once we get to that stage, it definitely will have impact on what they are doing as such but we're trying to get them involved all the way. (DP)

Despite the low-key approach being taken to National Standards in this school, there were a few notable developments in 2012. The format of end-of-year reports to parents made more of reporting against National Standards than the mid-year and end-of-year reports of the previous year, both some notes of explanation on the front page and using larger font and clearer statements of the scale within the report itself. Yet despite all this, the school continued with a five-point scale including 'well above', rather than the four-point scale of the National Standards. Areas other than reading, writing and maths were reported on a separate page against 'students' year level expectations', again using a five-point scale. "I hope parents read the print at the top and realise that the two are measured against different things" (DP).

On the other hand, a change from 2011 to 2012 was that *mid-year* reports in 2012 only mentioned students' year level expectations, so represented a step back from the mention of National Standards in previous reports, minimal though that had been:

We came to that decision because National Standards, by definition, are an end-of-year standard. So in order to report in the middle of the year ... you can't report in the middle of the year because you actually don't know. You can anticipate where a student might be in the middle of the year but you're reporting where the student is now. So we felt a student may very well be ... you know, in the middle of the year they can be below a National Standard but well on the way to being at it by the end of the year, so we've gone for the middle of the year as against the year level expectations and at the end of the year it will be against National Standards. (DP)

In fact leaving National Standards out of the mid-year reports had been a contentious decision within Huia's curriculum leadership group where several of the school's middle leaders had been keen to report against National Standards at mid-year. The final RAINS report will look at such tensions between different policy actors at Huia Intermediate.

OTJs also got greater attention at Huia over 2012, with the development of sheets for staff providing advice about a range of sources of data and also how assessment tools would match up with National Standards end-of-year expectations. One member of the SLT also circulated all classrooms to see how OTJs were being formed:

From our discussions and stuff we were getting feedback we could see that even though we had checklists that we had all agreed on, the data coming through was not getting the consistency we had hoped for. So they agreed and [the DP] said, 'Right, I'll go through and I'll see what I can see by doing a sweep through the school', so that's why she did it.

The DP reported:

I found the schoolwide data that we did at the beginning of the year, yes that was there. Teachers seem to like, or recall more easily more of the paper sort of test. Whether it was a unit test or even the e-asTTle was in the same vein but the hardest part is getting some consistency with reading, how you measure that progress during the year. If you didn't do asTTle what else you would do to do it or how you would report or what skills... The maths was more analytical because they were given pre and post-test and felt comfortable with that. The writing was a lot more difficult, some teachers developed a system that worked really well and they had three samples of writing, you could see the progress of what they've been working on. So we need to, as a school collectively perhaps, just have some more discussions about what we consider to be benchmarks for us. Maybe it's reporting three times, collecting three samples, maybe it's recording in such a way, maybe we have a focus on a particular focus or strategy or skill we're wanting.... Something that we're all comfortable with but allows them individuality because their classes are different ... but that's all that part in assessment that we really need to look at now, how we're doing it and there's a real risk of us having to collect data to satisfy the Ministry and us collecting data that's suitable for our teaching purposes. Because as you recall, whether they're 'well below' or whatever, that's diddlysquat to a teacher. They want to know what the kids actually don't know.

As mentioned earlier (Section 3.5), two Huia staff went to PD on the new e-asTTle writing assessment tool. This seems to have been the only PD closely related to the National Standards done by staff in 2012.

Impact of National Standards at Huia Intermediate

Members of the SLT tended to argue that teachers were making gradual progress around the standards system:

Last year they didn't [understand what an OTJ was]. I'm being absolutely honest there ... so my teachers [now] definitely understand OTJs and they definitely understand that we've got a way to go.

The whole National Standards debate in our school has made us feel a lot more concerned about the lack of work we were doing around assessment and the lack of skills our teachers have had, you know, because with National Standards we clearly saw straight away the National Standards and the data we were trying to collect didn't match at all, so we had to do a lot of work around that. Now teachers do know how to match asTTle with National Standards, we've done that, but in terms of matching their own data with National Standards a whole lot of work still needs doing.

This whole business of National Standards forced our staff to look at benchmarking our own data, forced our staff to really start thinking about the judgements they are making, really good in that sense, and it also forced an awareness in this school of a whole of areas of weakness when it comes to assessment in general. So it's been useful for us because those were messages [the DP] and I wanted to get across.

Even related approaches such as using the four-point scale (or in this school, the five-point scale) to talk about curriculum expectations had been of some value:

We have had a number of parents come back after our mid-year reports and say, "My kid is below their year level expectation, what are you doing about it?" And I think that's been quite useful because it's actually made our teachers really look at where the kids are at and be accountable for that. So with previous reporting you could make it quite vague, really, and if you wanted to you could give the impression that the kid was doing OK when really they're not, so we're forcing our teachers, really, into making a decision where is this kid at and then they have to own that as a classroom teacher and [say], "What am I going to do about this as a classroom teacher [to] move this kid on?" (AP)

These shifts amongst teachers were seen to be positive while at the same time there was some sense of loss as well:

You know, this is quite depressing because we have always been a school that likes creativity and likes innovation but in the end—and I have to say this to you—because of National Standards our team leaders and everyone, we've started to hone it, we're starting to hone in and narrow it down and everyone's got to do this, this way and everyone's got to do that, that way. Whereas we're a school who loves the curriculum, who allowed that individuality but now we're pulling it all back in tighter, we are. And at the same time as recognising it, I'm getting a bit of resistance because our school hasn't operated that way in the past. Do I think we're going the right way? Yeah, I do ... when I talked to individual teachers I could see there were huge differences in what they were doing.... But I'm proud of the fact that we're going slow 'cause those schools, you can't bang this, you just can't go, "You'll do it, you've got it, move on." It takes time. And we're a school that's going to take that time ... you know, so you can stand at the front and you can power the message and you can go "you will" and "thou shalt" ... but they won't behind closed doors and I know that, so I much prefer going the slow approach, for what's it's worth.

What was also apparent in 2012 was that the school still felt it was making these changes without much interest from children or parents:

The kids in the classroom know if they're in the bottom group, they know that and I don't think National Standards is going to tell them anything new. I think they know that so it's a bit of a non-event in their lives and I don't think they'd be too fazed about it. It's still a bit of a non-event for [parents] too. In the next couple of years we might see a change in that but not at the moment. (DP)

National Standards is still really new and a lot of people might see information in the media, I don't think they know where to go looking or how to look or what they should be looking for ... no individual has approached us personally to say, 'Can I see your National Standards results?' (DP)

I've had a lot of interviews with parents over the last few weeks as we've had our Open Day and Open Evenings to bring their children to [Huia Intermediate]—not one has mentioned National Standards to me. They want to know about our programme and what's available and the opportunities; all those sort of things but no single parent has mentioned National Standards.... And I'm talking about, you know, we've had hundreds of people through the school. (AP)

In this community what parents are concerned about is behaviour, behaviour of kids. Not once in the last two years has one parent spoken to me about National Standards,

not once. We ran a parents' meeting [in 2011], you know, we got all ready and prepared, we had [the SLT], we had a board member, we had two other parents and they were both on boards.

Local high schools were not showing much interest either:

They test the students anyway to whatever they want and they use that data primarily. They do [use our data] to give an indication where children sit but bottom line, the classroom teachers over at the high schools don't get that information. I'm not sure where they store it but I've talked to a few casually and I said to them, "Didn't you see that on our sheet?" "Oh, no." The deans or whoever's putting together the classes might see it together but they have their own assessment and they use their own data. (DP)

Forwarding of National Standards data to the Ministry

As noted in Section 3.1, the National Standards data forwarded from this school to the Ministry in 2012 was based solely on asTTle scores. This seemed likely to be the case in 2013 as well:

It's not an OTJ, it's meant to be an OTJ, that's what the wording is. But I don't have the evidence to present an OTJ and I'm not sure when we first start to get that evidence that it will be a good OTJ because we need some more practice at it. (DP)

So the data that's been reported on graphs is asTTle data full stop at this stage ... and because we've started that way I'm fairly certain we'll finish off that way. And to be frank, right now, with what's going on [public release of data], I'm comfortable to leave it at that too at the moment. 'Cause we can prove it.

We need another year or so of [using just asTTle scores] before we've got some good systems in place that will cover two years, we've got to somehow work out how to capture [for] Year 7 the end of Year 6 National Standards, how we can make sure we are getting that information for all the students when they enrol so we can use that as a beginning point. (DP)

We're not sending asTTle on its own to make us look any better. We're sending asTTle on its own because we feel confident that at least we've done a really good job at trying to make the delivery of that test consistent. That's the only reason why, whereas the way my teachers are using the other data I don't feel confident to put through the other stuff.

Also available at Huia were some comments about target setting as required by the charter that needed to be submitted end of January 2012. Clearly the process was extremely tentative without better data and without a clearer sense of Ministry expectations:

We just put three goals there based on the previous year's information because we didn't have data and we had to set them. The school hadn't even started and didn't have the data to send in, so the percentage had slightly changed and I used that referring to last year's so to speak and we just slightly changed how we're wording it. (DP)

... it's really difficult to reset the new [targets] because you really weren't sure exactly what the Ministry wanted you to do and how to shape and you heard stories about people who had theirs sent back and everything else like that. (DP)

If you look at your data from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, yes at the end of the year I had 70% we wanted to shift but in reality, did they all stay there for the whole year? Perhaps I should have said 60% because not all were there for the full year. So you do get a distortion with facts, with data. So it's not the most cohesive report but they wanted facts and numbers. I've given them facts and numbers, I gave it to the board in its entirety and the board said, "Send them the lot." So I sent the lot. (DP)

Our groups that make the biggest changes in those areas are our Pasifika and Māori students, definitely. So like I say, in a way, pat ourselves on the back because it would appear, compared with the others in our school, they're the ones that have made the extra gain so we are being more effective with those groupings within our school. Now whether that's a fair comment right across the board, I don't know. And if you're already 'at' and 'above' there's not as much room I suppose for movement either, that's the other thing whereas 'well below' and 'below' there's a lot of room for movement. (DP)

I've made some comments but I'd take [them] with a grain of salt at this stage. I'm not sure if that's the way we need to go or should go but I've got all the ticks and [the Ministry] liked what we put forward so that's all I can do. Passed the test and had it sent back anyway! (DP)

Part of the 'distortion' at this school was the combining of 'well below' and 'below' groups in order to make progress look more favourable than if these groups were left separate:

My comments in the end have just been grouping the bottom two together and saying the progress from beginning to end, the percentage of the students and that all that I've been able to really effectively been able to make a comment on. I suppose it's also shaping the information. You do it sometimes when you look and think mmm, not quite the shift you expected. So I'm trying to report in a positive light; I'm aware of how people might read it. (DP)

Release of National Standards data by the media and Ministry

Interviewed in August and September, just prior to the release of the data, the SLT at Huia Intermediate were not happy about this development but also thought it might not make much difference at the local level because parents were using much wider criteria to select primary schools.

It will be misinterpreted and misconstrued, it will be used for the wrong purposes, it will be disadvantageous to a lot of schools and students; it'll create a lot of debate, but not really informed debate; at the end of the day I do not believe any student will be better off for that and it certainly won't have improved their educational outcome. So for me I just cannot see the point. (AP)

Well, I'm not happy about it at all. I'm not happy about it in terms of I can understand the big concerns but as a principal of a school I actually have faith in my community, I have faith in my teachers [...] that the car park talk is still more important to parents than the data... because especially at intermediate and primary level—there are [fewer] parents who are going to go looking for hard core results. There are a lot of parents who still—this is from my years of experience—ask what school is your kid going to? What are the people like at the school? So my experience tells me that that's still going to count for a lot. For example, if we're talking real car park talk: [another school in this city] is known as a school where the kids achieve really highly, as a white school; I'm talking very generalising here. Huia Intermediate is known as a sporting school that deals with all sorts of kids and the kids there are pretty happy, you know? Those general perceptions have been around as long as I've been a cowboy. And those perceptions to a certain extent aren't going to change because [the other school] does get the kids from their community who are European, Asian and do tend to be in a higher socio-economic bracket. Now, as you and I know, that doesn't mean everything but those generalisations ... continue to flavour the schools.

Despite the reservations of the SLT, the OIA request from Fairfax went to the board, who decided to release the data:

Until now I guess I've been able to sit on the fence, and when I sent out the message to the board, the board had the data, we had discussed it at board level but when this

decision came [about whether to] send your data off, all the board were really clear to let it go.

So I put it to the board and said, “What are your thoughts on it?” and the board said, “No, we want you to send it unless you can give me a good reason not to.”

It became clear during the late August interview with the principal that staff were not yet aware that data had been sent to the Ministry and media:

In my day-to-day world we haven't discussed it but just talking to you now I realise I really need to let them know that's what I've done so that they can expect ... the fact that I've sent that data off, that will definitely bring up a bit of a discussion in our staff and we need to have it.

In the event Huia's data did appear in the local newspaper, the only RAINS school where that happened. Also the author was in this school the following week (last week of Term 3) and was able to record the immediate reaction of principal and DP (also other staff as well but that data is not reported here). Neither went online, they were responding to the publication of data in the local paper. The DP expressed surprise it was such a big story for the paper but was pleased there was no obvious ranking. For the principal, “the penny has really dropped about the gulf of understanding between the bureaucrats and the day-to-day practitioners”:

I'd hoped that common sense would prevail but we are a long way from that.... My daughter rang me up, “Huia's not looking very good.” I said, “Really? What makes you think that?” She said, “You look at the other schools, you are definitely in the lower third.” So that was her completely non-informed view but she's a woman who has got a brain and can read what a report says etcetera. So I said, “I don't want to start with you. I'll simply say that data we put forward was one set of data and it makes perfect sense in our school.” So interesting, ... she saw it as a statement about the school, a clear statement of this school compared to other schools. She felt our school did not look good in those tables.... I thought, oh my God, especially when she rang me, because I was being a bit blasé about it all.

What offended most was not being able to speak to the data and the sense of being judged solely on the ‘3Rs’:

At the end of the day I don't have an issue about the public or anyone knowing what's going on in my school. It's just that I didn't get a chance to qualify it or explain it or anything. I don't like that.

That statement [the figures] have said a lot to some people. And it's totally unjustified.

There's a rounded view of education [at this school]. And maths, reading and writing are not the only things that count in education. How do you measure all the other stuff? (Talks about sporting and cultural successes and the value of the New Zealand curriculum “because you can localise it”.)

Nevertheless both the DP and principal commented on how seductive it was to start comparing schools despite knowing the data was flawed:

As a member of the public, reading the newspaper and knowing I have a vested interest in my school, you do look. You look to compare against similar schools, other intermediates, for us. (DP)

Too soon to make any value judgement out of it, far too soon. But natural instinct is that you look. And then there's so many figures you start to look at [which schools] are exceptional. (DP)

And I felt quite encouraged by that [seeing schools of similar deciles with similar results]. Interesting, wasn't it? Gave us an interesting picture, a viewpoint. [Pauses] But once again, look at what I just said to you, I have no idea how they got their results, but I've made a statement, a statement of comparison! And that's why I haven't gone online but even what I saw there [in the paper] made me quickly check

out the other intermediate schools [in the region] to see where we sat. And I guess that's probably why I'm sitting a little bit relaxed today because those other intermediate schools there are very much where we are and so I'm thinking "all right..." And so in spite of myself I've already done exactly what this is going to do. Which it always does, doesn't it? If you start to publish statistics you start handing them around as if they are God's gift and the real thing.

The Huia SLT made a range of predictions as to the significance of the release:

I think it's going to change the game, I really do. No school wants to be languishing at the bottom and not having an impact. (DP)

When we look at assessment in our school, [we need to ask] why are we doing it? They have to ask themselves the same question, 'Why are they doing it?' They are trying to argue that publicising the results is going to improve the results. No it's not, schools are going to start fudging. Schools will start fudging.

Next we are going to get asked the questions [by the media], "What is your school doing and let's publish what this school has to say about why they are doing" ... that will come. Why will it come? Because parents will ask for it. Because parents who actually believe in this stuff will want answers to the questions.

By the middle of the week following the release of the data, the Huia principal had already mentioned the release of data in a staff meeting and board meeting. The staff response was described as "ho-hum" (remembering this was last week of term as well), although one staff member noted the patterns by decile. Of the board members, three hadn't read it, "they weren't up with the play, it hadn't featured for them, they hadn't engaged" but they had gone on to have a discussion about why the data was misleading: "They are all a bit clearer that they don't see it as beneficial."

Template, PaCT and test changes

By the time of the last SLT interview at Huia (December 2012), the new reporting template had yet to be considered in this school. Nor were there any comments about the revised assessment tools. As for PaCT, the concern at Huia was less about the tool than whether they would have the necessary data to populate it:

Some schools, could be us, I don't know yet we won't have enough data to put in that they require in the system. So schools will have to look at how they can make sure that their own systems are reporting what's being asked. (DP)

Relationship with the Ministry

Although Huia Intermediate seemed to have a reasonably constructive relationship with its senior advisor (who, for instance, was arranging some PD for the school for 2013), there were more general concerns about some of the directions being taken by the Ministry, which were seen to be mainly about cost-cutting:

So I'm really concerned about the Ministry at the moment, I've been concerned for some time now—you only need to look at things around ... for example let's look at RTLB ... the RTLB initiatives devolving or evolving, whatever the word is, from smaller groups to the bigger groups—it's not going to work. It's not going to work and I see it as cost saving in the wrong areas. I'm really concerned that the latest around behaviour management [is that] all these residential schools are going to close, we're just waiting to hear from the Minister that's going to happen. I've seen the recommendations from the reports about it and it's not recommended but everyone's saying the Minister's going to do it.

Well, I'm sure you've heard this before from other people, that's a continuing frustration for us, you know—we've been asked to do these things but the personnel and the resources aren't being given to do that. We've lost ... you know, with

amalgamation of RTLBs and bringing learning support into that and everything, I can understand from an economic perspective [the idea to] reduce the number of managers but it's not being counterbalanced by an increasing number of frontline staff, and in fact there's been a reduction. And the needs are getting greater. (AP)

The AP at Huia Intermediate gave a useful example of how one recent immigrant—just one of many at this school—was being left with little support:

I've had a boy start school this morning who is from Iran, been in the country three weeks. So somehow we have to integrate him into a Year 8 New Zealand class. There's no resources or funding come with him. And he's a boy who has limited English and a huge cultural adjustment to make but somebody has to work with him and look after that—we don't get funded for that.... He'll get some ESOL support but all that will give him is a couple of sessions a week with an ESOL teacher ... we'll try and get him some teacher aide time, but for the rest of this year he's basically going to be sitting on a seat trying to learn some English and adjust to the culture and ways of doing things and stuff like that ... and that takes time out of the classroom teacher has to provide a differentiated programme for him, really, and put some resources in place. So we don't want to turn kids away, whether they're a kid who's got limited English or a kid who's got hearing difficulties or a kid who's got behavioural difficulties, we don't want to turn them away but we just ... you know ... [need] help! (AP)

In a way that was related to wider policy developments as discussed below, the Ministry was also becoming a threat. For instance the 'reorganisation' of Christchurch schooling and other cases around the country was making schools worry they might not be rebuilt if they suffered some misfortune:

You just need to look at the school on the Coromandel that recently had its technology area burnt down. [The Ministry] has reduced about, was it 700m, down to 200 and that's all the Ministry is going to rebuild.¹³ So I think there is a hidden agenda; they will quietly manipulate things. (DP)

Views of the wider policy environment

The SLT at Huia Intermediate were linking the National Standards to wider critiques of education policy and the manner in which policy was being carried out:

National Standards by themselves are one thing; what the introduction of National Standards represents in terms of the big picture is different.... By which I mean the imposition on the education sector of a political ideology that's not based on education or outcomes, it's based on a philosophy rather than anything that really has to do with teaching and learning and so National Standards is just one aspect of that. As a tool in itself, as I said they're useful; but it's what is behind it. The ability then of having league tables, then the privatisation of schools, introducing the education as being a competitive marketplace model, all that sort of stuff, it comes with it. (AP)

I'm not interested in charter schools, all the viewpoints that schools and NZEI are putting forth, I totally agree with [those], I think it is a capitalistic decision rather than anything to do with learning and my reading tells me that and my discussions tell me that.

I hate the way charter schools, I don't know if you saw it on TV this morning, 'Oh, it's not a problem, charter schools are going to be measured against the National Standards.' I thought what they hell are you talking about, they are going to have different curriculum, different teachers, how are they going to be able to be measured against the National Standards, anyway? It was either John Key or John Banks, I can't remember which. It's as if they are now using National Standards as their God-given answer to low achievement. It's only an assessment strategy! National Standards, to

¹³ This was the case of Whangamata Area School, where the Ministry was arguing that because the school had 'significant surplus capacity', it could not approve a complete rebuild.

be frank, gives us nothing [except] it's been useful for us as a school [goes to clarify within-school value for getting greater consistency, developing assessment etc.]

[The Minister] goes back to the same old line, 'Five out of five children have the right to succeed, blah, blah, blah'. So she's running a little bit narrow, but I've heard her speak several times now and she has more than that actually.

I don't think the present Government has thought through a lot of aspects in relation to education and that's been shown by class sizes and staffing issues and no we're not going to release league tables and yes we are. I think they've been ill advised and at present are using other aspects, like just pure finances, to drive some of these issues because they haven't thought through the ramifications. And the fact that ... I won't say necessarily grass roots as such, but the education unions are not involved in this loop ... I think is really sad ... when you don't include the people who are going to have to work with this tool it's not ever going to be a real success. (DP)

It was the class sizes issue that had especially exercised Huia Intermediate:

Look, think about what happened with class sizes, that debacle ... if it wasn't for intermediate schools I don't believe we would have won that.... [T]here was no reason for our schools to close. If there was good reason—what [the Minister] did, and I see it as a cost-saving exercise, the class sizes debate I think would have gone through. But when [the Minister] put in the technology staffing with it, for me I would have lost nine teachers in 2013. Nine teachers! Now, if I'd lost nine teachers I would have had all these facilities but no specialists so that means parents are going to say, 'Well, why go to an intermediate? There's no need to go to an intermediate, we may as well stick with our primary school or stick with our full primary'. So that would have meant that intermediate schools over the next five years would have had to close.

We had to reinvent ourselves. It got serious enough for us to think OK, let's start engaging with Year 5 and 6 parents and I said to the board, 'Why would I want to do that?' ... now, the middle school model, there's only seven in New Zealand, the middle school model is gone. I actually think there's a really strong reason for middle schools to stay but it's gone and ... you've only got the seven and the high schools don't want to know us. So we discussed all these options at board level. Now, for the high schools, to be frank, they should let [Year 9 & 10] go. I don't see any value in a school of 2000-plus kids. To me that's just crazy. But if that had gone through they weren't going to let us in, they're not going to say, "Yes, I'll make an alliance with you and you'll have our Year 9 and 10." [Or the primary schools weren't going to say.] "Yes, I'll make an alliance with you, you can have our Year 5 and Year 6." Get real. We were over. And in one fell swoop within the next five years 120 intermediate schools would close.... Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying intermediate schools are better than anyone else. I'm saying that intermediate schools in New Zealand have their place and I'm saying that intermediate schools can offer a form of education for Year 7 and 8s that is worthwhile for a certain number of the population, just like the full primaries.

The class sizes debate had also exposed divided loyalties amongst different kinds of schools in the primary sector:

We were in a real precarious position because our NZPF colleagues, you know, were saying to me, "Well, who cares about you guys, anyway? You're sitting nicely in the National Standards little group there." [This was] because NZAIMS had a representative [on the NSSAG] whereas NZPF and NZEI didn't and a lot of our members were upset at that but we felt we were wanting to be in on what was going on. Our attitude was let's be in to hear what's going on at the table, that was the reason we went in. But my NZPF colleagues have said, "You're playing love nest with National Standards"; there was a bit of that going on, and we're a small group, so we were in a really precarious position. Because in that whole argument, even though [full primary and contributing schools] lost numbers in their staffing further down,

they got their technology staffing back. So that meant that the ratios they lost with the years one to six they gained back a little bit from the technology staffing. See, primary schools, in actual fact, had evened out.

Future directions

The SLT at Huia intermediate raised a number of points looking to the future. Some were around keeping politics out of the standards system as much as possible:

This is pretty much an intermediate school stance, although there are some intermediates that don't feel this way, that generally speaking we don't have a negativity around all of National Standards and [Huia] is typical of that attitude, I'll say that. So we communicate the messages, but I do not buy into the political arguments. I tell my teachers, "Look, I just want you to teach the kids" ... and at this stage that viewpoint hasn't got me wrong.

And the most discussion I have around it is at principals' meetings. But I'll be frank with you, a lot of the principals ... I just think they're way over the top, some of them, I really do. I respect them as people but I'm thinking, you're losing a lot of energy in this. I actually agree with them, I agree with them about league tables, I agree with them about the worries; but, you know, you're engaging a lot of energy into this when you should be focusing on what's going on in your own school. And that might sound like sitting on the fence but the Government is just religiously doing their steps through. I think it's going to come to a hard-core battle like the class sizes. Then I'm in. When it comes to that stage, you know what I mean? Then I'm prepared to fight. But if you look at the whole journey of this, it's just happening one stage at a time and I have filled out my surveys, I've made it clear how I feel as an individual principal and I'm backing my principals' [organisations, but] in actual fact ... I'm not going to lose too much sleep over it here in school. I don't want to have political arguments in school.

It was also a case of 'wait and see' as far as how the public would respond to the release of data:

My view is this: how the public responds when these results are made public and how that affects 'bums on seats' in schools will dictate how schools will react.... At the moment it's fairly low key but depends how ... far they intend to go with that publication and how they change the format of that. So I think that schools are kind of watching, you kind of have to go along and watch, but if the public perceive it and schools all of a sudden get highlighted, then I think you'll find that schools will get up and fight. I would.

So we'll have to wait and see what that does to [Huia Intermediate] because we are a school that's played the straight game, we are a school that's played a 'this is who we are, this is what it looks like'. So I'll be interested to see how that's perceived in the community because I'm a great believer and, you know, we schools are holistic. We're not just about academic results, we're not just about maths, numeracy, literacy and writing. We are about the whole child and intermediate schools more than anyone. We exist because of the other stuff, we exist because of the whole kid. And we do a fantastic job in the community, I get feedback all the time about the wonderful things, about [what] the school gives their kids. The kids who aren't achieving ... But don't get me wrong, we get some good results here for academics as well. So because we're such a holistic school there are many parents for whom academic results are important but not the be-all and end-all. And I think Joe Bloggs thinks that.... That's what I'm hoping! [laughs].

Another view to the future was that National Standards could come right eventually: "It's going to take four, five years before you can say OK well maybe the data is getting more robust now" (DP). In making this suggestion it was pointed out that National Standards had been on the back foot from the outset compared to NCEA in secondary schools. Secondary teachers had had universal PLD, non-

contact time written into their employment contracts, and external moderators. In contrast, “We haven’t got any of those systems” (DP).

Finally, there was the view that schools would just muddle on, doing their best within the resources available to them:

At the end of the day, look, you know, schools will just carry on doing the best we can for our kids, you know? And we may have to do things that we don’t like, I don’t know. But we’ll keep on just doing what we can with the resources that we have to ensure that when our kids leave here they’ve had the best possible education we’ve been able to give them. It may not be what we would have liked to have given them but it certainly will be as good as we’ve been able to give them, given what we start with in terms of the students and what we’re resourced to help them with. (AP)

5. DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

This final section reflects further on some of the policy discussion (Section 2), the comparability of OTJs (Section 3) and lessons from the RAINS schools in 2012 (Section 4). This section also summarises the research to be undertaken over the remainder of the RAINS project.

5.1 THE RELEASE OF THE DATA IN 2012

Section 2.1 reviewed policy developments around the National Standards in 2012, especially the release of data by the media and by Government in late September. It was irresponsible of Government and media to release such poor quality data for comparative purposes, and in the case of special schools, such obviously inappropriate data too. The initial release was rendered relatively impotent by the form of the data, the extensive qualifications wrapped around it as the media sought to justify its role and the decrying of the release and the data by most principals and others. But the release of the data was not just a passing event; it remains available in a reasonably convenient and unqualified form for comparing between schools on several Fairfax websites. For this reason, as discussed below, the release of the data will be more damaging than many people probably recognise. It has also potentially opened the door to further releases, depending on what government is in power in years to come.

The release of the data was irresponsible because, while it might have been politically useful to get the release of the data started, there could be no educational justification for the publication of such obviously ‘ropey’ or ‘shonky’ data. This is why attempts to justify the release of data that went beyond the usual accountability and public ‘right to know’ arguments tended to fall flat. Hartevelt (2012e) provided a good example:

What if it was a spark to light the fire of inquiry at schools where parents asked teachers, and teachers asked principals, and pupils asked parents: what are we doing right here? Where could we improve? What sort of help do we need?

One could readily answer that schools have plenty of processes where such questions are already posed, that reporting such broad National Standards categories would never raise the detail of what is needed, that publishing the National Standards would be a too-expensive approach to raising such questions and that the ‘fire of inquiry’ would still be based on flawed data in any case. Also that it is particularly impossible to see any value in making special schools reveal that all their students were ‘well below’.

Hartevelt may be grasping at educational straws but few educators, almost regardless of political or methodological perspective, could support the publication of such a poor data set. This helps to explain why the author, along with John O’Neill of Massey University, was able to collect signatories for a simple statement of opposition from so many of New Zealand’s education academics: for most academics it did not require much thought. What was more astounding, if the newspaper coverage was anything to go by, was that a couple of academics apparently supported the release. Perhaps they were misquoted or perhaps being ‘within the tent’ (e.g., in the MCSFoRA) gave them a misplaced sense of loyalty to the policy. In the case of some academics/educators concerned about Māori or Pasifika education, there may also be a view that anything is worth a go, that these groups don’t have the luxury of critique, an ‘ends justifies any means’ kind of outlook. It is tempting to quote Mahatma Gandhi: “There is no way to peace; peace is the way.”

In some senses Brown (2012c) was right to note that release could have been worse. The diverse presentation of the data released on the Education Counts site, the fact that neither the Ministry nor the media produced ranking of schools on the basis of the data, the extent of qualification wrapped around it and the number of people who spoke out against it meant that for most people it was hard to draw any firm conclusions from the data. Yet it is important to recognise that because the data was put online by Fairfax in particular ways, the release of data continues in a way that is now largely unqualified. A reader can currently go onto Fairfax’s Stuff education page or just the home pages of papers like the *Waikato Times* or *Nelson Mail* and be invited by the ‘School Report’ button to start picking up to ten schools and start comparing their results without having to be exposed to very much

in the way of context. For this reason, whether Fairfax reporters bother with the same level of qualifying commentary in 2013 as they did in 2012 is not the test of their commitment to a contextualised account of the data that it might have otherwise been. Fairfax is already failing miserably in requiring on any continuing basis the contextualised view of National Standards it promised readers in September when Hartevelt (2012c) claimed that Fairfax had "... not simply dumped all of the new National Standards data online".

There is also little evidence from coverage of the release that other forms of media will be up to the task of providing a strong corrective analysis in years to come. On TV there was an interview with the Minister on *Q+A* and a panel debate on *Media 3* (both screened just after the release on 30 September 2012). It was quite apparent from this coverage that even good interviewers were unable to get into much depth within the time and other constraints of this medium. Radio New Zealand could provide more depth but Edward's (2012) claim that "the blogosphere really added value to the debate" seems to gild the lily somewhat as the internet became clogged with views, some informed, many much less so.

The release of the data in 2012 opens the door to further releases in future years, depending on the government in power. It represents the breaking of a longstanding New Zealand educational belief that it is best all round if the achievement data of young children stays in schools or with those who work closely with them, rather than be publicly released. While there have been good reasons for this low-key approach in terms of protecting future possibilities for children as individuals and groups and the authenticity of the primary education they are exposed to, the genie is now out of the bottle and data will be in the public domain. The release of data will undoubtedly 'raise the temperature' for primary schools and gradually power up the effects of performativity in much the same ways as seen internationally. Those in schools will have taken from the release that their data will be in the public domain in the future: this will now be generating 'creative responses' from schools towards the 2013 release of data, which will be in a more directly comparable format, even if the underlying processes remain as diverse as even. Some of this performativity can be seen, for instance in the discussion of Huia Intermediate in this report.

A key point to recognise is that even if New Zealand's standards system is a different form of high stakes assessment than what is usually seen internationally, there is no reason to expect anything other than a variation on the same international theme when it comes to the effects of releasing data on school achievement. Why would the publicity around having lots of children 'below' and 'well below' in the National Standards be much different for school morale and reputation than a school doing badly in SATs (England) or NAPLAN (Australia)? Yet what Section 3 of this report has also demonstrated is that one variation on the theme will be the relative ease with which New Zealand schools will be able to manipulate their results to avoid having many children below or well below in the first instance.

5.2 MAKING A PROFIT WITH NO QUESTIONS ASKED

Another development raised in Section 2.1 was the National Standards policy being targeted by business as a means of making a profit with no questions asked. The issue of the standards system increasing the potential for school and parent funds to flow to the private sector was raised in the first RAINS report (see Thrupp & Easter 2012, p. 143). The troubling thing about the examples provided is that they reflected only a brief internet search and there may be many more. In particular, it seems likely that private providers of PD to teachers and schools might often view the National Standards in a way that does not provide their customers with any suitably critical analysis. This is an area that needs to be watched closely.

5.3 NEW ZEALAND'S LOCAL NATIONAL STANDARDS

This report has illustrated how the Ministry, as illustrated by the MTL research it has commissioned, is conceptualising the variability in OTJ-making much too narrowly when it focuses on teachers' abilities. Section 3 drew on the cases of the RAINS schools to illustrate that variations in OTJ-making are likely to be influenced by multiple factors at national/regional, school and classroom level. Some

of the variation is surprisingly obvious while some is more buried in the detail of day-to-day practice. What is clear from the discussion is that even if some of the national and regional sources of variation could be addressed, there are many sources of variation at the ‘local’ level that are impossible to set aside. National Standards may be a Government aspiration but they are not national and never will be while there is so much potential for local variation. It is almost comical—if it weren’t so serious—that OTJ data representing such variation has been put into the public domain for comparative purposes when there are such important differences in what it actually represents.

An implication is that if the PaCT tool is intended mainly as a form of national moderation for OTJ-making, (i.e., informing other assessment processes rather than itself becoming **the** assessment tool for making OTJs), then it can be expected to be an expensive failure. Depending on how the tool turns out, it might address some sources of variation, particularly around the subjectivity of individual teacher’s perspectives, but it will not address many of the various influences and pressures on schools and teachers, illustrated by Section 3, that will lead schools to take different ‘readings’ of the National Standards and OTJs. Another way to think about the PaCT is to see it as a means of overlooking the causes of OTJ variability and dealing only with (some of) the symptoms. By failing to recognise the underlying causes of variation, it will allow the Government to ignore the impact of contextual inequalities between schools, for instance, the effects of diverse and unequal intakes and communities, school locations, staffing and other resources.

5.4 THE RAINS SCHOOLS IN 2012

Turning more directly to the experiences of the six RAINS schools in 2012, as reported by members of their SLTs and the outlooks of those SLTs, the first impression is how much they were still in line with the trajectories noted in the first RAINS report. There were still much the same diverse concerns and outlooks as in 2011, although some had been tempered by subsequent experiences. For instance, Kanuka’s SLT continued to view the National Standards in a largely favourable light but was clearly unhappy to be told to use ‘well below’, whereas Cicada remained deeply critical of National Standards but after getting through its 78J situation had somewhat fallen into line with Ministry requirements and was trying harder to build bridges with the Ministry.

In 2012 most of the schools were not making major changes to their approach to the National Standards; it was again more a case of incremental change, developments in one or two areas such as reporting (Juniper, Magenta, Huia), use of national assessment tools (Kanuka) or work on OTJs (Cicada, Huia) as well as more general tinkering. Seagull, Kanuka and Magenta had all begun working with other schools on the National Standards in one way or another, although none seemed particularly enthusiastic about this collaboration. The most abrupt change was Kanuka starting to use ‘well below’, which was a change required by the Ministry but one that was resented. When it came to describing the impact of the National Standards, it was once again only the Kanuka SLT that viewed them mainly positively, along with Ngā Whanaketanga, albeit not the use of the ‘well below’ category in the National Standards. Huia’s SLT saw the National Standards more as ‘necessary medicine’ but with some misgivings in terms of both narrowing the curriculum and lack of interest from parents or apparent value to secondary schools. The others variously damned with faint praise (Juniper), suggested little change (Seagull, Magenta) or raised some significant concerns (Cicada in particular). Again none of this is particularly surprising given the continuing trajectories of these schools, although the examples of apparent and possible performativity being provided by the schools’ SLTs are noteworthy (see 5.6 below).

A range of reasons were provided by the RAINS SLT members for the largely uncontested forwarding of National Standards data to the Ministry in 2012. These included the nature of annual reports, doubts that the Ministry could do much with the data anyway and schools becoming tired of the fight over the National Standards policy. Not all of the schools forwarded data based on OTJs—Huia Intermediate’s data was based solely on asTTle test scores. None of those interviewed were positive about the public release of the data. They provided numerous arguments against this development and most had resisted forwarding data to the media. They were also mostly sceptical about PaCT to the extent that they knew about it, but those who had seen it were relatively relaxed about the form of the new

required template for National Standards reporting, viewing it as quite manageable even if they were opposed to the public release of the data.

Those interviewed were generally unhappy with the way the Ministry was relating to schools, in some instances their own school's specific relationship to the Ministry and some cases more generally. The 'senior advisor' relationship was working better in some schools than others. In the latter this relationship had often remained too distant or there had been too frequent turnover of Ministry staff. There was more general concern that the culture of the Ministry had become dictatorial and compliance-bound. It seemed that the Ministry was trying to give particular support to Cicada following its overt resistance to the National Standards. Elements of this support were welcomed but some of it was not trusted. Indeed deep mistrust and a sense of being misunderstood were dominant features of the RAINS schools' accounts of the Ministry.

The SLT members also provided views of the wider policy environment and likely futures. It was clear that wider policy developments were often being viewed with concern by the schools and that they had also distracted from National Standards, especially the class sizes issue at Huia Intermediate, which had also revealed tensions between contributing and full primary school and the intermediates. Once again Kanuka tended to be more upbeat about the opportunities presented by reform, for instance the potential for performance pay. Yet none of those opposed to current policy just ranted against it: all the schools provided nuanced accounts, ones where they were willing to take a favourable view of some developments and give credit where they thought it was due. The tone of opposition was mainly one of disappointment and weariness, along with the deep mistrust and sense of being misunderstood mentioned above.

5.5 LITTLE OBVIOUS PRESSURE FOR COMPLIANCE

This report has illustrated that popular views in some quarters about National Standards bringing accountability to the school system—views that have often been encouraged by Government discourses around the National Standards—are often quite unrealistic. Good examples of such views are provided by online comments in response to an article published in December 2012 about whether or not Hekia Parata would lose her position as Minister of Education following the resignation of the Education Secretary (Young 2012d). In response to this, Robbo suggests that the "... education unions'... real fear is that a resolute Minister might enforce national standards", while Digby notes "... most parent's support for national standards, forcing transparency across the board". BG wants National Standards, as "I [am] tired of the 'we know best' and the protection offered to poor teachers by the unions" and 'Just Me' suggests that "[l]azy unionized teachers are at the bottom of this pathetic education system with their resistance to anything which resembles measurable standards like the government is trying to achieve with National Standards". Sahiyena Tsitsistas asks: "If we expect Parata and Longstone to be accountable, where is the accountability for teachers? Hooray for National Standards; bring in performance pay!", while finally to the Old Sage, "So much tripe is trotted out by self serving teachers... Standards are able to be measured whilst the nebulous rubbish they otherwise 'teach' cannot. Parents deserve better and Parata is giving it to them that is why the left are coming to get her".

In contrast to such popular views, where they exist, that the standards system will 'whip schools into shape', Sections 3 and 4 reveal that any obvious pressures on schools to date around the National Standards have been more like 'a slap on the wrist with a wet bus ticket'. This is because the Ministry is unable or unwilling to more strongly ensure schools are complying and there is little apparent public pressure on schools thus far either. (To what extent ERO reviews are putting pressure on schools will be addressed in the next report.)

5.6 SCHOOLS 'DOING IT TO THEMSELVES'

Those who don't agree that teachers need to be made more accountable might take some comfort from the situation that despite some compulsory elements, the National Standards policy has so far turned out to be more of a exhortative/developmental or 'writerly' policy than an imperative/disciplinary or 'readerly' policy. But readerly policies are not required for the growth of damaging performativity. The

first RAINS report noted Seagull reducing its aspirational targets to avoid the prospect of failure (see Thrupp & Easter, 2012 p. 54), Huia narrowing its curriculum in terms of the range of activities classes could do during morning sessions (ibid, p. 123) and a non-RAINS school reported to be fabricating the National Standards categories of some children (ibid, p. 13). This report presents further evidence of schools 'doing it to themselves'. For instance, we have Juniper getting involved with the PaCT trial, (p. 53), the Seagull DP reporting pressure on the principal of a non-RAINS school from its board around National Standards performance (p. 55), the Magenta principal receiving subtle pressures of the same kind from his own board (p 66), the Cicada SLT recognising a narrowing curriculum in that school and conscious of their own role (pp. 69–70), and the principal of Huia reinforcing the view that that school's curriculum was narrowing (p. 59) and catching herself using the released National Standards data to compare schools (p. 81). Also Huia combining 'well below' and 'below' groups in reporting to the Ministry in order to make progress look more favourable than if these groups were reported separately (p. 80).

It also needs to be stressed that what has been reported in Section 4 is only from the perspective of the SLT—other research within the schools may reveal patterns at other levels. For instance, the Kanuka principal's comments about the enthusiasm of a senior teacher for more testing (p. 59) might indeed be the consequence of reflective practice, but another interpretation might be that it is about filling a gap in a situation where staff are becoming increasingly anxious about having 'sufficient' assessment coverage at all levels. Huia's curriculum might really need to become more focused or maybe not. It is impossible to know without further research. The RAINS project is also still to consider the effects of the culture of National Standards performance on children and parents and how much this would show up from our interviews with young children in any case. But interviews undertaken by the author in late 2012 with Chloe, a 12 year old at Huia Intermediate, and then with her mother provide one ready example of the National Standards 'below' category doing undesirable work even at a school with little real emphasis on the National Standards:

Chloe: I'll probably be like 'at' and 'below', I'm not really that good at anything ... I'd be happy with an 'at' but if I got 'below' then I'd be a bit down, because I'd feel I hadn't really tried in class.

MT: But you have tried in class, you are saying, though?

Chloe: Yeah, but I'll just feel like I haven't really tried. Yeah. (Interview with Chloe December 2012 before she got her end-of-year report).

Chloe: I sort of knew it was coming but I didn't think I'd be below in maths because that was my strongest one.

Chloe's mother: I expected these marks. I was actually surprised she got the 'at' in reading, I actually thought she would be 'below'. (Interview with Chloe and her mother January 2013 after Chloe got her report with 'below' in writing and maths).

5.7 NEXT STEPS

May–October 2013 will be a busy period of further research in the RAINS schools as the author and a research assistant revisit all the schools apart from Huia Intermediate and once again observe classes and undertake interviews with SLT, board, teachers, parents and children, i.e., much the same research activities as carried out in 2011. There are also some ERO team interviews to complete as well as data from 2011 and 2012 to revisit. The next and final RAINS report will then present data from all levels in and around the RAINS schools as we flesh out change and continuity in the culture of New Zealand primary and intermediate schools and sum up the part played by National Standards over the period 2009–13.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR 2012 SLT INTERVIEWS

(These were the key questions and prompts but in practice discussion tended to be wide-ranging around the same areas, see Section 2.2. Supplementary questions to clarify specific points or seek further detail were also asked in each school, especially in the second interview.)

1. Leaving National Standards aside for a minute, have there been any significant wider changes in the school this year/since we last spoke? (e.g., staffing, PD developments)
2. Are the National Standards bringing about any changes in the school since last year/last time we spoke?
 - Assessment and reporting?
 - Curriculum and teaching?
 - Leadership and governance?
 - Relationships within and beyond the school? (e.g., between staff, with other principals, NZEI, Ministry, ERO?)
 - Motivation (staff, board, pupils, parents)
 - Resources/PD?
 - What range of views are there on staff these days?
 - What is the board's view these days?
 - Are parents showing any more interest than they were last year?
 - Anything else?
3. How would you generally describe the school's response to the National Standards these days?
4. What's your personal view of the National Standards these days?
5. What do you think about what's going on with other government policy around schools these days (class sizes, performance pay, release of data, charter schools)? Do you see these things being related to National Standards?
6. Are there any questions you still have about the National Standards?
7. Where do you think it will all go from here?