



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

Final Report: National Standards and the  
Damage Done

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## OVERVIEW OF THIS REPORT

1. This is the final report of the Research Analysis and Insight into National Standards (RAINS) project, a three-year study of the enactment of the National Standards policy in six diverse primary and intermediate schools.
2. The report provides an overview discussion of the pros and cons of the National Standards policy as experienced by staff, children and parents in the RAINS schools. It summarises the policy and methodological background to the research and the findings of the two previous RAINS reports. The report is also being accompanied by online case studies and other data files.
3. Although the RAINS schools' trajectories have been very different, they are converging towards the National Standards agenda, whether the schools were early adopters, have come to the Standards over time, or have been forced to engage because of intervention from the Ministry or ERO. One school has managed to get by with a more tepid response but this positioning remains vulnerable.
4. The report considers why those in the RAINS schools, many of them sceptical or dismissive of the Government's National Standards agenda at the outset, have mostly come around to engaging with the Standards with more effort and attention. Reasons for falling in line with the National Standards include professional identities, pressure from central agencies, and incrementalism. There has been little evidence so far of market pressures related to the public release of data.
5. National Standards are having some favourable impacts in areas that include teacher understanding of curriculum levels, motivation of some teachers and children and some improved targeting of interventions. Nevertheless such gains are overshadowed by damage being done through the intensification of staff workloads, curriculum narrowing and the reinforcement of a two-tier curriculum, the positioning and labelling of children and unproductive new tensions amongst school staff. These problems are often occurring despite attempts by schools and teachers to minimise any damaging impact of the National Standards.
6. The children in the RAINS schools interviewed for the project were largely indifferent to, or supportive of, the National Standards. There were some comments that give cause for concern and the interviews were also revealing of processes of peer comparison. Further analysis is required to properly unpack the children's perspectives.
7. Interviews with parents illustrated that whether National Standards were seen as a good idea or not depended very much on the experiences and perspectives of particular families and particular children. Parents could often see some value in a system that allowed people to know where their child 'sat' nationally, but the National Standards categories are broad and when it came to their own child they wanted both a more detailed and a more rounded view including progress, attitude and socialisation. Parents tended to trust schools to know what they were doing and were clearly not very interested in how the National Standards judgements came about. Some parents chose not to share school reports with their child because of the National Standards judgements.
8. ERO teams that undertook reviews in the RAINS schools during the course of the project expressed some respect for the stances of those who opposed the National Standards. Nevertheless the politics of their role was to support government policy rather than question it or support a token reading of it. This meant reviewers could not acknowledge potential problems within the National Standards system. Review teams were more sympathetic to some RAINS schools than others and struggled with how much to acknowledge the impact of school context.
9. Evidence that the National Standards are damaging schools needs to be taken seriously because it has surfaced while New Zealand's version of high-stakes assessment is still in an embryonic stage. National Standards are not going to avoid the problems found internationally; they represent a variation on the theme.
10. Recommendations include changing teachers expectations of progression through the curriculum levels to be in line with national norms; abandoning the four-point National Standards scale and

instead reporting whichever underlying curriculum level a child has reached; leaving it up to schools as to how they determine student achievement against curriculum levels while informing their decisions through high-quality professional development; removing the reporting of primary achievement to the Ministry and the public; gathering system-wide information through a national sampling approach; and continuing with ERO reviews but with different policy informing review teams' practices.

11. The challenge for the public around the National Standards agenda is the same as across the public sector: to avoid being seduced by the tidy rows of figures in national indicators and to be more searching about what might actually lie beneath them. Unfair criticism of the New Zealand school system should be avoided and more attention given to reducing socio-economic inequalities between schools.

## GUIDE TO ACRONYMS

AIMS	Association of Intermediate and Middle Schools
asTTle	Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning
BOT	Board of Trustees (also referred to as ‘Boards’)
CPA	Catholic Principals’ Association
ERO	Education Review Office
ELL	English Language Learners
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
MCSFoRA	Ministerial Cross-Sector Forum on Raising Achievement
MoE	Ministry of Education (also referred to as ‘the Ministry’)
MTL	Maths Technology Ltd
NETS	National Evaluation Topics
NZC	New Zealand Curriculum
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
NZEI	New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa
NZPF	New Zealand Principals Federation
NSSAG	National Standards Sector Advisory Group
NSADAG	National Standards Aggregate Data Advisory Group
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIA	Official Information Act
OTJ	Overall Teacher Judgement
PAI	Public Achievement Information
PaCT	Progress and Consistency Tool
PD	Professional Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PRT	Provisionally Registered Teacher
RAINS	Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards
RAINS 1	First RAINS report (Thrupp & Easter, 2012)
RAINS 2	Second RAINS report (Thrupp, 2013a)
SES	Socio-economic Status
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
STAR	Supplementary Test of Achievement in Reading

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The National Standards were introduced into New Zealand primary and intermediate schools in 2009. Four years later an official fixation with the data generated through the Standards is becoming abundantly clear. The public release of the data for each school on the Government's 'Education Counts' website was done only crudely in 2012 but the data released in 2013 is in a more consistent format, broken into year levels. There is also the beginning of a target-setting culture around the National Standards data with the announcement in 2013 of a national target of 85% of primary students at or above the National Standards or Ngā Whanaketanga (the Māori assessment approach that runs alongside the Standards). And suddenly in 2013 there are also over a hundred infographics related to the National Standards for anyone who wants to look at them: national, regional, territorial, some just about National Standards or Ngā Whanaketanga and some linking these to the wider Public Achievement Information programme, all published online and some in newspapers.<sup>1</sup> New Zealanders are suddenly swimming in National Standards data, as much as anyone could want—and more!

There are two immediate problems with all of this new focus on National Standards data. One is to do with the nature of the data. The National Standards are based on raw rather than 'value added' data and so take no account of the effects of socio-economic or other contextual constraints on children or schools. The underlying assessment processes are also highly variable. This was well illustrated in the second Research Analysis and Insight into National Standards report (RAINS 2<sup>2</sup>). It means that National Standards data can't be used to compare school to school or year to year and makes the Government's claim of "pleasing [national] increases in maths, reading and writing"<sup>3</sup> entirely fanciful. The reality is going to be an increasingly hollowed-out relationship between schools, parents and society as National Standards headline statistics, however inadequate, become a ready reckoner for primary school quality.

The second concern, more important in many ways, is that Government's fixation on data and targets will damage the culture of primary schools. As discussed in this final RAINS report and illustrated in accompanying case studies, there is a compulsion developing within schools towards more data related to student achievement in literacy and numeracy in order to shore up teacher judgements against the Standards and fend off claims of underperformance. This preoccupation impacts on staff workloads and on the taught curriculum and there are also issues around the positioning of children and with staff relationships. The key message of this report is that while the National Standards may have brought gains in some areas, their damaging cultural impact within schools must not be ignored.

Through the detailed research summarised here, we have sought to understand why schools are changing when the external forces on them around National Standards have remained fairly circumscribed to date. During the three years of the study (2011–13), the external pressures coming on many of our RAINS schools around National Standards from the Ministry, ERO, parents or the media have hardly been overwhelming. So why is it that principals and teachers have been putting themselves under pressure over judgements against the National Standards when they could have just as easily taken a more token approach?

The research evidence points to changing professional identities as principals, teachers and support staff in schools are worked upon by even subtle policy pressures. We have found that those employed in schools typically work hard and care deeply about the children in their care. We have also found them quite aware of the widely publicised concerns around the National Standards, and they are no fools when it comes to assessing the likely 'lived' effects of new developments, as most are able to measure them against years of making policies work on the ground. Despite all this, it has become clear that the National Standards are going to sooner or later damage the learning cultures of the

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/topics/pai-pipeline>

<sup>2</sup> In this report, RAINS 1 refers to Thrupp & Easter (2012), RAINS 2 refers to Thrupp (2013a).

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/140332/NZ-Education-Profile.pdf](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/140332/NZ-Education-Profile.pdf)

schools we have been researching in, regardless of their very different characteristics and responses. Indeed it is hard to see that any New Zealand school will remain unscathed: as the wider culture of schooling shifts and influences all schools, any reprieve will be only temporary.

Understanding why the National Standards policy is creating the conditions within which teachers will ‘do it to themselves’, and the various implications of this development, are the most important aspects of this report. We conclude that there will only be a shift in teacher preoccupations and use of energies away from the damaging excesses currently emerging when a different way to be a ‘good’ New Zealand teacher becomes sanctioned by policy. To be clear, it is not going to be enough to promulgate a different story about the existing Standards. The goal must be to more fundamentally change the policy messages around primary education in order to reach back into the culture of schools and repair the damage being done.

The National Standards policy was a central policy plank for the incoming Key Government elected in 2008. The development of the National Standards was ‘too political’, with the legislation introduced under urgency, the policy proceeding with little consultation and with government-funded research on the Standards designed to tinker with the policy rather than ask more fundamental questions (see RAINS 1, pp. 18–37). Given these circumstances NZEI Te Riu Roa, New Zealand’s largest education union and a powerful advocate for quality public education, stepped in to fund the RAINS research. The project has been investigating the experiences of six diverse schools and while in practice we expect to be working with RAINS data for some years to come, this will be the final report for the NZEI.

In anticipation of a range of audiences, we present our analysis in two different ways. This report employs a question and answer format to provide an overview discussion about the project and its findings and implications. Also gradually being put online at [http://www.education2014.org.nz/?page\\_id=16](http://www.education2014.org.nz/?page_id=16) are case studies of each of the six schools in the study and how they are responding in diverse ways to the National Standards, as well as examples of further perspectives from children, parents and ERO reviewers. This material provides the rich accounts of New Zealand primary schooling that have become the hallmark of the RAINS research.

Martin Thrupp wrote most of this report and the accompanying case studies and other data files. The sections drawing on interviews with children were written by Michelle White who, along with Anne Easter and Debbie Bright, undertook nearly all of the RAINS interviews with children and parents.

There are many people the authors wish to thank. First and foremost we thank all the teachers, principals, board members, support staff, children, parents and ERO reviewers and managers who cannot be named but have participated in various ways in the RAINS project. We could not have done the research without you. Others who have contributed to this latest report in one way or another include Tamara Bibby, David Berliner, Bronwen Cowie, Margaret Drummond, Kylee Edwards, Deborah Fraser, Denyse Graham, David Hursh, Meg Maguire, Tracey Lowndes, Ruth Lupton, Hugh Lauder and Logan Moss. We thank the Quality Public Education Coalition, the New Zealand Association for Research in Education and all those who attended recent seminars about the RAINS research at the Universities of Arizona, Rochester, Manchester and Bath and at Kings’ College London. Parts of this report are based on material previously published in *Assessment Matters* (Thrupp & Easter, 2013) and the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* (Thrupp, 2013b). The RAINS research programme has been supported by supplementary funding from the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato.



## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 What are New Zealand's National Standards?

New Zealand's National Standards were launched in October 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 schooling in New Zealand). These judgements are made against a four-point scale ('above', 'at', 'below', or 'well below' the standard) and take place after one, two or three years at school in the junior school and then at the end of each year level in Years 4–8. The policy matches existing curriculum levels (and associated numeracy stages and literacy progressions) to these assessment times. This means that teachers are supposed to consider children's achievement against what is required for the curriculum levels, and use that understanding for making Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs) about achievement against the National Standards. OTJs are intended to be 'on-balance' judgements made by using various indications of a child's level of achievement, such as teachers' knowledge of each child from daily interactions, exemplars (examples of children's work, with accompanying notes to illustrate learning, achievement, and the calibre of the work in relation to curriculum levels) and assessment tools, tasks and activities. The definition of an OTJ from the New Zealand Ministry of Education (the 'Ministry') is as follows:

An Overall Teacher Judgement (OTJ) is a judgment made about a student's progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards. An OTJ should be based on a variety of evidence teachers already collect, such as the student's work, peer and self-assessment, everyday classroom observation, and assessment activities (both formal and informal). This involves drawing on and applying the evidence gathered up to a particular point in time in order to make an overall judgment about a student's progress and achievement. (Ministry of Education, n.d.-a)

OTJs are expected to be moderated within schools or informally in local clusters of schools. There is no national moderation, although the Ministry is bringing in a national online platform that teachers will use in the process of making OTJs, the Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT). OTJs are required to be used 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 (i.e., 'above', 'at', 'below', or 'well below' the standard) but they are expected to report against the scale when they report annually to the Ministry of Education about student achievement levels. Since 2012 this data is being reported publicly on the Government's Education Counts website<sup>4</sup> (see RAINS 2, pp. 14–18 and this report, Section 2.9) and now forms part of the Government's wider data-dissemination exercise mentioned in the introduction and again in Section 2.9, the so-called Public Achievement Information (PAI) pipeline.

### 2.2 Why has it been important to research school responses to the National Standards?

The National Standards policy has been one of the most controversial school-level developments in New Zealand for decades. Although there are many reasons for this (RAINS 1, p. 10), the most central issue is whether New Zealand's approach to National Standards will avoid the damaging effects of high-stakes assessment already found in countries such as England, the USA and Australia. These damaging effects include the increasing preoccupation of teachers with assessment, the narrowing of the curriculum towards what is being assessed, adverse positioning and labelling of children and a range of other perverse effects of performance cultures within schools (Alexander, 2009; Au, 2009; Ball, 2003; Comber, 2012; Hursh, 2008; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Stobart, 2008). For instance, a key

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<sup>4</sup> [www.educationcounts.govt.nz](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz)



problem found internationally is that meeting high-stakes targets, standards or test scores often become incentivised to be more important than authentic teaching and learning. Schools can seek to manipulate student intakes or programmes or achievement data in order to give the appearance of improved performance. This is caused by *performativity* whereby “the performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’ or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection ... they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement” (Ball, 2003, p. 216).

Yet whether New Zealand’s new system of National Standards would lead to the unfortunate outcomes found elsewhere was never going to be straightforward. Certainly the collection of National Standards data by the Ministry, and its public release since 2012, might be expected to ‘raise the temperature’ around the National Standards, creating perverse effects in a similar way to the high-stakes approaches of other countries. But New Zealand’s approach has also been different. The use of a standards approach rather than a national test and the way teachers were expected to draw on so many sources in making OTJs against the Standards could be seen as an attempt by Government to avoid the problems found internationally.<sup>5</sup> As one Ministry official claimed:

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)

The implicit claim here is that New Zealand’s standards system would avoid the pitfalls experienced by other countries. But given how widespread and persistent the problems associated with high-stakes assessment are in other countries, New Zealand could be just as likely to develop a variant of the problems found internationally rather than avoid them altogether. It was this concern that led to the RAINS project.

## 2.3 What has the RAINS project involved?

At the heart of the RAINS project is the understanding that schools never just ‘implement’ policy. Rather, RAINS is concerned with policy ‘enactment’: how the Standards policy is being 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). An important reason to think about enactment is that the particular features of the National Standards policy mean that context will be very important in how it plays out in schools. In particular, 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 based on the international literature noted above, new performances will be needed from 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. 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. Schools are now mostly complying with the Standards policy but this does not mean it has always captured ‘hearts and minds’ amongst principals, teachers and Boards. Their varying outlooks will continue to influence the way schools approach the National Standards.

These concerns are reflected in the research questions guiding the project:

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<sup>5</sup> Another interpretation, one we return to in Section 4.2, is that the Standards approach was taken because it would be easier to sell to a sceptical profession (and public) than national testing.

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?
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 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).

Six schools were selected for the research: Seagull, Kanuka, Juniper, Magenta, and Cicada Primary Schools and Huia Intermediate. The characteristics of these schools have been described in the previous RAINS reports and the case studies accompanying this report recap many of their main features. 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) openly resisted them at the outset. All the schools had successful ERO reviews in the years immediately before the project started and they all enjoyed reasonably favourable and sometimes excellent reputations in their local communities.

The first year of the RAINS research (2011) largely involved gaining access to the schools, trying to understand the complexities of the school contexts into which the National Standards were being introduced, how they were being introduced into those contexts and what people in and around the schools in different roles thought about this development. The research involved Boards of Trustees, senior leadership teams, (SLTs) individual teachers, children and parents. Semi-structured interviews and other recorded and unrecorded discussions formed the mainstay of data collection along with some classroom observation and collection of relevant school documents and student data. An experienced lead teacher helped to facilitate the progress of the project in each school and provided advice and feedback.

There was a further round of data collection in 2013 in most of the schools, although Huia Intermediate was revisited earlier (2012) before its RAINS ‘cohort’ moved on to secondary school. In 2012 the project also had a particular focus on the comparability of OTJ-making across the schools. During the course of the project there were also interviews with Education Review Office teams after they reviewed each school: an exception was Seagull School, which did not have a school review during the timeframe of the project.

We focused on particular ‘cohort’ classes in each school in both 2011 and 2013 (Huia in 2012), as recorded in Appendix 2. For each of these classes, we undertook interviews with teachers about what they did in their classes on a day-to-day basis, a small amount of general classroom observation (a day in each class and discussion with the teacher at the end of the day) and interviews with children and parents. We chose classes at levels where most of the children would still be in the schools when we returned later in the project so we could re-interview those children to see whether their perspectives had shifted and whether the National Standards were looming any larger in their awareness. Sometimes the cohort classes observed in 2012/2013 were with the same teachers as in 2011 (because some of the schools were small and because teachers sometimes take up classes at new levels even in larger schools), but usually different teachers became the ‘cohort’ focus. We also interviewed many other teachers in both 2011 and 2012/13, allowing the project to gather perspectives from across the

schools, often repeatedly. Appendix 1 provides specific details of the extent and repeated nature of interviewing in each school. Nearly all interviews or discussions were recorded.<sup>6</sup>

In summary, the data we have collected includes:

- initial discussions with lead teachers going into specific details of curriculum, assessment, reporting and PD over the previous few years;
- multiple interviews and discussions with principals and/or other senior staff;
- interviews and discussions with at least four cohort teachers in each school (six at Kanuka where we spent time in bilingual classes as well);
- field notes from a day observing in each of the cohort classes;
- interviews with children in each of the cohort classes and some of their parents, with some repeated and some new children interviewed over 2012/2013;
- short interviews with many other teaching staff in each school in 2011, again often repeated in 2012/2013;
- interviews with the board chair or another board member (repeated in 2012/2013 in three schools only);
- documents including annual reports and samples of student reports;
- materials from school websites and newsletters;
- photographs of wall displays in each cohort class and often in other classes across the schools; and
- interviews with ERO reviewers following their reviews of each of the schools (except for Seagull School).

When it came to analysis of interview data, we have been interested in both the substance of the points made by those being interviewed as well as the many examples from day-to-day practice that were used to illustrate their points. Discursive evidence has also been relevant, for example how a teacher talks about children or about a situation at school as well as changes over time in the way some issue is discussed.

## **2.4 What features of the RAINS research design make it a plausible account of the impact of the National Standards?**

There are a number of features of the RAINS research that should provide readers with confidence about its findings and implications.

To start with, there is no pretense here of the research coming from a naïve standpoint, as if previous research did not exist. RAINS is concerned with whether or not the National Standards in New Zealand are likely to suffer similar problems to those noted in international research on high-stakes assessment systems. But as researchers we have also been reflexive about possible bias towards finding the problems identified elsewhere and have taken many steps to ensure our thinking has been challenged. An example is that templates used to assemble evidence in relation to the impact of National Standards have asked for favourable evidence to be considered in the first instance.

The research also has depth, involving repeated interviews with many people in each school and generally a lot of time ‘hanging around’ the schools and their classrooms, especially in the larger and more complex schools such as Huia Intermediate. The huge advantage of this approach (over, say, a survey or a one-off interview in the principal’s office) is that it is better able to get to what is really going on in schools. It has often allowed multiple opportunities for research subjects to reflect and

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<sup>6</sup> Occasionally a recording device was not available or the person being interviewed didn’t want to be recorded. In these instances notes were taken instead.

express themselves and has also provided a better chance to get past the ‘professional face’ staff present to outsiders in the context of the ‘performing school’. Not surprisingly, those working in schools are often reluctant to highlight any difficulties or concerns when their work centres on staying in control of situations and when everyone around them is expected to try their best. Researchers therefore have to become reasonably familiar with and become known within the school setting if they want to understand the outlooks of teachers and principals and make sense of the day-to-day examples they provide. Spending even a little time in classrooms allows researchers to better connect with the experiences of teachers (and children) and develop some rapport. Indeed the RAINS research has become more ‘bottom up’ as the project has progressed (see Section 2.7). The two earlier reports drew mainly on the perspectives of the SLTs in each school but the case studies published along with this report are based more on the experiences of teachers and children.

Another strength of the RAINS research is that rich descriptions of how schools are enacting the National Standards are provided to the reader as part of reporting the research (see RAINS 1 and 2, and also the case studies that will accompany this report). The extensive use of verbatim quotes provides support for the discussion and forms the skeleton around which the body of the research takes its shape. Effectively the research employs a ‘chain of evidence’ approach that allows the reader to “follow the analysis and come to the stated conclusion” (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998, p. 159). It remains possible for readers to take a different reading of the data presented but the reasons for our conclusions should be clear enough.

Finally, various kinds of quality assurance have been in use throughout the project. The RAINS project has benefited from a national advisory group and an international reference group (see RAINS 1, p. 161) and from discussion of the findings in many different forums. The politics of the research has been explicitly addressed in previous reports. Where time has allowed, lead teachers and principals have provided comments on drafts of the case study of their schools until an agreed version has been reached. While this is a time-consuming process, it has been very helpful for correcting inaccuracies and making sure those closest to the schools could recognise them in the text.

## 2.5 What did the first RAINS report (February 2012) tell us?

The first report introduced the six RAINS schools and went back into their respective histories including how they had grappled with the National Standards since their launch in 2009. A key finding was that the changes in the schools around National Standards were typically incremental rather than representing substantially new departures from what the schools had already been doing. Reasons for this included the way the National Standards policy 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.

Along with an incremental approach, 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 included both intake differences (such as socio-economic make-up, ethnicity, transience, the proportion of pupils from migrant families or with special needs) and other school and area characteristics (urban/rural location, market position compared to surrounding schools). There were also important internal contexts, such as the *history* of approaches to teaching, assessment and school organisation as well as past and present reputational and recruitment issues and significant staffing changes. It was not that the current leadership and teaching wasn’t making an important difference. But internal school factors, especially historical ones, tended to be advantaging or weighing heavily on the schools (see also Lupton & Thrupp, 2013).

Overall, it was clear that the detailed specifics of National Standards assessment practices were occurring within schools that were contextually dissimilar and that were already set upon different

trajectories that could not be easily set aside. We found for instance that the principal of Juniper was released to spend much more time on her enthusiasm for assessment than would be the case in most schools, that Seagull had already been fine-tuning its assessment processes for years, that Kanuka saw the National Standards as an opportunity to get staff more focused on ‘acceleration’, that Magenta was preoccupied by its local response to the New Zealand Curriculum, that Cicada was opposing the National Standards in what it considered the best interests of the intake of that school and that Huia teachers were more focused on pedagogy than assessment and hence a long way from making OTJs. Overall the responses of the schools were more nuanced than the debate over National Standards had tended to suggest, often ‘making sense’ when seen against their contexts.

The incremental nature of changes around the National Standards seemed to support another early finding of the study: that teachers and school leaders often preferred to think their practice was not being ‘directed’ by policy even if it might be. This was indicated by the way they were often keen to emphasise there had been ‘no change’ but then went on to note various changes in their schools related to the National Standards. The significance of incrementalism was to allow the argument that a school was heading in a particular direction anyway, such that National Standards wasn’t making much difference. But this was a complex issue with other dimensions to it including the way that strong demands from the Ministry around charters often led school leaders to feel more directed over 2011; the way that professional reputations were being made and being put at risk through the National Standards (for instance, with 4–5 year return times becoming the gold standard for ERO reviews, getting a three-year return because of non-compliance with the standards system may affect promotion prospects); the self-managing ideology of Tomorrow’s Schools; and the reality that there were some ways that the schools were ‘mediating’ policy. For instance, the schools did exercise some choice in how explicitly they reported against the National Standards and teachers reported various ways in which they ‘softened’ and distracted from the judgements against the National Standards.

## 2.6 What did the second RAINS report (April 2013) tell us?

The second RAINS report noted how the National Standards policy became less contentious in 2012 as most schools—including Cicada School—bowed to pressure and ‘fell into line’ with the National Standards and as the debate also became overtaken by other events such as a (failed) attempt by Government to increase class sizes. However, the public release of National Standards data by the media and Government in September 2012 was another controversial development. The release was rendered relatively impotent by the diverse formats of the data made available on the Education Counts website, 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 it was not just a passing event; it potentially opened the door to further releases and the data remained available in a reasonably convenient and unqualified form for comparing schools on several Fairfax websites.

A key issue explored by the second report was whether or not the comparability of teacher judgements against the standards (called OTJs—Overall Teacher Judgements) could be improved to allow ‘apples with apples’ comparisons of student achievement across schools. The RAINS schools’ judgements against the national standards were being affected by many sources of variation at national, regional, school and classroom level. Some of this variation in OTJ-making related back to the individual school trajectories noted above. There were different approaches to National Standards categories such as ‘well below’, differences in matching the categories to curriculum levels and differences in the rigour of the data sent to the Ministry. Other variations in approaches to the National Standards included how much schools relied on formal assessment tools compared to other evidence in making their judgments, their choices of tests or other assessment tools, and the very specific details of the procedures used by schools for assessment and moderation. Overall, the research illustrated that it would be quite wrong to expect to compare any school’s pattern of achievement against National Standards with that of any other school, even for schools with relatively similar intake characteristics, such as in the same decile. There were simply too many sources of variation, leaving each school grappling with the National Standards in ways that preclude fair comparison. This also meant that any



claim of overall improvement or decline in the achievement of New Zealand children against the National Standards would be spurious.

The second report provided an update for each of the RAINS schools over 2012 based on interviews with their SLTs. Matters covered included 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 were discussed. The experiences of the six RAINS schools in 2012 as reported by members of their SLTs 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.

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 an online moderation tool (PaCT) to the extent that they knew about it, but those who had seen it were more positive about this new required template for National Standards reporting. The RAINS principals were generally unhappy with the way the Ministry was relating to schools, in some instances their own school's specific relationship and in some cases more generally. Deep mistrust and a sense of being misunderstood were dominant features of accounts of the Ministry. It was also clear that wider policy developments were often being viewed with concern by the schools and that these had also distracted from National Standards.

Overall the second report concluded that, despite some compulsory elements, the National Standards policy had so far turned out to be more of an 'exhortative' policy that allowed for varying school responses than a 'disciplinary' policy that tightly framed up what schools had to do. Nevertheless there was growing evidence of schools 'doing it to themselves'; for instance, Juniper was planning to get involved with the PaCT trial and the Cicada SLT was recognising a narrowing curriculum in that school and their own role in it. This set the scene for the final year of the research where the focus returned to the practices and experiences of teachers, children and parents.

## 2.7 What has the final year of the RAINS research involved?

In 2013 we again spent time in all the schools apart from Huia Intermediate (where fieldwork had largely finished in 2012), observing cohort classes and undertaking interviews with SLT members, (some) Board chairs, teachers, parents and children.<sup>7</sup> But while we interviewed much the same groups as in 2011—and often the same people—there were some differences in the interviewing two years on. There was less focus on the SLTs and more digging into the teaching and learning culture of the schools. The research also now occurred in a situation where National Standards were no longer new and where we had greater familiarity with both the schools and many of the people we were interviewing. So the interviews, while still using many of the questions used in 2011, became more conversational and wide-ranging and often involved some testing of points discussed in the earlier interviews or ideas that we were developing about the schools. In this way the project started to move naturally towards 'saturation' and we began to spend more time writing and less time out in the schools doing fieldwork. From mid-September the first author spent a month in the United States and United Kingdom giving seminars and holding meetings about RAINS. This time was invaluable for stepping back from the immediacy of fieldwork and thinking about the broader patterns within the data.

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<sup>7</sup> There were also two ERO team interviews to complete.

There were signs that the project might be starting to come to the end of its useful life in the RAINS schools as well. The three years of the project is a long timeframe when seen against the termly and annual calendars of schools. By 2013 some of the lead teachers who had been helping with the research had moved on to other posts. The National Standards were also no longer new and were now making their own demands on schools for data, so the RAINS research was perhaps becoming ‘another thing’. These changes began to make the research more difficult; for instance we found staff less enthusiastic about digging out data on OTJs or making arrangements for child and parent interviews. Yet these changes were developing on the margins and overall we consider the project remained very well supported by the schools.

## 2.8 Why is this report not the last word from the RAINS project?

Whereas for some research projects, a ‘final’ report might signal the research is ‘done and dusted’, here it refers more to a particular kind of publication, a formal report for the research funder. This report is not intended to be the last word from the project as we expect to be publishing from the research for several years to come. These days it is difficult to get funding for any relatively wide-ranging investigation into New Zealand schooling.<sup>8</sup> The RAINS project provides a rare opportunity that we are trying to make the most of. We hope the rich case study material that has appeared in previous reports and will gradually accompany this report can be used as a kind of repository of material about real New Zealand primary schools for those who are interested. Schools are so different in terms of their contexts and the historical trajectories that reflect those contexts that cases of individual schools are inevitably more accurate than generalising across them.

For this report and accompanying case studies and data files then, while we make at least passing use of all the kinds of data we have collected, we have concentrated our energies on areas that are likely to be most immediately insightful (Research Analysis and *Insight* into National Standards). An example is that we have spent a lot of time on the case of Seagull School, a highly advantaged school with a staff and board who were broadly opposed to the National Standards at the outset but who have now started to work with the Standards in earnest. Appreciating why such a school moves towards the Standards is very helpful for understanding the impact of the policy.

Similar judgements have been made about how much to ‘worry at’ particular kinds of data at this stage. For instance, we have given more attention to interviews with cohort teachers than other teaching staff (because they are in greater depth and we have the classroom observations as well). We have given more attention to instances where teachers or the SLT were present over the full period of the research and were able to be interviewed more than once than to instances where we only have one interview. So far we have also only been able to spend limited time on data from children and parents and in the case of the children are seeking further help with interpreting the interviews (see Section 3.7).

In places this report is therefore qualified by mention of the need for further analysis. Nevertheless (with the possible exception of the children’s interviews) future work is more likely to be a case of digging into the data and bringing theory to it than presenting a quite different story. For instance, another academic account of the National Standards might talk more about changing subjectivities and a new normativity being activated by teachers as a result of their enactments of the National Standards policy, that is, using the ideas of Foucault to discuss how those in schools become situated in the ruling relations that govern their work and how these affect their view of the world as well as their actions (Ball, 2013). But this is going to another level of theorisation; significant inconsistency with the findings and conclusions drawn here is not anticipated.

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<sup>8</sup> Most educational research in New Zealand is much more framed up by the funder, usually the Ministry of Education.



## 2.9 What new policy developments were there around the National Standards in 2013?

The two earlier reports discussed policy developments related to the National Standards policy over 2009–12 and there were further developments in 2013. In general, by 2013 national discussion of National Standards took on a tone of weariness. It was a policy that was no longer a novelty and around which intractable problems were being recognised and highlighted in the media.

**Revision of tests:** 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 children able to do well in these tests. This caused concern in schools and some believed it was a deliberate tactic to help children achieve more easily against the National Standards and therefore make the policy appear more successful. By 2013 this issue boiled over into mainstream media (Woulfe, 2013) and steps were taken to address the issue. For e-asTTle this involved the Ministry making a downwards adjustment in how rubric scores for e-asTTle Writing were mapped on to curriculum levels with schools advised to “re-generate any reports for tests taken in Term 1 to ensure [they were] using the updated results” (Ministry of Education, 2013c). In the case of the STAR test, revised and sold by NZCER, the response by NZCER was to set up a new assessment blog<sup>9</sup> and run a series of workshops on ‘Making the most of standardised assessments’ in a range of venues around the country. In both cases these steps seem to have been enough to silence critics of the tests, helped in good measure by the Ministry backing off its plans to make the PaCT tool mandatory.

**PaCT:** The online Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT), part of the Ministry’s plans to make OTJs more comparable within and across schools, also continued to be controversial in 2013. According to the PAI information released in August 2012, PaCT was to be trialled in 2013, released as a prototype in 2014 and made mandatory in 2015 (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b). But debates about what PaCT would and would not be (e.g., Ministry of Education, 2013a, Flockton, 2013) culminated in a united boycott of the trialling of the tool by the NZPF, NZEI, AIMS and the CPA in June 2013. This was on the grounds that it would ‘give legitimacy’ to ‘published National Standards’ (NZPF president Phil Harding quoted in Smallman, 2013) and that it could lead to performance pay for teachers (NZEI president Judith Nowotarski quoted in Shuttleworth, 2013c). Interviewed at the same time, the Prime Minister commented that the Ministry of Education and the education groups should “put their pistols away” and meet to avoid industrial action. He also suggested that more schools complying meant there wasn’t a lot of resistance to National Standards any more. “If you look at the year one data from last year, there were about 300 non-complying schools, this year it’s only 13—the resistance to National Standards is evaporating” (Shuttleworth, 2013c). The following month the Minister of Education was reported as saying that PaCT would not be compulsory on that grounds that it would “mandate itself” as schools would want to use it voluntarily (Shuttleworth, 2013d). As the year progressed the Ministry continued to promote what it was now describing as an “indispensable” tool (Ministry of Education, 2013b) but some debate about PaCT continued and so too did the boycott.

**Release of National Standards data:** The 2013 release came in several stages unlike the previous year when the data was all released within a week. It started on 11 June with the release of national Standards data showing percentage increases in those ‘at’ or ‘above’ (the headline statistic for the National Standards) from 76.2 to 77.4 in reading, 68.0 to 70.0 in writing and 72.2 to 73.6 in maths. As noted in the introduction, little of significance can be read into such improvements as there are numerous sources of variation that underlie schools’ judgments that mean any claim of overall improvement or decline in the achievement of New Zealand children against the National Standards is spurious (see RAINS 2, pp. 3–50; also Thrupp, 2013c). Ngā Whanaketanga data was released at the same time, the first year it had been released, with the proportions of children getting ‘manawa toa’ or ‘manawa ora’ as follows: kōrero 65.3%, pānui 75.8, tuhituhi 70% and pāngarau 60%.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcer-on-assessment>

<sup>10</sup> Manawa toa means the child is progressing and achieving higher than expected, manawa ora means the student is progressing and achieving as expected. Kōrero refers to oral language, pānui is reading, tuhituhi is writing and pāngarau is mathematics.

Government's publicity around the release of national Ngā Whanaketanga data (eg., Parata, 2013) did not make it clear that nearly half of schools had not submitted data. This only became public later in the year (see below).

The Government certainly tried to make the most of the release of the National Standards data. The Minister described the overall results as a "pleasing advance on last year's data" and the data as "powerful" (Shuttleworth, 2013b). She also suggested such small gains meant they were real: "The increase we see between last year and this year, it's been an incremental change of 1.2 percent, 1.4 percent. So seeing this consistency is very reassuring." ("Educators dismiss claim of national standards improvement", 2013). But the NZPF, NZEI, the Greens and New Zealand First as well as individuals like Nigel Latta, Howard Lee and the first author all poured cold water on the idea that the gains should be taken seriously, while Opposition Education Spokesperson Chris Hipkins used the opportunity to say that Labour would dump the National Standards ("Educators dismiss claim of national standards improvement", 2013; Shuttleworth, 2013a). NZCER also weighed in with a warning against reading too much into the data, pointing out that since the National Standards had never been trialled, the first few years needed to be treated as a trial (NZCER, 2013).

The second stage was the release of regional data on 18 July 2013. Various newspaper articles around the country speculated on why that particular region was higher or lower than others in the National Standards, but with little to go on these stories didn't develop into much (e.g, Pokoney & Ratley, 2013). Several National MPs also issued media releases on 19 July entitled "[Insert MP's name] welcomes regional information on education results".<sup>11</sup> These all went on to use exactly the same 'could do better' wording:

I'm happy to see [insert percentage figure] of students in the [insert region] achieved the national standard in reading. While these are great results, we want to see our primary students do even better, and this data will help schools to focus resources to better support kids.

Clearly this template release was the National Government's PR machine in action but what was disturbing rather than comical about it was that it signalled the start of a target-setting regime in which schools and teachers would always be expected to do better, regardless of how well they were already doing.

Also about this time was the launch of the regional infographics as part of the PAI pipeline. This development was pitched directly at parents "Public Achievement Information to support your child's education" (Parata, 2013). The Minister is quoted as saying "This information empowers us all to take action on specific areas at the local level—where the greatest change is possible—and get more involved and engaged to help support our children's teachers" (Parata, 2013). Despite this attempt to make the PAI data relevant, they are only summary statistics and are a world away from the particular concerns of parents (see Section 3.8).

The third release has involved the data on individual schools and kura. Whereas the Minister's media release covering the publication of national data said the individual data would be released at the end of June (Parata, 2013b), in fact it only seems to have been put up on Education Counts four months later in late October (NZPF, 2013b). The late release of the individual data might have been due to the scale of the task of getting the data online in its new format or because suitable data was missing from schools (especially Māori-medium schools, as discussed below). It is also hard to know the exact date the data went up since, at the time of writing (10 November 2013), there has been no media release by Government to accompany this event. Again this may have been because it was so late (and Government did not wish to publicise this), because of the missing data or because the largely adverse publicity around the National Standards over 2013 (again, see below) made it preferable to push on quietly.

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<sup>11</sup> Alfred Ngaro, Michael Woodhouse, Jo Goodhew, and Cam Calder with Kanwal Bakshi all put out such media releases and possibly other MPs as well. Goodhew's release had a slightly different title, "MP welcomes regional information on education results"). Kanwaljit Singh Bakshi used the same 'could do better' wording in his July 2013 newsletter.

One pleasing development in the tables released on Education Counts in 2013 is that the value ‘p’ has been used in any school where less than four children in the school or in a major data category (such as boys) are performing ‘at’ or ‘above’. This avoids the appalling situation where special schools catering for children with more severe special needs are highlighted as being 100% well below as occurred in 2012. On the other hand it does not cover the situation of regular schools where children with special needs are still expected to be given OTJs and where they will contribute to a school’s achievement data and comparisons made regardless of how inappropriate these age-related progressions will often be for such children.

**Kura kaupapa Māori and Ngā Whanaketanga:** In August it emerged that nearly half of the Māori-medium schools had not submitted Ngā Whanaketanga data to the Ministry. Some of these were not forwarding data for ‘capability reasons’ but most simply refused (Shadwell, 2013). Among those who objected most to Ngā Whanaketanga were those kura kaupapa Māori who were following the Te Ao Matua philosophy, a holistic Māori world-view expected to underpin the curriculum of kura kaupapa. This had been passed into legislation under the Education (Te Aho Matua) Amendment Act 1999. Te Rūnanga Nui o Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori, the national body of kura kaupapa Māori and the kaitiaki (guardians) of the Te Ao Matua philosophy had been firmly opposed to having Ngā Whanaketanga dominate the curriculum in kura (Te Rūnanga Nui o Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori, 2010) and was continuing to press for an alternative approach to assessment during 2013. We are not sure where negotiations with Government have got to but note that at the time of writing (10 November 2013) data is still missing on Education Counts for 29 of the 45 full-primary schools with kura in their title and that are identified as supposed to be teaching Ngā Whanaketanga.

**MTL research:** In September another report was released from the National Standards School Sample Monitoring and Evaluation project (see RAINS 1, pp. 33–37). This report noted some improvement in OTJ-making but concluded that “considered together, [the] evidence suggests that OTJs lack dependability” (Ward & Thomas 2013, p. 1). This problem also led the authors to question some substantial increases in the proportions of children from various subgroups rated ‘at’ or ‘above’, for instance Pasifika students: “These increases must be interpreted with caution; they represent changes in teachers’ judgments of student achievement over time ... this data cannot necessarily be taken as evidence that student achievement is improving over time” (Ward & Thomas, 2013, p. 3). The report covered a range of other issues including reporting and student achievement targets but media coverage focussed on the lack of dependability of the OTJs (“Accuracy of school results in doubt”, 2013).

**National Standards Aggregate Data Advisory Group (NSADAG):** When the national data was released in June 2013, the Minister announced the setting up of this group, chaired by NZCER director, Robyn Baker, to advise the Ministerial Cross-Sector Forum on Raising Achievement (MCSFoRA). The NSADAG advised the Government not to make PaCT mandatory and to find a more “compelling story” about the National Standards in order to overcome “distrust” and “insufficient understanding of the strengths and limitations of data” within the sector (National Standards Aggregate Data Advisory Group, 2013). The NSADAG also suggested using a high profile “champion” to lead thinking about the National Standards, only reporting the Standards every alternative year and investigating the impact of the Standards on those children deemed ‘below’. There were other recommendations around improved professional development and allowing a climate of greater transparency, critique and discussion around the Standards.

The NSADAG recommendations were clearly an attempt to help the Government escape the hole it had been digging itself in relation to PaCT, the National Standards and its relationships with those within the sector. It was refreshingly honest about some of the problems Government was facing but within a framework of being committed to the continuation of both PaCT and the National Standards. Some criticisms of the NSADAG recommendations were along the lines that they were saying the most pressing task was for Government to ‘spin’ these policies better (Turei, 2013), but across the political spectrum the report was also cited as evidence that even the Government’s own advisors were critical of PaCT and National Standards (e.g., Elley, 2013; NZPF, 2013b; Patterson, 2013).

The NSADAG continues a line of advisory groups (starting with the NSSAG, through the PAI subgroup of the MCSFoRA, to the NSADAG) that have been announced as consultative solutions when the heat is on Government over its education policies, only to be quietly discontinued or have their meeting notes no longer made public once their political usefulness has passed. The NSSAG seems to have met last in February 2012 (see RAINS 2, p. 23). The most recent meeting notes currently up on the Ministry's website from the MCSFoRA are for 24 September 2012. The recommendations from the NSADAG were not released publicly but only came to light in October following an OIA request from the Green Party.

**Labour's policy on National Standards:** While most of the political parties did not change their policies of opposition or support of National Standards in any obvious way during 2013, Labour firmed up its opposition to National Standards, which had not been so clear in 2012 (see RAINS 2, p. 20). As noted above, Chris Hipkins announced in June 2013 that Labour would get rid of National Standards: "National Standards are no use basically; they're not consistent, they're not providing reliable, accurate data and they don't have an educational purpose" (Hipkins, quoted in Shuttleworth, 2013a). Labour would instead track student progress against the NZC and aggregate data would not be published (Shuttleworth, 2013a). By the end of the year, Opposition Leader David Cunliffe had only one relevant line in his speech to the Labour Party conference: "We will scrap the National Standards" (Cunliffe, 2013).

### 3. MAIN FINDINGS

#### 3.1 After four years of the National Standards, how much have the RAINS schools changed in obvious ways?

The RAINS schools have changed quite a lot in ways that are related to the National Standards launched in October 2009. The most obvious changes are to assessment and reporting as well as to the pedagogical balance or focus of some of the schools and these are discussed here. There are further important changes in relationships and outlooks; these are discussed in Sections 3.3–3.6 below. For reasons discussed in Section 3.2, not all of the changes we mention would be identified by the schools as being primarily due to National Standards or indeed resulting from this policy at all. We therefore need to constantly ask: “Is this something this school would have done, and would it have taken the same approach, were it not for the National Standards policy and the schooling climate it has created?”

At Seagull School, a large Year 0–6 suburban school drawing on mainly middle class Pākehā and Asian families, the staff, SLT and board initially regarded the National Standards as a retrograde step compared to the assessment and reporting the school had already been doing. Nevertheless they didn’t see any point in overt resistance to the policy and so this school started off by largely ‘bolting on’ National Standards to existing practices. 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. But over time Seagull has turned from a token approach to the Standards to doing them in earnest and working very hard to get its National Standards processes ‘right’ and maximize children’s achievement against the Standards. Measures taken have included taking up a new assessment tool across the school (e-asTTle writing), relatively structured, whole school approaches to collecting, moderating and checking ‘triangulated’ data and more emphasis on targeting and boosting achievement for particular groups and individuals. There has also been an increase in formal reporting and Seagull now reports against the National Standards in its regular reports, although not using the language of the four-point scale.

Kanuka School, 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, was the most enthusiastic of the RAINS schools about the National Standards and in many ways also became the most instrumental in pursuit of student achievement against the Standards. This school developed uncompromising report graphs that used colour coding to indicate whether or not children were achieving well; these were used as the basis for discussion with children and at parent-teacher conferences. Kanuka only started to use the ‘well-below’ category in 2012 after the Ministry required this. Apart from this change, the graphs and parent conferences were tinkered with but did not change much over the course of the project. Many teachers at Kanuka also had classroom wall displays that showed children the relative positioning of themselves and their classmates against curriculum levels and/or the National Standards. Kanuka also developed its own indicator sheets for use by teachers in gauging what children needed to have for National Standards and came to accept a curriculum that was more strongly focused on numeracy and literacy than any of the other schools and one where there were more specific interventions intended to ‘accelerate’ children, few of whom arrived ‘school-ready’. By 2013 teaching staff were all working on a new schoolwide intervention that they hoped would dramatically improve children’s reading and writing. Importantly, this new intervention did not assume much prior curriculum-related experience to support reading and writing, so it was hoped that more Kanuka children could experience success with it than with previous approaches.

Juniper School, a small rural Year 0–6 school with a middle SES intake and about 50 mainly Pākehā pupils, had a principal who was a self-confessed enthusiast for assessment. While somewhat critical of the National Standards, she was very keen to be ‘ahead of the game’ from the outset. Changes at this school involved constant tinkering with children’s portfolios, assessment rubrics, and reports for parents as well as a general intensification of assessment, perhaps best illustrated by introducing small multiple-choice and true/false tests for new entrants as a means of getting them ready for later standardised testing. In reporting to parents, Juniper used careful wording to avoid the four-point



scale. Juniper had very advantageous staffing as the board had taken it upon itself to fund-raise enough to employ an extra teacher to keep the principal from having to teach, allowing her a lot of time for working on the National Standards at the level of the whole school, supporting three classroom teachers and individual children. But by 2013, with the roll still slowly declining, it was apparent that the fund-raising was becoming too expensive and that Juniper would lose the non-teaching principal arrangement and some very small class sizes that were making it much easier for this school to respond to the National Standards than others.

Magenta School was a rural ‘full primary’ Year 0–8 school with a mainly middle class Pākehā intake. It very much demonstrated a commitment to a broad primary school curriculum and tended to make more of its local response to the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), the ‘Magenta Curriculum’, than of the National Standards. Magenta tinkered with report formats and worked with a local cluster of schools on moderation of writing samples and mathematics. It also became increasingly preoccupied with recording evidence of achievement. After a reasonably sympathetic review from ERO, it was probably the RAINS school that had changed least in response to the National Standards by the end of 2013.

Cicada School, a large Year 0–6 suburban school with a low socio-economic and ethnically diverse intake, had an SLT and board that were openly opposed to National Standards so did nothing towards them until late in 2011. However a 78J letter (demanding large amounts of information from schools deemed ‘at risk’), concern about a commissioner being put into the school, and more attention from a Ministry senior advisor, saw the school setting up apparatus around the Standards as “a necessary evil”, including new reports and a framework of benchmarks to guide teachers. It also had targeted groups of underperforming children in each class, and comparative discussions of this data within the school.

Huia Intermediate, a large ethnically and socio-economically diverse suburban intermediate (Years 7 and 8, aged 11–13), initially made just a few moves towards the National Standards. These included some minor changes to reporting as well as changing the school timetable to include the expectation that children were in their regular classrooms from 9–11 each day and for that to be uninterrupted time spent on literacy and numeracy. Senior staff argued the need for a gradual response to the National Standards because there was a great deal of preliminary work to be done on pedagogy before teachers could start making OTJs based on a range of evidence. Reports on achievement against National Standards as given to parents and forwarded to the Ministry in 2012 and 2013 were therefore based solely on asTTle scores. Unfortunately, this had an uncompromising effect on OTJs, making this school’s achievement look lower than it probably would have otherwise. By 2013 Huia Intermediate was found wanting by ERO (a 1–2 year return) and became subjected to increased monitoring and intervention by ERO in a way that will force more engagement with the National Standards in the years to come.

Although it can be seen that the RAINS schools trajectories have been very different, they are converging towards the National Standards agenda gradually, whether the schools were early adopters of the Standards (Kanuka, Juniper), have come to them over time (Seagull) or have been forced to engage because of intervention from the Ministry or ERO (Cicada, Huia). Magenta has managed to get by with a more tepid response but the positioning of this school remains vulnerable: a tougher ERO review or a change of leadership would easily see a greater focus on National Standards in line with the other schools.

### **3.2 Why have the RAINS schools fallen into line with the National Standards agenda in the way they have?**

One of the most important aspects of the RAINS research has been to gain an understanding of why those in the RAINS schools, many of them sceptical or dismissive of the Government’s National Standards agenda at the outset, have mostly come around to engaging with the Standards with more effort and attention. We identify three main kinds of reasons for falling in line with the National Standards: professional identities, pressure from central agencies, and incrementalism/unevenness.

Meanwhile there has been little evidence (so far) of market pressures related to the public release of data. This is a general discussion: the case studies discuss a range of reasons for going with the Standards in each of the schools.

## Professional identities

Various issues around the professional identities of teachers and principals were enough to create a shift towards the National Standards in the RAINS schools even without much other pressure. To begin with, the development and impact of the National Standards policy has in many ways been ‘camouflaged’ by components that teachers connect to previous practice. The OTJ feature means the National Standards have numerous assessment elements including many that are already within the accepted practice of primary teachers but which are being given a new twist as they become linked to a more high-stakes assessment system. This means that the boundaries of New Zealand’s National Standards are not clear-cut and much less so than any newly introduced national test would be. In all of the schools the idea that what was being asked for by the National Standards was not so different from what was already being done was an important part of accepting the National Standards agenda. There were some schools where it was also explicitly argued that what appeared to be being done for the National Standards was actually being done for good practice independent of the Standards; for instance, the target-setting in each class that began at Cicada in 2013.

Second, the National Standards policy has been supported by some wider ideologies in New Zealand education. In particular, the discourse of avoiding deficit thinking was an important source of support for National Standards at Kanuka, especially for the SLT. In essence the argument at that school was that the achievement of all children must be raised to meet the Standards; that there must be no concessions for socio-economic constraints. This aspirational discourse was regarded by the SLT as essential for being a good teacher at Kanuka—it was aspiration that counted, almost regardless of how realistic it might be.

Third, there were matters of leadership and the personal enthusiasms or ambitions of senior leaders in the RAINS schools. At Juniper, assessment was a passion of the principal, who clearly saw the National Standards system as a challenge to be explored; for instance, wanting to trial the PaCT tool. At Kanuka, finding a positive way through the National Standards was an important part of a relatively new principal demonstrating leadership. There was a risk for senior leaders at all the schools of undermining their own leadership with staff by creating a kind of dissonance around the National Standards: ‘We are doing this but I don’t really agree with it.’ Hence at Cicada it was clear by 2013 that the principal had increasingly begun to keep his reservations about the National Standards to the SLT while at Huia the SLT lost credibility with middle leaders because of diffident messages.

Fourth, wanting to do well with the National Standards intersected with a culture of commitment to high expectations and constant improvement, especially at Seagull. In this school the perspective essentially became that ‘if we are going to do the Standards we are going to do them really well, in the same way we do our best at everything else’.

Fifth, there was a loyalty to one’s own particular school: that our school is ‘boxing clever’ or, as one Seagull teacher put it, has ‘nice’ National Standards. Teachers at the higher SES schools like Seagull also argued that their school didn’t realistically face some of the same difficulties as other schools.

Lastly there was defensiveness around practice as a committed teacher or principal: people who were putting a lot of energy into their jobs and not wanting to think they might be on the wrong path in the way they were responding to National Standards.

In all of this we can see changing outlooks as teachers and principals have sought to make a virtue out of necessity, either earlier (Kanuka, Juniper) or later (Seagull, Cicada). Even Huia Intermediate and Magenta Schools have had to find some accommodation with the National Standards, the difference being that their more tenuous accounts of how they were doing the Standards were unacceptable to ERO on the one hand and acceptable on the other.



## Pressure to comply from Government agencies

Pressure by Government agencies on some of the schools for compliance can be seen—strong and wide-ranging pressure in some cases (on Cicada from the Ministry, on Huia from ERO) and more limited pressures in others (on Kanuka from the Ministry to use ‘well-below’, on Magenta from the Ministry to put the words ‘National Standards’ many times in its charter, on Kanuka from ERO to use a wider range of assessments, on Magenta from ERO to make a bit more effort with the Standards). In the cases of Juniper and Seagull such obvious external pressures from Government have been neither necessary nor present. What was important in all the schools, however, was a general awareness of the political climate, the recognition that contestation of National Standards was ‘failing’ nationally and so any school that didn’t respond to the Standards in some measure was likely to get into significant difficulties.

## Incrementalism and unevenness

New demands were also able to creep in because they were incremental. What wouldn’t have been expected or acceptable so long ago becomes ‘business as usual’, a phrase used about the National Standards at Kanuka and Seagull and which again may be signalling a new normativity. A further obfuscating issue in the contributing and full primary schools (all except Huia Intermediate) was that the senior part of the schools were having to respond more to the National Standards policy than the junior, making it more difficult to have a common view around the impact of the policy.

## Market pressures

Largely missing from the RAINS schools over the course of the project was any sense that their responses were being animated by the public release of data. Of course this research has been conducted before the publication of data has become very established (a point taken up further in Section 4.1). There was some early tweeking at Seagull to make targets more achievable in the event that this school’s performance against its targets became more public, and the SLTs of both Huia Intermediate and Juniper Schools were certainly conscious of the demographics impacting on the size of their schools’ intakes. But it was only the principal of Magenta that seemed to be really concerned about community perception of National Standards performance. He argued (to ERO but also less directly to us) that the demographic decline of the school’s rural catchment area coupled with its position within an aspirational community that had other choices meant that even a decline of 1% or 2% in published achievement data would be extremely damaging for this school.

## 3.3 What is the evidence in relation to intensification of staff workloads?

Increased staff workloads are often a consequence of high-stakes accountability systems internationally (e.g., Gewirtz, 2002), but through the RAINS research we have realised this is likely to turn out to be a serious cost of New Zealand’s National Standards, especially if the political temperature continues to rise around the policy. Workload related to assessment activities such as collecting data, testing, marking, recording, moderating, making judgements and checking have increased considerably in some of the RAINS schools. The issue is mainly with the OTJ, not so much with teachers making an OTJ (which most seem able to do quite intuitively and efficiently) but rather the requirement to be able to justify one’s OTJs within or beyond the school. This is because what is needed to justify an OTJ becomes a matter of ‘how long is a piece of string’? There is no end to how much an OTJ can be shored up with test results and other evidence and the more anxious an individual teacher or a school is about getting it right, the more energy will be put into careful OTJ-making. This may not be at the obvious expense of other aspects of primary education, but there will be an opportunity cost even where a school is determined not to call time on other areas they see as

important, whether it be in work-life balance, the richness of the curriculum, extracurricular activities, or most likely, all of the above. When teachers are already working long hours (and they do), something has to lose emphasis. (Seagull teacher: ‘I was just thinking next week I won’t be doing reading groups that day because I need to make sure I have [collected in data]’).

Looking at the schools, it is some of those that ERO would regard as exemplary—Juniper and Seagull<sup>12</sup>—that are putting the most energy into OTJ-making. While Juniper could do this without so much opportunity cost because of that school’s unusual staffing advantages, at much larger and more conventionally staffed Seagull there was a horrendous amount of work involved in OTJs, including all the moderating and checking that senior curriculum leaders were undertaking in their attempts to get all staff on the same page. (Seagull DP: ‘For a wee while ... we would go to the teacher and say, ‘Okay, these ones you are marking a bit too hard’ or ‘too easy, can you go back and revise’. [But] they don’t want to go back and revise because everyone has their strong opinions on what they believe in so it doesn’t work so then we had to go back and redo it all.’) This was a school determined not to drop anything but it is difficult to see how these extra demands would not be impacting on other school activities. Meanwhile Kanuka and Cicada have been forced by the demands of their intakes to keep OTJ processes reined in, Magenta was doing just enough to get by and Huia wasn’t doing much at all (but will be now that ERO has started ‘supporting’ this school).

There have also been some new and time-consuming demands around *responding* to the National Standards judgements in terms of target-setting and interventions with particular targeted groups or individual children and extra time on reporting to parents, including the linguistic gymnastics needed to avoid using the four-point scale and the checking of reports, which have now become more high stakes. We recognise the extra targeted help has likely benefited some children, although the logic of the National Standards is that some children will still get overlooked (see Section 3.6). But our main point here is that it is a particular use of teacher and school energies and something has to give.

### 3.4 What is the evidence in relation to curriculum and curriculum narrowing?

There were some accounts from teachers and principals that the National Standards had not particularly narrowed the curriculum in the RAINS schools, or that where it had become more focused this had been a useful thing (see case studies). But there was more evidence that the curriculum was narrowing in ways that depended on the particular schools and their responses to reform. One type of narrowing was towards reading, writing and maths despite often wanting to still offer a broad primary curriculum. Another was the growth of assessment activities within reading, writing and maths (and other areas where literacy and numeracy assessment can come in) in order to support OTJs against the National Standards. Third, there was a narrowing of focus in what was being taught within reading, writing and maths, again according to what was seen as important for the National Standards. Finally these specific narrowing effects were occurring within a broader pattern of a two-tier curriculum being reinforced by the National Standards policy, a general development that may prove to be just as important in terms of children’s life-chances as the more specific ones.

#### Narrowing towards reading, writing and maths

Perhaps the most obvious curriculum narrowing occurred where the RAINS schools decided to increase the proportion of the school day spent explicitly on numeracy or literacy. The best example was Huia’s decision in 2011 that children must always be doing regular classroom work from 9–11am each day and for that to be uninterrupted time spent on literacy and numeracy. This was an important change as it meant children could no longer be with specialist arts or technology teachers or doing PE or other activities in the first block each day. It was not entirely adhered to by teachers but certainly sent a signal about what areas were expected to be given priority.

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<sup>12</sup> Seagull was not reviewed during the project but has a track record of excellent reviews.

In a few cases schools also made conscious decisions to pull staff energies out of particular areas that they had previously been involved in. Kanuka and Seagull's use of an outside group to take PE and Kanuka's use of a specialist music teacher could be seen as a way to keep regular teachers focused on the classroom (with other advantages too).

More common, however, was simply that teachers found that numeracy and literacy took up most of the day so that it was increasingly difficult to fit in 'topic work', the 'big idea' or 'concept' and the attention to science, social science, environmental studies and arts they represented. Such material was often only covered in the last block of the day when children were getting tired and less focused. The problem of running out of time for the broader primary curriculum was mentioned repeatedly across the schools. Some telling examples were teachers at Seagull talking about their struggle to fit everything in and recent arts graduates at Cicada talking about how they had no time to fit the arts into their programme. In this context, areas other than reading, writing and maths become almost guilty pleasures for teachers or they become vehicles for literacy and numeracy first and foremost. High interest activities such as making 'hokey pokey' (Juniper) or 'fairy bread' (Cicada) were invariably a prelude to explanation writing or procedural writing. It was only in a senior class at Magenta that we saw a science experiment going on for its own sake in a regular class.

## Growth of assessment in numeracy and literacy

As well as areas other than reading, writing and maths falling away, the balance between assessment and teaching in these three areas was shifting towards more time spent on assessment activities at the expense of teaching. The extent to which this was happening and teachers were aware of it varied from school to school. It was most obvious around a demanding new assessment item such as e-asTTle writing at Seagull or some decision to reinforce the frequency of assessment such as with running records at Kanuka. But for the most part the drift towards assessment was more subtle than this. The National Standards have created a greater focus on, and anxiety around, assessment and teachers are therefore spending more time on the processes leading up to the OTJ. Related to the earlier discussion of increased workloads and opportunity costs, inevitably some of this energy is coming out of teaching in the areas that are being assessed including development of relevant and rich curriculum resources and tasks and engagement with them in the classroom. (Juniper Teacher: "How much more are we going to test these children, when are we going to teach them?")

## Reduced focus within the taught content of reading, writing and maths

As well as being under time pressure to reach curriculum levels in reading, writing and maths, there was evidence of the taught curriculum in these areas becoming narrower and in some ways more technical as teachers pressed the points needed to show the mastery required for the relevant curriculum level or maths stage. This sometimes involved pressure to focus on one part of a curriculum over another (e.g., with maths, see Cicada case study) or just lingering on a particular competency or skill that was deemed to demonstrate that a child had mastered a particular curriculum level or maths stage (Cicada teacher: "They need to know this strategy, they need to know this strategy, they need to know this strategy, in order to be able to get this mark on a test") whereas previously the teacher would have moved on (see also teacher comments on e-asTTle at Seagull). The problem is not that some areas are being *reinforced*, it is that the curriculum is being *forced* in a way that is likely to be less authentic and less appealing to children. We are reminded that it is the intrinsic appeal of curriculum that is probably the most powerful tool at the disposal of any teacher.

Another angle on this issue is the way in which other accepted teaching practices and initiatives might become pressed into the service of National Standards. For instance PB4L (Positive Behaviour for Learning) provides teachers with strategies for changing behaviours and improving the engagement of children at school. Seeing those strategies put to frequent use in a Year 3 cohort class at Seagull in 2013, we were struck by how they could be used to support the engagement of children with the National Standards. In particular if National Standards are demanding a more specific and technical

approach to curriculum, PB4L strategies such as constant praise could become forms of external motivation used to offset loss of intrinsic motivation in the taught curriculum.

## Two-tier curriculum

While all New Zealand primary schools have become more focused on numeracy and literacy because of a variety of policies since the 1990s, realistically New Zealand has also long had different curriculums in its schools as they have responded to higher and lower socio-economic intakes (Thrupp, 1999). Against this background National Standards are reinforcing a two-tier curriculum across richer and poorer schools by giving permission to, and incentivising, an even tighter concentration on numeracy and literacy in low SES schools such as Kanuka and Cicada, while more middle class schools such as Seagull, Magenta and Juniper are still able to retain a somewhat more generous primary curriculum.

Schools like Kanuka and Cicada perceive that the main needs of their children are in reading, writing, and maths and permission to focus more tightly on these has been implicit in the National Standards concentration on these areas and the frequent Standards-related messages about the need to turn around achievement of the '1 in 5' and the need for the learning of struggling children to be accelerated in order to 'catch them up' to the Standards.<sup>13</sup> These were messages that Kanuka, in particular, had taken to heart (see Kanuka School case study). It openly stated that the key foci of the school were literacy and numeracy, and that this was a view supported by the community. Lower socio-economic schools are also incentivised to focus on numeracy and literacy given that the National Standards do not involve a value-added approach and given the nature of their intakes. (Cicada teacher: "It's very clear about where our kids are supposed to be. And in order to get them there we have to make sacrifices.") By comparison, middle class communities will typically neither see the need for, nor put up with, a curriculum that is so narrow. After all, if most children at your school can be expected to be 'at' or 'above', the 1 in 5 and acceleration messages hardly apply. And if your school will have an advantaged positioning in comparisons of raw scores then why would you take such a focused approach to numeracy and literacy and ignore the more exciting learning, creativity and connections often available in a wider approach to the curriculum?

It was not hard to see these differences playing out in the RAINS schools. It was not that any of the schools were not trying to do their best by the children in their care, but there was a different reading of the predominant needs of their classes in a way that meant that any child who transferred from one of the (mainstream) classes in the low SES schools to one of the (mainstream) classes in the higher SES schools would experience a quite different curriculum. To take an obvious difference, at Seagull they would spend a day every week on some optional activity where reading, writing and maths were pushed to the background whereas at Kanuka such a programme would not have been supported because it would be wasting precious numeracy and literacy time given the urgent needs of the children. Conversely the extensive time spent on the context-free reading and writing programme introduced at Kanuka in 2013 would be unlikely to be welcomed by children at Seagull, nor their teachers and parents. There were also many more subtle examples of differences between classes observed in the middle class and lower socio-economic schools. Our point is not that such differences exist but that the policy around the National Standards will be intensifying them because of new pressure on low SES schools to push up numeracy and literacy rather than aspire to a broader curriculum. Huia Intermediate can be seen as a school that eventually ran into trouble with the Ministry and ERO because it wasn't seen to be focusing enough on numeracy and literacy basics despite having many disadvantaged children in its intake.

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps also signalled by the absence of a 'well above' category in the National Standards.

### 3.5 What is the evidence in relation to positioning and labelling children?

At the heart of the matter here is whether or not being positioned against and labelled by the National Standards categories was a favourable or unfavourable experience for children in terms of motivation and learning. Unsurprisingly, the picture varied according to where children were being placed on the four-point scale, but it also varied between teachers and schools, children and parents.

Teachers in most of the schools were clear that labelling children ‘below’ or ‘well below’ was unhelpful or damaging. This was considered especially problematic when there were lots of children with ESOL backgrounds or children with special needs as at Cicada and Huia. Fewer such concerns were noted by teachers in 2011 than in 2012/13 because our 2011 interviews took place when ESOL children or children with special needs could still be exempted from the National Standards.

Teachers typically sought to soften judgements by focusing on progress in their discussions with children and parents. That children usually had little to say about the National Standards (see section 3.7) may be testament to the effectiveness of this ‘softening’, although many teachers reported struggling to get their messages about progress against the authority of the National Standards category. (Seagull teacher: “[The parents] just don’t see it, they are just kind of like ‘Oh, I’ll need to get my kid a tutor.’”) Schools were also using the option to soften the language of reporting away from the language of the four-point scale. Many of the schools were also trying to avoid using the ‘well below’ category altogether. Some teachers pointed out that while children had been told they would get to ‘at’ through hard work, this was often an unfulfilled promise, a case of ‘jam tomorrow’. One reason for this may be because the National Standards get harder against national norms as children move up through the year levels (NZCER, 2013; NSADAG, 2013).

Most of the schools were also circumspect about displaying children’s achievement levels relative to their peers in classroom wall displays and the like. At Juniper and Huia, some wall displays included the position of each child against curriculum levels but each child was represented by a symbol that they could keep to themselves if they wanted to.<sup>14</sup> Kanuka was more explicit about positioning children (see case study). Here, although the SLT was strongly opposed to deficit thinking and opposed the ‘well below’ category as encouraging this kind of thinking, ‘below’ was regarded as an essential message for children and parents because of the importance of transparent messages to low SES parents, and in order to encourage improvement. As a result, report formats and many classroom wall displays were more explicit about children’s positioning against the National Standards than at any of the other schools. Indeed enthusiasm for transparency seemed to have got out of hand at this school. In one classroom we found a wall display that made individuals who were below or well below stand out like a sore thumb. Discussion with this school’s SLT suggested they did not endorse this approach although they agreed with the desire for transparency the display reflected.

Teachers had more mixed views on categorising children as ‘at’ or ‘above’. Some thought it was motivating, or at least harmless for many children, but others argued that these children and their parents also found it hard to see past the National Standards categories to the level of progress that was really being made and the need for ‘next steps’, regardless of how well the child had done. In other words teachers were concerned that the labelling of children as ‘at’ or ‘above’ often led to complacency and did not encourage ‘able’ children to improve further. The absence of a ‘well above’ category was frequently noted by teachers and was seen to further contribute to the complacency problem.

When it came to the interviews with children, few seemed to perceive National Standards categories as a problem compared to their teachers. There is a range of issues around the data from the childrens’ interviews that we are continuing to explore (see Section 3.7) but we note here a few comments that give cause for concern. (The OTJs of these children in each of reading, writing and maths can be found amongst all of those children interviewed in Appendix 3.)

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<sup>14</sup> At Huia this was based on a skateboard ramp in a park where unnamed cutouts of children were moved through curriculum levels—“Writing Park: Write your way through the Park!!”



I'd be happy with 'at' but if I got 'below' I'd be a bit down cause then I'd think I haven't really tried in class. (Year 8 girl at Huia, H5, interviewed in 2012. Pākehā and Tongan ethnicity. Had just been talking about how hard she had worked that year. Mainly 'below' while at Huia).

It feels like all the rest of the class is above me and I'm not 'above' them. (Year 4 girl at Kanuka, K5, interviewed in 2013. Pākehā ethnicity. 'At' or 'above' in 2011).

When I was in Term One, I thought my teachers would growl at me for not being at a high standard. (Year 6 boy at Cicada, C12, interviewed in 2013. Indian ethnicity. Always at or above during 2011–13).

When it says I'm 'at' it feels like I'm not studying much and like I've been playing games too much at home ... and I feel guilty. (Year 6 girl at Cicada, C11, Thai ethnicity. interviewed in 2013. Always 'at' or 'above' during 2011–13).

It's not exactly helpful for me, I'm 'above' the average but then, so? It doesn't really mean anything, actually. (Year 8 girl at Huia, H15, Pākehā ethnicity. interviewed in 2012. Always 'above' while at Huia).

Although less severe, some of the initial comments have the flavour of those that children in England were making in the 1990s in response to SATs testing: "I'll be a nothing" (Reay & William, 1999). Concerns about being only 'at', which were also expressed by a number of children, remind us that families have different views, related to ethnic and class culture, about what constitutes satisfactory achievement for their children (Nash, 1993). They also underlined that few children or parents may have understood the nature of the judgements being made. The fourth quote above is also concerning because if National Standards are contributing to making children 'feel guilty' for/about their learning at home, the power of important informal learning will be being diminished.

Also highly relevant to positioning and labelling, we heard from both children and parents that reports were sometimes not being shared by parents with their children because of the National Standards judgements. This was often a means of protecting children from the effects of low OTJ ratings and this action probably speaks louder than words about what parents think about the unfavourable effects of judgements against the National Standards.

Lastly, children (and parents) had a strong awareness of ability grouping in teaching classes despite teachers' best efforts to camouflage this. This suggests that invidious processes of social comparison found elsewhere remain powerful in New Zealand primary schools too (Fraser, 2010). This finding in itself provides an important lens through which to consider the National Standards, as the OTJ ratings of children are likely to be a matter for peer comparison even within schools that try to downplay children's differing achievement.

### **3.6 What other evidence is there related to effects of National Standards data and targets?**

Staff in the RAINS schools sometimes raised increased targeting as a favourable impact of the National Standards. (Seagull teacher: "Where [teachers] used to nominate children for enrichment, the DP looks at data across the board, 'Okay, these children here are going to go', which is helpful ... more targeted.") Also raised, on the other hand, was the concern that targetting would increasingly become a more direct response to the National Standards profile of schools, a kind of 'educational triage' (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), with most effort being put into those children who were just 'below' and who relatively easily could be shifted to 'at'.

Increased emphases on data, OTJs, National Standards and all their attendant ambiguities and uncertainties were also driving up anxiety levels in unhelpful ways across the schools. There were tensions in staffrooms related to OTJ-making (for instance, where the previous year's teacher was deemed to have set the latest teacher up by being too generous) and around class groupings that

teachers were allocated to work with, some of which would be much easier to ‘get through’ the National Standards with than others.

There were also difficulties related to particular features of how the National Standards are expected to work. Children now needed to be seen in terms of their ‘years at school’ through to the end of Year 4. This change created new complexity around tracking individual progress, especially in the larger schools, as junior children could no longer be tracked by way of the year level they were in. There were also particular problems with managing the ‘After three years at school’/‘At the end of Year 4’ area where cohorts diminished and increased, making for some very atypical school achievement data in those areas, depending on the characteristics of the children that had moved through and those that hadn’t yet. The way the OTJ is only supposed to be made at the end of the year (from end of Year 4) created an artificial holding back of achievement level when reporting to parents earlier in the year. It was risky for teachers to be definitive about where they thought children would be on the four-point scale at the end of the year but their evasiveness made parents more anxious than they needed to be as well. Some of the schools created their own report wording or subcategories to indicate a child was ‘on track’ to being ‘at’ or ‘above’. Finally, the way the National Standards involved uneven steps as well as getting disproportionately harder in the senior years was yet another problem for teachers and parents to grapple with. (Seagull teacher: ‘It’s really confusing for them [parents] because the benchmarks move and the kids go back’.)

### 3.7 What were children saying about the National Standards in the RAINS schools?

On the face of it, comments from the children were largely indifferent to or supportive of the National Standards apart from a handful of comments along the lines already discussed in Section 3.5. Nevertheless, we caution that particular care is needed in interpreting the data from the children’s interviews. Better analysis of the interviews will probably reveal patterns and we are getting further help with this.<sup>15</sup> In the meantime our discussion here is largely about some factors that we are aware need to be taken into account in any reading of the data.

Despite best efforts our sample was skewed towards children who were deemed ‘at’ or ‘above’ (see Appendix 3) and so we interviewed only a few of the kinds of children that teachers were really troubled about. Many of these children were also only interviewed once because they were not present at their school on the other occasion. Although we undertook 90 interviews with parents, and nearly twice that number with children (Appendix 1), we know that our processes of recruitment, requiring pages of information and consent for ethical reasons, would have put some parents off. For the second round of interviewing in 2012/2013 we used a variety of strategies to recruit a wider range of parents/children and were more successful in this in some schools, going by the OTJ profile of the children interviewed.<sup>16</sup>

There is a considerable literature about methodological and ethical issues involved in interviewing young children (e.g., Burke & Loveridge, 2013; Cameron, 2005; Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010; Krähenbühl & Blades, 2006). In order to not ‘put words into the mouths’ of the children, our interview approach didn’t raise the term National Standards unless the children raised it themselves until the final questions of the last round of interviews.<sup>17</sup> By taking this approach, it became clear that even by mid-2013 the term ‘National Standards’ was still quite unfamiliar to many children. (One Year 3 girl at Magenta thought the researcher was referring to the National Anthem: “That you sing, um, that’s on Friday at assembly and that’s quite fun because you get certificates.”).

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<sup>15</sup> Tamara Bibby, Roseanna Burke and Judith Loveridge have offered to review the data. Bibby researches the psychoanalytic dimensions of children’s experiences in schools and classrooms (Bibby 2011). Burke and Loveridge (Burke & Loveridge 2013) have been working on a New Zealand study of children’s learning.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 3 and compare the children interviewed in 2011 with those interviewed in 2012/2013.

<sup>17</sup> Except for Huia Intermediate in 2012 where the timing and nature of the interviews had to be significantly different because the children didn’t get their (first ever) National Standards report until the last school day of the year (see RAINS 2, p. 24).



Hence although they may have known about their placement on the four-point scale they often did not link this to National Standards. There was also considerable variation by school; for instance, at Juniper most children were aware of their position in relation to NZC levels, which was what this school focused on with children rather than the National Standards.

Related to this was the way children's individual learning portfolios/journals, or mathematics or writing books, were used as a prompt for discussion during the interviews. The contents of these artefacts including the extent of assessed work greatly influenced the direction of the interview and how the children thought about assessment. At Juniper (especially) and at Magenta and Kanuka the learning portfolios contained assessed work and assessment items as well as mid-year reports or achievement graphs (at Kanuka). At Seagull School, the portfolios contained published work only (no assessment), while Cicada and Huia did not use portfolios.

Children ranging in age from 5 to 13 years were interviewed. The children's awareness of the National Standards and their own achievement seems to have increased as they got older and was also affected somewhat by socio-economic factors. In line with this pattern, the children who seemed most knowledgeable about the National Standards were the Year 8 children at largely middle class Magenta School. These children could more clearly articulate ideas around the National Standards more than the children in any of the other schools. Why this was when this school was the keenest to de-emphasise the Standards is hard to know. Possibly there had been a recent discussion about the Standards in their class and this raises for us the issue that some unavoidable variation in the timing of interviews may have also had an impact on responses.

### **3.8 What were parents saying about the National Standards in the RAINS schools?**

We are still working our way through interviews with parents at the RAINS schools (see also the case studies). As noted in the previous section, we would not claim to have interviewed anything approaching a representative group of parents. We note that at largely middle class Seagull School we had a big response from parents, even bigger than at Huia where we had 'pulled out all the stops' for our interviewing in 2012.

Despite this, the parent interviews reflect a considerable diversity of perspectives in some ways. A key point from the interviews was that whether National Standards were seen as a good idea or not depended on the views and experiences of particular families and particular children. Some parents had more experience with primary education than others (for instance, if there had been older siblings or someone working in the sector). The ethnic and religious culture/s of the family were also important (for instance, some recent immigrants pointed to ranking of children as standard practice in the countries they had come from). For parents, when it came to children and the National Standards there was not just 'ability' to consider but personalities and gender as well. For instance, a parent might talk about their child being competitive, but for one child this meant liking the National Standards because of the chance to be at the top of their class whereas for another it meant feeling bad about seeing others in the class doing a bit better than they were. One parent recounted how an 'able' daughter seemed to like being above in the Standards while a son who was consistently 'below' didn't seem to care.

Following on from this personalised view of primary schooling, parents were generally not so much opposed to the National Standards (although some were) as having only marginal interest in them. They could often see some value in a system that allowed people to know where their child 'sat' nationally but the categories are broad and when it came to their own child they wanted both a more detailed and a more rounded view including progress, attitude and socialisation. They also didn't understand the National Standards very well. Most of those we spoke to in 2011 were quite keen on the National Standards but didn't know much about them at all. By 2013 their views were more diverse and while their knowledge was a little better, only one of 44 interviewed in 2013 mentioned the OTJ. (This was despite most of the interviews being in September at a time when the OTJs had hit the headlines.) Indeed, it appears some parents thought the National Standards judgements were based

on tests. Lack of understanding went right across the RAINS schools, including those that had made most effort to inform parents. Parents tended to trust the schools to know what they were doing and were clearly not very interested in how the National Standards judgements came about.

The personalised view of schooling also meant that parents made their own decisions as to how to use their child's reports containing National Standards judgements, and as mentioned in the previous section, some parents chose not to share these with their child:

For [our boy] in particular who is a child who has sat 'below', we haven't actually shared those with him. Because that would actually stunt him. He would read that and say, "Yeah I am stupid. That's what the other kids told me." And that would actually stunt his progress. So, when he was reading below, we wouldn't—well he's still spelling below—we actually don't share that with him. We just share the positives in the report. (Kanuka School parent)

The extent to which parents could avoid their child knowing their OTJs varied from school to school. Kanuka was a school that was putting a heavy emphasis on the OTJs with children and parents through its colour-coded graphs but this kind of comment suggests parents could still de-emphasise them, at least for the time being.

Another reflection of the desire for a more personalised approach emerged in relation to student-led conferences, variants of which were used by all the schools. While many parents seemed happy enough with these conferences, others found that having their child present and/or the way that the time was structured meant they could not discuss the spectrum of issues around their child that they actually wanted to discuss:

I don't have any concerns about my kids academically but sometimes you want to know how they interact with the other children ... um ... you know, there's so many things that you can't ask with the child there because they hear and understand it all ... and a bit of it, like 20 minutes, and then you know part of the time they spend, the child reads a page ... two pages out of a booklet—it's a complete waste of time because, when you read ... when they read at home every day you know how they read. (Seagull School parent)

Student-led conferences are an area that we will follow up in later work as while they have become standard practice for schools, they seemed to be a significant source of frustration for many parents, more so than the nature of reports or indeed the National Standards for that matter.

### **3.9 What was ERO's approach to reviewing the National Standards in the RAINS schools?**

There were two kinds of activities involving National Standards for reviewers in the RAINS schools, although in practice data collection for them would have overlapped. There were the regular review enquiry processes where National Standards fell under the broad question of how effectively a school's curriculum promotes the learning, engagement, progress and achievement of children. Because of the careful language in ERO reports in individual schools, we were under the impression that review teams might use a template for commenting on how fully or otherwise schools were 'implementing' the Standards. But we were assured that the only standardised wording in use in school's review reports was when a school was non-compliant where the wording needed to be quite clear in terms of legislative requirements.

A template was used for answering the evaluation questions for the National Evaluation Topics (NETS) that underpin the national reports that ERO puts out from time to time. Not all national reports involve reviewers collecting information specifically for NETs but many do. ERO has had a series of national reports on the National Standards and by 2011 when ERO teams first appeared in the RAINS schools during the course of our research, they were looking at how trustees were working with the National Standards as part of their governance role and how school leaders and teachers were working

with the National Standards as part of the school's curriculum and assessment procedures (see ERO, 2012b; Appendix 2 and 3). During later reviews in 2012 and 2013, the NETS also included a focus on the National Standards in Maths, on accelerating priority learners and on Board responsibilities. In other words, over the period the schools were reviewed, the NET of the moment was sometimes specifically on National Standards and sometimes not, but National Standards were often of some relevance.

It is important to recognise too that over the three years of the project, ERO's review focus moved from whether schools were engaging with the National Standards to look more specifically at how National Standards judgements are being arrived at and how the data is used to inform practice targeted at 'priority learners' in particular. Also mentioned by reviewers was increased sharing of data between the Ministry and ERO; for example, around schools that were not complying with the National Standards. An implication is that review processes are becoming more demanding around the National Standards over time in a way that means that schools reviewed earlier in the three-year period would have likely had fewer demands made on them than those reviewed more recently.

When it came to the reviewers themselves, we were interested in the detail of how they dealt with the contentious issue of National Standards when they were reviewing in schools, whether there were there any signs that the reviewers had their own views on the National Standards that might not reflect government policy and whether their reviewing across the RAINS schools and their diverse school settings would really be as fair and consistent as ERO's resources and publicity would seem to suggest.

The first author interviewed the teams that undertook reviews in five of the six RAINS schools,<sup>18</sup> or nearly all members of those teams. They were generally different teams with little overlap of ERO staff between them. Their comments about the RAINS schools can be found in the relevant case studies and there are more general comments in the ERO data file as well. As part of the agreement with ERO that secured their involvement in the project, the teams were not interviewed until after the review report was confirmed. They were also given their interview transcripts to revise and return but we asked them not to remove verbatim comments unnecessarily and they seem to have entered into the spirit of this request. One team leader gave a transcript to her manager for checking rather than sending it back to us but for the most part transcripts were returned with only minor changes.

In interview the reviewers came across as genuinely committed to improving the schools they were working with and as reasonable and good-humoured people. It will be seen from the material in the case studies that they were willing to acknowledge strengths in those RAINS schools where they had also identified problems and they expressed some respect for the stances of those who were opposing the National Standards, even where they didn't agree with those views. But reviewers also clearly understood that the politics of their role was to support the exemplification of government policy rather than question it or support a token reading of it. This was clearly signalled in what was said; for instance, "We're really looking at to what extent are schools progressing towards the full implementation of the National Standards, rather than perhaps spending a lot of time on discussing why or why not" (member of Juniper review team). There were some mildly scathing comments about principals who were not falling into line with the National Standards ("known resisters", "grumpy" etc.). There was the view expressed that professionalism equated to working hard to bring in the National Standards.

Further underpinning all this, there were comments that suggested some reviewers genuinely saw value in the National Standards (for instance, a passing mention by one reviewer about what a great difference the National Standards had made to the focus on priority learners in schools). But lack of any critique of the National Standards is concerning where it meant reviewers could not acknowledge potential problems within the National Standards system. For instance, the comment made in relation to Huia Intermediate that "we know that intermediate schools are all low and it's a concern" could have been accompanied by questioning whether the National Standards get harder against national norms in the later primary years. But to take a balanced view is clearly not ERO's role. For instance,

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<sup>18</sup> As noted earlier, Seagull School was not reviewed over the course of the project.

as featured in the media during the debate over National Standards over the last few years, ERO's national reports have criticised (and sometimes praised) teachers and schools but they have not criticised the National Standards policy. In this way ERO's national reports are essentially policy tools under the guise of research.

The reviewers made many perceptive comments about the schools. They clearly make good use of documentation sent prior to review and then the various conversations, meetings and observations made during the brief time they have in each school. They also have the kind of power relationship with schools that generally ensures schools' full attention and co-operation. The drawback of this is that they become subjected to a performance, more so for instance than researchers who have little power over schools. While reviewers are well aware of this and compensate for it to some extent, they have no option in the time available but to accept a lot of evidence as provided.

In practice ERO reviews are hardly impartial. Review teams clearly draw on the ability of a school to put a convincing and policy-acceptable story around what it is doing, rather than using a narrowing checklist approach (as with ERO's assurance audits of the 1990s). Yet in the case of Kanuka reviewers missed something as obvious as this school not using the 'well below' category (for any purpose, internal or external). Our reading of this, is that the review team were disarmed by this generally impressive school and didn't bother with checking important detail. It also seemed that, even allowing for the different timing of the reviews, ERO reviewers choose to cut some schools more slack than others. Magenta and Cicada were schools that, by ERO reviewers' own accounts, were not doing National Standards very well but they got more sympathetic responses from the reviewers than Huia.

One way to understand this is to recognise that as well as an evaluation, ERO's school reviews inevitably represent a political settlement. First, where a school has data that indicates lots of children achieving poorly (as Huia did, without recognising the risks), ERO may have relatively little choice but to come down heavily. In the absence of any value-added approach being taken by government, the logic of the data says there is a problem to be fixed. Second, there is likely to be some (probably unspoken) weighing up of how hard it will be to sell any message of poor performance to any school and its community. Magenta's middle class achievement and community politics would have made a harder case for underperformance and Cicada had the advantage of a feisty principal but also one who was savvy enough to make the right responses to the review team. Conversely, Huia's senior leadership was being questioned by middle leadership: both review evidence against this school and a point of weakness. Third, review reports are negotiated artefacts, right up until the confirmed version. At Huia the draft report initially given back to the school was more damning than the version that eventually became public. Indeed the review team noted a point had been put into the report largely because the principal had wanted it in there, not because they had wanted it.

Another concern about reviewers' comments on the RAINS schools is their inconsistent stances on the significance of context. This included, variously, the size of the school not mattering (rather than recognising Juniper's obvious staffing-ratio advantages), the socio-economic context sometimes being worthy of recognition and sometimes not mattering (mention of Kanuka as a low decile school but Cicada then being likened to a private school) and the stability and experience level of teachers sometimes mattering (the CAPNA process at Huia, a reliever and a new teacher at Magenta) and sometimes not (because some PRTs at Cicada were doing so well with classes there). Overall there was a sense that reviewers wanted to be realistic about context but were reluctant to acknowledge any contextual 'excuses' for differential performance. This confused outlook should be of no surprise when it is also demonstrated by ERO National Office and Government as well. ERO took decile ratings out of all school review reports in 2012, ostensibly to remove the idea that the decile was an indicator of school quality, but in the process removing any indication of the socio-economic make-up of the school (ERO, 2012a). And the Key Government (and indeed the Clark Government before it) has reluctantly recognised contextual constraints on achievement but has long been keen on the idea that good teaching is far more important. For instance, the Minister of Education recently promoted the idea that four consecutive years of quality teaching eliminated any trace of socio-economic disadvantage. "In New Zealand we provide 13 years. You'd think it would not be too much to expect that four of those are good quality" (Hekia Parata, cited in Fea, 2013).



## 4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### 4.1 How seriously should we take the RAINS evidence on National Standards?

Proponents of the Standards might look at the findings from RAINS and argue that they are not so bad. After all, the evidence could be read as showing that teachers are working harder, that some children's educational needs are being better targeted and that teachers, children and their parents have often come to accept the Standards. And all of these things would be true. But it is more realistic and appropriate to be concerned about what is happening to the RAINS schools and their communities.

To begin with, it is important to not just generalise across the data but to consider particular patterns within it, especially the ways schools are choosing to respond to the National Standards and the likely experiences of different kinds of children within the schools. For instance, to have very good schools highlighting children's failure in wall displays (Kanuka), preparing new entrants for tests (Juniper) and tying themselves up in burdensome processes (Seagull) suggests the policy is not providing appropriate signals to schools. Similarly, the fact that teachers are saying they feel powerless to emphasise progress because of Standards judgements, that ESOL children and those with special needs are particularly disadvantaged, and that parents are sometimes not sharing reports with children because of the National Standards judgements should be raising alarm bells rather than being glossed over.

Such concerns about the National Standards also have to be taken more seriously because they have surfaced while New Zealand's version of high-stakes assessment has still been in an embryonic stage. For instance, ERO has clearly taken a gentle approach to National Standards requirements in the first year or two and National Standards data only became public in September 2012, halfway through the RAINS project, and then only in a weakly comparable format on the Education Counts website and against the background of considerable contestation (RAINS 2). The 2013 more formatted release of individual school data only occurred after data collection had ended. So given that these external pressures that might be expected to drive the National Standards culture into schools have hardly been present during the course of the study,<sup>19</sup> what we are already seeing in terms of Seagull's earnest taking up of the Standards, Kanuka's single-mindedness around literacy and numeracy and Juniper's enthusiasm to be 'first cab off the rank' with the PaCT tool is all the more worrying. Put another way, the responses of these schools indicate that conditions are ripe for much worse effects if the market and central accountability pressures on schools increase as seems likely. Conversely we might be concerned about areas where some improvement over the three years of the project might be anticipated but hasn't happened. Lack of understanding of the National Standards amongst parents is one such concern.

Another consideration is that there is likely to be significant under-reporting of the impact of National Standards from the staff of schools. We have argued that as well as the generally incremental nature of the changes within schools, the OTJ feature means that what constitutes changes in school or teacher practices in response to the National Standards is not as clear-cut as with a national test or with the kinds of National Standards typically seen in other countries. We have also suggested that teachers value their autonomy, and that this sometimes leads to reluctance to acknowledge the influence of policy on their practice. For these reasons it has been important to consider shifts in teachers practices and general outlooks alongside their more direct observations about the National Standards.

We would also urge caution about using the largely positive or indifferent nature of comments about National Standards from children to suggest that all is well. As discussed in Section 3.7, there are a range of issues that make such a conclusion premature. Some older children articulated thoughts and feelings about the National Standards that should cause concern. It was also apparent that the children

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<sup>19</sup> An exception is Cicada, which by putting 'head above parapet' became an early Ministry target.

in the RAINS schools were very aware of their positioning in the groups within their classes. In our view these points alone should give pause to anyone who wants to argue that the National Standards are not having any negative impact on children's social and academic identities. The lack of interest in the National Standards shown by most children also begs the question of what difference they are making to children's learning and how much this relates to current conditions (teachers 'softening' their judgements etc.) and might change if a stronger comparative culture is allowed to grow around the Standards.

Finally, we point out that generalising across the schools as we have often done in this report removes the vividness of the individual school case studies and the strength of their examples. Again we recommend reading the case studies as they become available.

## **4.2 Is the New Zealand approach to National Standards going to avoid the problems of high-stakes assessment systems seen internationally?**

New Zealand is caught up in a global 'audit culture' in education, one centred especially on international comparisons of student achievement data such as PISA (Lingard, 2010, 2011; see also Nusche, Laveault, MacBeath, & Santiago, 2012). While the shifts are still undeveloped compared to the high-stakes assessment cultures of the United States, England and Australia, the culture of New Zealand primary schooling *is* shifting, and quite quickly too as illustrated by the RAINS schools. Yet there is no place for local complacency along the lines that New Zealand's situation is not yet as bad as in some other countries. In any national setting schooling can get better or worse in social justice and educational terms (Gewirtz, 2002). Our concern must be to ensure that New Zealand education policy is on the best footing for the future, even if there are greater problems internationally.

The National Standards policy has been promoted as a means to avoid the negative effects of national testing. But while the policy recognises the professionalism of teachers in some ways through the OTJ approach, it also undermines it through the demand for evidence, the crude four-point scale that results from the teacher judgement and the release of data. It doesn't go far enough to avoid an addiction to data and targets within schools and it still connects too well to the data-driven agenda being pursued by the Key Government and promoted by international bodies such as the OECD, described by Brown (1998), as the "tyranny of the international horse race". It should also be recognised that the National Standards approach may have been much more about appealing to a sceptical profession (and public) than about avoiding the costs of national testing in any case. Although the complete story around the origins of the National Standards policy may never come to light, we note the National Party had already tried to introduce national testing in 1997, 1999 and 2005 (Lee, 2010).<sup>20</sup> The fact that the Government has subsequently been so keen on release of the National Standards data, almost regardless of what form it is in, and the way it has been placed in the wider PAI pipeline, is also revealing of the data-driven comparative regime that is sought.

National Standards are not going to avoid the international problems of high-stakes assessment. We are merely going to get a variation on the theme. The New Zealand version is going to be burdensome, there is going to be a narrowing of curriculum, and there will be some damaging positioning of children and schools and some damage done to relationships within schools. Yet just how destructive it gets depends partly on future policy and the extent to which the public data and target-setting regime continues to develop and partly on the particular nature of the children and schools concerned.

As indicated earlier, we can't see much evidence yet that the release of data has been an important driver of the way the schools have responded to National Standards with the exception of Magenta, which, as a rural school facing some demographic decline, was very conscious of anything that could influence community perception. For most of the schools the release of data sits in the background, part of the general awareness around the Standards of principals and others, but not exerting any

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<sup>20</sup> Labour also toyed briefly with the idea of national testing in 1997.

important pressure on the schools at this stage. But this is during a period where the data has been released amidst much qualification and sometimes (on Education Counts in 2012) in a format that is hard to compare across schools. Any of following would 'raise the temperature' around National Standards judgements and amplify the problems in schools that we have identified: the data becoming more frequently and strongly used for target-setting or evaluation by the Ministry or ERO, the National Standards data starting to become used for the evaluation of teachers or senior staff, and the data beginning to capture interest of the public in a way that might really have an effect on school choice.

The RAINS research also suggests some schools and their children are more likely to experience the damaging effects of the National Standards policy than others. They include low socio-economic schools or schools with lots of ELL or special needs children (because National Standards are based on raw achievement rather than value-added), full primaries and especially intermediates (because the National Standards apparently get harder against national norms towards the older primary years) and large schools (because of the extra demands of moderation and checking of judgements). They also include schools where issues of school choice are more to the fore (because of the range of schools available or because of a particularly aspirant or anxious community) and wherever schools are taking the National Standards more seriously than they really have to (because of their particular trajectories and/or the various 'professional' outlooks described in Section 3.2). Finally, like Huia Intermediate, schools are going to make themselves vulnerable to intervention where because of their choice of assessment tools or for other reasons they paint a harsher picture of low performance than they really need to.

### **4.3 What are the implications for policy around primary school accountability?**

The key message of this final RAINS report is that despite bringing some gains, the Standards approach is starting to damage the culture of schools. Unsurprisingly, this damage relates to the particular features of the National Standards approach and of New Zealand schools, and so the nature of the damage is distinctive compared to high-stakes assessment regimes overseas. But there are many similarities and policymakers clearly need to start sending different messages to those in schools: messages about doing less assessment rather than more, about genuinely focusing on a broad primary curriculum rather than being so anxious about reading, writing and maths, and messages about being quietly supportive of the progress of a child at whatever level they might be, rather than encouraging invidious processes of peer comparison as some teachers/schools seem to be doing.

While we recognise some need for 'system-wide' information, there is no point in collecting data if to do so is damaging to the culture of the education system itself. This makes no sense: it is akin to a parent insisting on an assessment that can only be collected through a process that is damaging to their child. Careful concern for both children and their teachers needs to be put at the heart of policy. Consequently it is not going to be enough to tell a better story about the National Standards, as has suggested by the NSADAG (Section 2.9). In our view the National Standards approach needs to be significantly overhauled in a way that reduces the potential for damage, while leaving in place some of the more positive features around engaging with the curriculum that RAINS teachers and principals have identified.

We would

- be fairer to children in the later primary years by changing teachers' expectations of progression through the curriculum levels to be in line with national norms;
- reduce adverse positioning and labelling caused by the crude four-point scale by abandoning it and instead reporting whichever underlying curriculum level a child has reached;
- provide extra help and resources for those children who need it but with clear guidance to teachers that discussion or assessment artefacts that children are exposed to should be about



their progress against curriculum levels rather than involve comparison with age cohorts or classmates;

- focus most discussion with parents on progress against curriculum levels. Be willing to discuss age-related expectations of children and any other matters that parents want to discuss, but only in ways that are mindful of the potential for damage such as lowered expectations;
- discourage over-the-top OTJ-making by leaving it up to schools how to determine student achievement against curriculum levels, while informing their decisions through high-quality professional development;
- substantially reduce the emphasis on reading, writing and maths assessment within schools by abandoning the nationwide collection and public reporting of primary achievement data, instead gathering system-wide information through a national sampling approach; and
- continue with ERO reviews while informing reviewers with better policy and professional development.

In Codd's (1994) terms, all of the above is to argue for a 'professional-contextualist' rather than a 'technocratic-reductionist' approach to dealing with the issue of school accountability. It emphasises the provision of high-quality professional development on the understanding that informing and supporting teachers' professional identities and cultures will be a more immediate and more powerful way to impact on their practice than market forces. This is also well illustrated by the forces animating the RAINS schools' responses to the National Standards so far. Yet it is not just a belief in the organic professionalism of teachers that should lead policymakers to look for alternatives to high-stakes assessment. Rather it is a sensible response to the paradox that the more performative pressure is placed on teachers, the less authentic their teaching will become. For this reason New Zealand's National Standards will be often proving counter-productive and there is no getting around the problem.

## 4.4 What are the implications for school staff and boards?

Points that come out of the RAINS research and related questions for schools and boards to reflect on are as follows:

1. There are likely to be overwhelming pressures to go with the National Standards policy.

Questions worth asking (after reading Section 3.2 and the case studies) could include: What combination of pressures has been important in our school's response to the National Standards? Are there issues discussed in Section 3.2 and the case studies that are also relevant at our school? Are there issues not mentioned that we face at our school?

2. There are likely to be some harmful effects of the policy.

Questions worth asking (after reading Section 3 and the case studies) could include: In our school have the National Standards caused any problems around intensification of staff workloads, curriculum and curriculum narrowing, positioning and labelling of children? Are there any other negative effects of Standards data and targets in our school? What indications do we have (either way)?

3. Primary schools have some agency to reduce the harmful effects of the National Standards policy while waiting for better policy.

Questions worth asking (after reading Section 3 and the case studies) could include: Are there areas where a more realistic reading of our context or through more open discussion of concerns we can 'lower the temperature' around the National Standards so as to reduce their impact on our school? Are there practices that we can change to reduce any risk of harmful effects that we identify?

## 4.5 What are the implications for the public and parents?

It will be the public's response or otherwise to the National Standards infographics and tables and their use by the media, by public figures and by schools in their promotional materials that is likely to determine whether National Standards really take off in New Zealand. Certainly 'standards' have an appeal to the electorate because everyone can agree with the need for standards in schools at some general level. But every time we as New Zealanders ignore the way the National Standards figures misrepresent what they purport to encapsulate as an indicator of New Zealand primary education, we become complicit in entrenching the culture of target-setting and the damage it causes to the culture of schools.

The challenge for the public around the National Standards agenda then is the same as across the public sector whether in health, education or other areas: to avoid being seduced by the tidy rows of figures in national indicators and to be more searching about what might actually lie beneath them. Unfortunately, as the parents in the RAINS research illustrate, few people outside of schools are in a position to really understand the National Standards or assess their impact. And why should they? As educational researchers the authors have had a privileged view into schools and classrooms but we would not claim to understand the value or impact of indicators in other sectors such as health, for instance. But we should all be able to appreciate that when an indicator seems too simplistic, it probably is. For instance, children typically spend about 160 days a year in their primary or intermediate schools. A large amount of this time is spent doing reading, writing and maths. How can all this time and effort possibly be summed up as 'well below', 'below', 'at' or 'above'?

The public and parents also need to consider the issue of harm that has been frequently raised through this report: harm to the culture of schools and harm to particular children. We might like the idea of 'greater transparency' around children's achievement but should anyone be able to insist on this at the price of damaging schools and children? The Government has taken some steps to reduce harm by masking the data published on 'Education Counts' where the effects of publishing is likely to reveal the achievement of individuals or stigmatise schools with very few or no children 'at' and 'above' such as special schools. Yet it doesn't take educational expertise to see that this is closing the stable door after the horse might have bolted. What needs to have been taken more seriously is the potential for National Standards damaging day-to-day processes and relationships within and around schools long before the data gets published, as well as any subsequent effects of publication.

There is also the need to avoid too much cynicism about what is wrong with New Zealand schools these days. We are concerned about the construction of a crisis in New Zealand schooling, the result of the Government rarely having anything positive to say about teachers and media discussions often highlighting problems within the system and the way children are treated. Indeed some of our education academic colleagues have recently held a conference about 'Children in Crisis' (Pearl, 2013) and others have suggested major problems with the school curriculum (Rata, 2013).

The critics often have a point, but we think a bigger risk is that constant criticism of schools will end up killing the golden goose. We would argue strongly that if it weren't for the mainly very good daily work being done in New Zealand schools then many more New Zealand children would be in crisis. Certainly in our three years in the RAINS schools we saw not a hint of anything but good intentions and staff who were trying to do their best. Even at Huia Intermediate, criticised by ERO for some inadequate process in 2013, had often been described in very complimentary ways by children and parents when we interviewed them at the end of 2012. (There is another paradox here: that sometimes what makes a school 'bad', also makes it 'good'; see Ball, 1997.) Indeed teachers are constantly going 'above and beyond' in the interests of the children in their care. This is why conceptions of accountability and market forces in New Zealand primary schools need to be tempered by the reality that schools are often stretched and actually need every bit of genuine parent, community and official support that they can get.

Finally, we note that the real story about New Zealand schooling is not about a loss of standards but of growing inequality. This was well reflected in the RAINS case study schools which although all well-resourced in material terms served children from differentially resourced background and were

concentrating their efforts on correspondingly different teaching and learning. In this segregated context, the entrenchment of a two-tier curriculum and corresponding life chances seem all too likely if we continue with the National Standards and publication of data. The challenge for an increasingly anxious New Zealand middle class is not to pull up the drawbridge behind their children. There is value in childhood experiences that go across class and ethnic lines and there is the fundamental issue of fairness. As John Dewey famously said more than a century ago: “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children” (Dewey, 1902). Creating crude hierarchies of National Standards judgements within schools and creating unfounded rankings between schools will not bring out the best in New Zealand education and will disadvantage many of our children.

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## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEWS IN EACH SCHOOL

		School						Total Interviews
		Cicada	Huia	Juniper	Kanuka	Magenta	Seagull	
Number of teachers interviewed								
2011 <sup>a</sup>	Total	13	12	3	21	6	23	159
	Teaching at least 3 years.	10	12	2	17	6	20	
	Cohort teachers	2	2	2	3	2	2	
	Cohort teachers teaching at least 3 years	2	2	1	2	2	2	
2012/13 <sup>b</sup>	Total	12	11	3	13	5	17	
	Teaching at least 3 years.	9	11	3	13	4	15	
	Cohort teachers.	2	3	2	3	2	2	
	Cohort teachers teaching at least 3 years.	1	3	2	3	1	2	
2011 & 2012/13 <sup>c</sup>	Total reinterviewed	9	8	3	13	4	14	
	Cohort teachers in 2011 & interviewed as ‘other’ teachers in 2013.	1	2	1	1	2	2	
	Cohort teachers	1	0	1	2	0	0	
	Cohort teachers in 2013 & interviewed as ‘other’ teachers in 2011.	1	1	0	1	1	2	
	<b>Total teacher interviews<sup>d</sup></b>	26	31	8	39	13	42	
Number of Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members interviewed <sup>e</sup>								
2010/11	Total	2	3	1	3	1	3	49
2012	Total	1	3	1	3	1	2	
2013	Total	2	1	1	1	1	3	
	<b>Total SLT interviews<sup>d</sup></b>	7	14	7	8	5	8	

Number of Board of Trustees (BOT) members interviewed								
<b>2011</b>	Total	2	1	1	1	1	1	10
<b>2012/13</b>	Total	0	1	1	0	1	0	
	<b>Total BOT interviews</b>	2	2	2	1	2	1	
Number of Education Review Office (ERO) teams interviewed								
	<b>Total ERO team interviews</b>	1	1	1	1	1	0	5

		School						Total Interviews
		Cicada	Huia	Juniper	Kanuka	Magenta	Seagull	
Number of Children Interviewed								
2011	Total	12	13	12	20	12	19	173
	Year 1	4	-	2	1	7	10	
	Year 2	0	-	4	10	0	0	
	Year 3	0	-	3	8	0	0	
	Year 4	8	-	3	1	0	9	
	Year 5	0	-	0	0	0	0	
	Year 6	0	-	0	0	5	0	
	Year 7	-	13	-	-	0	-	
	Year 8	-	0	-	-	0	-	
2012/13	Total	9	19	10	9	13	25	
	Year 1	0	-	0	0	0	0	
	Year 2	2	-	0	0	0	0	
	Year 3	3	-	1	1	8	13	
	Year 4	0	-	4	5	0	0	
	Year 5	0	-	2	3	0	0	
	Year 6	4	-	3	0	0	12	
	Year 7	-	0	-	-	0	-	
	Year 8	-	19	-	-	5	-	
2011 & 2012/13	Total reinterviewed <sup>c</sup>	4	7	8	8	10	16	
	<b>Total children interviews</b>	21	32	22	29	25	44	
Number of Parents Interviewed								
2011	Total	2	4	6	6	6	9	90
2012/13	Total	6	13	6	8	6	18	
2011 & 2012/13	Total reinterviewed <sup>c</sup>	0	3	2	4	5	9	
	<b>Total parent interviews</b>	8	17	12	14	12	27	

- Notes:
- <sup>a</sup> Interviews at all schools undertaken in 2011.
  - <sup>b</sup> Interviews at Huia School undertaken in 2012, all other schools in 2013.
  - <sup>c</sup> Reinterviewed in 2011 and 2012 or 2011 and 2013.
  - <sup>d</sup> Adds to more because of multiple interviews with some teachers/SLT member in same year.
  - <sup>e</sup> Deputy and assistant principals roles at Juniper and Magenta are included under teacher figures.
  - Not applicable.

## APPENDIX 2: COHORT CLASSES IN EACH SCHOOL

School/Type	Cohort Class 1		Cohort Class 2		Cohort Class 3	
	2011	2012/13 <sup>a</sup>	2011	2012/13	2011	2012/13
Seagull School Contributing primary	Y0/1	Y3	Y4 <sup>b</sup>	Y6	-	-
Kanuka School Contributing school	Y1/2	Y3/4	Y2/3/4	Y5/6	Y2/3 <sup>c</sup>	Y4/5/6 <sup>c</sup>
Juniper School Contributing school	Y1/2	Y3/4	Y3/4	Y5/6	-	-
Magenta School Full primary	Y1	Y3	Y3/4	Y7/8	-	-
Cicada School Contributing primary	Y1	Y2/3	Y4	Y6	-	-
Huia Intermediate	Y7	Y8	Y7	Y8	-	Y8

Notes:     <sup>a</sup>   Observations at Huia School undertaken in 2012, all other schools in 2013  
               <sup>b</sup>   GATE class  
               <sup>c</sup>   Bilingual class



## APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEWED CHILDREN'S OTJS

### Seagull School Overall Teacher Judgements

Child	RAINS Interview	Reading	Writing	Maths
<b>Year 3 2013</b>				
S1	2011 & 2013	At <sup>1</sup> /A <sup>2</sup> /A <sup>3</sup>	At/A/At	At/A/At
S2	2011 & 2013	At/A/A	At/A/At	At/A/A
S3	2011 & 2013	At/A/A	At/A/A	At/At/A
S4	2013	X/A/At	X/At/At	X/A/At
S5	2013	X/X/At	X/X/B	X/X/B
S6	2011 & 2013	At/At/A	At/A/At	At/A/A
S7	2013	X/B/At	X/B/B	X/B/At
S8	2011 & 2013	At/A/A	At/A/At	At/A/A
S9	2013	X/X/At	X/X/At	X/X/At
S10	2011 & 2013	At/A/At	At/A/At	At/At/At
S11	2011	X/A/X	X/A/X	X/A/X
S12	2011 & 2013	At/At/A	At/A/At	At/A/A
S13	2011 & 2013	At/At/At	At/At/B	At/A/A
S14	2011 & 2013	At/A/A	At/A/A	At/A/A
<b>Year 6 2013</b>				
S15	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/At/At	A/At/At
S16	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/A/A	A/A/A
S17	2013	A/A/A	A/A/At	A/A/A
S18	2011 & 2013	A/At/At	At/At/At	A/At/At
S19	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/A/A	A/A/A
S20	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/At/B	A/A/A
S21	2011	X/A/X	X/A/X	X/At/X
S22	2013	X/B/WB	X/B/WB	X/B/B
S23	2013	X/B/At	X/B/WB	X/At/B
S24	2013	X/A/A	X/B/WB	X/B/B
S25	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	A/A/A	A/At/At
S26	2011	X/A/X	X/A/X	X/At/X
S27	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/A/B	A/At/At
S28	2013	X/B/WB	X/B/WB	X/B/B

Notes: A = Above

At = At

B = Below

WB = Well Below

X = Child not attending or left Seagull School or data missing

<sup>1</sup> 2011 (Term 3)

<sup>2</sup> 2012 (Term 4)

<sup>3</sup> 2013 (Term 3)

## Kanuka School Overall Teacher Judgements

Child	RAINS Interview	Reading	Writing	Maths
<b>Year 3 (2013)</b>				
K1	2011 & 2013	At <sup>1</sup> /At <sup>2</sup>	At/At	At/At
<b>Year 4 (2013)</b>				
K2	2011	B/X	B/X	At/X
K3	2011	A/X	B/X	At/X
K4	2011 & 2013	A/A	At/A	A/A
K5	2011 & 2013	A/X	At/X	At/X
K6	2011 & 2013	A/A	A/A	A/A
K7	2011 & 2013	A/A	A/A	A/A
K8	2011	At/X	At/X	At/X
K9	2011	B/At	At/At	At/At
K10	2011	A/A	A/At	A/A
K11	2011	A/A	A/A	A/A
K12	2013	B/At	B/At	At/At
<b>Year 5 (2013)</b>				
K13	2011 & 2013	At/X	At/X	B/X
K14	2011	B/X	At/X	B/X
K15	2011 & 2013	A/A	A/A	At/A
K16	2011 & 2013	A/X	A/X	A/X
K17	2011	At/X	At/X	At/X
K18	2011	At/X	At/X	At/X
K19	2011	A/A	At/A	At/A
K20	2011	A/A	A/A	A/A
<b>Year 6 (2013)</b>				
K21	2011	A/A	A/A	At/A

Notes: A = Above  
 At = At  
 B = Below  
 X = Child not attending Kanuka School or data missing  
<sup>1</sup> 2011 (Term 4)  
<sup>2</sup> 2012 (Term 4)  
 2013 data not yet available

## Juniper School Overall Teacher Judgements

Child	RAINS Interview	Reading	Writing	Maths
<b>Year 3 2013</b>				
J1	2011 & 2013	At <sup>1</sup> /A <sup>2</sup> /A <sup>3</sup>	At/At/A	At/A/A
J2	2011	At/X/X	At/X/X	At/X/X
<b>Year 4 2013</b>				
J3	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/At/A	At/At/B
J4	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/B/A	At/A/A
J5	2013	X/At/B	X/B/B	X/B/At
J6	2011	A/A/A	At/A/At	At/A/A
J7	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/At/A	At/A/A
<b>Year 5 2013</b>				
J8	2011	A/A/X	At/At/X	At/A/X
J9	2011 & 2013	A/A/At	At/B/B	B/At/At
J10	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/At/A	At/A/At
<b>Year 6 2013</b>				
J11	2011	B/A/A	At/B/At	B/B/B
J12	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/A/A	A/At/A
J13	2013	X/X/At	X/X/At	X/X/A
J14	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/A/A	A/A/A

Notes: A = Above

At = At

B = Below

X = Child not attending or left Juniper School or data missing

<sup>1</sup> 2011 (Term 3)

<sup>2</sup> 2012 (Term 3)

<sup>3</sup> 2013 (Term 3)

## Magenta School Overall Teacher Judgements

Child	RAINS Interview	Reading	Writing	Maths
<b>Year 3 2013</b>				
M1	2011 & 2013	At <sup>1</sup> /B <sup>2</sup> /B <sup>3</sup>	At/At/B	At/At/B
M2	2011 & 2013	A/At/At	At/At/At	At/At/At
M3	2011 & 2013	B/B/At	B/B/B	B/B/B
M4	2011 & 2013	WA/A/A	A/At/At	A/At/A
M5	2011	At/X/X	At/X/X	At/X/X
M6	2013	X/A/A	X/At/At	X/At/At
M7	2013	X/X/A	X/X/At	X/X/At
M8	2011 & 2013	B/At/At	B/B/B	B/At/At
M9	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	At/At/At	A/At/At
<b>Year 8 2013</b>				
M10	2011 & 2013	At/At/At	At/At/At	At/B/B
M11	2011 & 2013	At/B/At	At/B/B	At/B/B
M12	2011	A/X/X	At/X/X	A/X/X
M13	2011 & 2013	At/At/At	At/At/At	A/B/At
M14	2011 & 2013	A/At/At	At/At/At	A/B/At
M15	2011 & 2013	X/At/At	X/At/At	X/At/At

Notes: WA = Well Above  
A = Above  
At = At  
B = Below  
WB = Well Below  
X = Child not attending or left Magenta School or data missing  
<sup>1</sup> 2011 (Term 3)  
<sup>2</sup> 2012 (Term 3)  
<sup>3</sup> 2013 (Term 3)

## Cicada School Overall Teacher Judgements

Child	RAINS Interview	Reading	Writing	Maths
<b>Year 2 2013</b>				
C1	2013	At <sup>1</sup> /A <sup>2</sup> /A <sup>3</sup>	At/At/At	At/At/At
C2	2013	X/At/JB	X/At/A	X/At/At
<b>Year 3 2013</b>				
C3	2013	At/At/A	At/At/A	At/At/At
C4	2011	At/A/A	JA/A/A	At/At/At
C5	2011	WB/X/X	At/X/X	At/X/X
C6	2011	At/At/At	At/At/A	At/At/JB
C7	2013	A/A/A	A/A/A	At/At/At
C8	2011 & 2013	At/At/A	JA/At/A	At/At/At
<b>Year 6 2013</b>				
C9	2013	A/A/At	JA/At/A	A/At/At
C10	2011	A/A/A	JA/A/A	At/At/At
C11	2011 & 2013	At/A/A	At/A/At	A/At/At
C12	2011 & 2013	A/A/At	JA/A/A	A/At/At
C13	2011	At/WB/WB	WB/At/WB	WB/WB/WB
C14	2011 & 2013	A/A/A	WA/A/A	A/At/At
C15	2011	A/A/X	WA/A/X	A/JB/X
C16	2011	At/JB/At	JB/At/At	At/At/At
C17	2011	A/A/A	WA/A/A	A/At/A

Notes:

- A = Above
- JA = Just Above (this school's own category)
- At = At
- JB = Just Below (this school's own category)
- WB = Well Below
- X = Child not attending or left Cicada School or data missing
- <sup>1</sup> 2011 (Term 4)
- <sup>2</sup> 2012 (Term 4)
- <sup>3</sup> 2013 (Term 3)



## Huia Intermediate Overall Teacher Judgements

Child	RAINS Interview	Reading	Writing	Maths
Year 8 (2012)				
H1	2012	X <sup>1</sup> /B <sup>2</sup>	X/B	X/WB
H2	2012	X/B	X/B	X/B
H3	2011	At/At	X/At	A/At
H4	2012	X/At	X/At	X/At
H5	2011 & 2012	B/At	B/B	WB/B
H6	2011 & 2012	B/B	X/At	B/At
H7	2012	X/A	X/At	X/A
H8	2011 & 2012	A/A	X/A	At/A
H9	2011	A/X	X/X	At/X
H10	2011	At/At	X/At	A/At
H11	2011 & 2012	A/X	At/X	A/X
H12	2012	X/At	X/At	X/At
H13	2011 & 2012	A/At	A/At	A/A
H14	2011	A/X	At/X	A/X
H1	2011 & 2012	A/WA	A/A	A/A
H16	2011	A/A	A/At	At/A
H17	2012	X/At	X/At	X/At
H18	2012	X/At	X/At	X/At
H19	2012	X/At	X/At	X/At
H20	2012	X/At	X/B	X/At
H21	2011 & 2012	A/A	X/A	At/A
H22	2012	X/At	X/At	X/At
H23	2012	X/At	X/At	X/At
H24	2011	At/At	At/A	At/A
H25	2012	X/At	X/At	X/B

Notes: WA = Well Above (this school's own category)  
 A = Above  
 At = At  
 B = Below  
 WB = Well Below  
 X = Child not attending or left Huia School or data missing  
<sup>1</sup> 2011 (Term 4)  
<sup>2</sup> 2012 (Term 4)

## APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 2012–2013

### Huia children December 2012

1. Which things did you enjoy doing most at school this year?
2. How do you think you got on at school this year? Are you a good learner? Do you think you have done well or not so well?
3. What did your teacher do to help you to learn better?
4. What kinds of tests do you do in class? Do you like doing them? Why/why not?
5. How do you find the learning conferences? Do you like them? Why/why not?
6. Tell me about your school reports. Do you like those reports? Why/why not?
7. Do you know about the National Standards? What do you think about those?
8. For this end of year report coming up, where do you think you will be in the National Standards for Reading? Writing? Maths? What do you think about that?
9. Is there anything you would like to change about school?

### Children in other schools August–October 2013

1. Can we have a look through your learning portfolio/books together? Which things did you enjoy doing most?
2. What are you learning about in Maths? Reading? Writing? Science? Art? (etc.)
  - Do you enjoy reading? Why/why not?
  - Do you enjoy writing? Why/why not?
  - Do you enjoy maths? Why/why not?
3. What does your teacher do to help you to learn better?
4. How do you think you are getting on at school?
  - Are you a good learner?
  - Do you think you are doing well at school? How do you know?
5. Is there anything you would like to change about school?
6. What kinds of tests do you do in class? Do you like doing them? Why/why not?
7. Do you think you do about the right amount of tests or would you like to do less or more?
8. [As appropriate to the school] Tell me about your learning/student/parent/teacher conferences? Do you like those conferences? Why/why not?
9. Tell me about your school reports. Do you like those reports? Why/why not?
10. [As appropriate depending on whether or not they have already mentioned National Standards without any prompting] Tell me about the National Standards then? What do you think about the National Standards? OR Do you know about the National Standards? What do you think about the National Standards?
11. Do you know where you are placed on the National Standards for Reading? Writing? Mathematics? What do you think about that?

### Huia parents December 2012–January 2013

1. Has [your son or daughter] had a good year at school this year? Why/why not? Is there anything you would like to change about the school?
2. Did you go to the student-led conferences early in the year? If so, how did you find that? If not, why not?
3. What did you think about the end of year report that [your son or daughter] has just brought home? Can we look at the report together?
  - Was it what you were expecting (in terms of format, in terms of child's achievement)
  - What did [child] think of it?
  - Wondering if you have noticed any differences from earlier reports?
4. I'm interested in the National Standards that are being reported in this end of year report
  - Do you know about the National Standards? What do you know?
  - What do you think about this approach where the children are told they are well below, below, at, above?
  - What you think about how [your son or daughter] has been judged against the National Standards?
  - Do you think this report makes some subjects seem more important than others?
5. Looking ahead to secondary school now, how do you think [your son or daughter] will get on there?
6. Anything else?

### Parents at other schools September–October 2013

1. So tell me, how does your child get on at school? Does s/he enjoy it? What do you think about the teacher and the school?
2. How do you think your child sees her/his learning at school? Do you think your child believes s/he is achieving?
3. [Where relevant] So what is the school doing to help your child improve? [and/or] So what is the school doing to extend your child?
4. Do you know what kind of assessments they actually do in your child's class? Do you think s/he likes that? Do you think they do about the right amount of assessment, or too much or too little?
5. Tell me about the student-led conferences. Do you go to the conferences? [Why not?] Do you like those conferences? Why/why not?
6. Tell me about the reports that come home from school. Do you like those reports? Why/why not? What does [child] think of them?
7. I'm interested in the National Standards that have started to be used by schools. Do you know about the National Standards, can you tell me a bit about them? What do you think about them? What do you think about this approach where the children are judged well below, below, at, or above? Do you think the National Standards are having any effect on your child? In what way?
8. Have you seen schools' National Standards results published online or in newspapers? What do you think about that?
9. Anything else?

### ERO 2011–13

(These were the key areas of questioning There were also supplementary questions to clarify points or seek further detail)

1. Could you start by talking to me about what you are actually looking for in relation to National Standards when reviewing in primary and intermediate schools? Also, how you go about it?
2. Thinking specifically now about [a RAINS school]'s approach to National Standards, what were your findings there?
3. What advice, if any, did you give to [a RAINS school] related to National Standards?
4. What other observations could you make about [a RAINS school] after reviewing it?
5. Do you have any other comments?

### **Board of Trustees chairs/former chairs 2012–13**

1. What issues have the National Standards raised over this last term of the Board?
2. What issues are the National Standards raising for the Board this year? What discussions have you had about them?
3. Last time... [checking points from previous interview]
4. Have the National Standards created any tensions between the Board and the principal or with other staff?
5. How would you describe the school's response to the National Standards so far?
6. What do you personally think about the National Standards?
7. Where do you think it will go from here? [Do you think National Standards will become more important for Boards and schools or fade away over time?]

### **SLT 2012–13**

(These were the key questions and prompts but in practice discussion tended to be wide-ranging around the same areas)

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 is 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? [2012 prompts—league tables performance pay, class sizes; 2013 prompts—charter schools, Christchurch reorganisation]. 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?

### **Cohort teachers 2012–13**

(These were the key questions and prompts but in practice discussion tended to be wider ranging as many teachers had previously been interviewed as cohort or other teachers)

1. Teaching background
  - How long have you been teaching here and what year levels? What other schools have you taught in and for how long? How you done any other jobs before you went teaching? Is teaching in the family? What did your parents do for a living?
2. Teaching perspectives
 

What are some of the things that make for good teaching in your view? Are there things you find rewarding about teaching? Is there a downside, things you don't like about teaching?
3. Politics
  - Have you ever got involved in teacher politics, NZEI campaigns, that kind of thing?
  - What about other political or social causes, are there things that you feel strongly about and have got involved in?
4. Can you tell me about this school? How would you describe it to an outsider?
5. What about the children here, are there particular approaches that work best with them?
6. I'm wondering if you can start talking me through different areas: maths, reading, writing, science, PE, art and so on and what you do to teach and assess and report in those areas. And as we are going along I'll be asking you if there've been any changes over the last year or two, whether because of National Standards or anything else.
7. National Standards
  - Can you remember when you first heard about the National Standards and what did you think at the outset?
  - Have you had any involvement with the development of the Standards, consultation, debate?
  - Where have you been getting information about the Standards?
  - What's your personal view of the National Standards?
  - How would you generally describe the school's response to the National Standards so far?
  - Do you think the National Standards are bringing about any changes to teaching or learning in this school?
8. I'm interested in how you think the children in your class will fare in relation to National Standards this year. At this stage whether you think they will be well below, below, at, above or where you just aren't sure.

### **Other teachers 2012–13**

(These were the key questions and prompts but in practice discussion tended to be wide ranging around the same areas)

1. Do you have any new responsibilities or roles?
2. What do you think of the National Standards now?



3. How would you describe the school's response these days? Is that different to previous years? One of the things that came through last time ... [checking points from previous interview]
4. Any other changes happening in the school related to National Standards? (prompts where necessary)
  - Assessment and reporting?
  - Curriculum delivery?
  - Teacher workload?
  - Teacher motivation?
  - Relationships with colleagues?
  - Student motivation?
  - Relationships with parents
  - Leadership within the school?
5. Where do you think the National Standards are going to go from here? In this school? In New Zealand schools more generally
6. What do you think about the public release of the National Standards data [asked in 2013 only]?
7. What do you think about what's going on with other government policy on schools at the moment? [2012 prompts—league tables, performance pay, class sizes; 2013 prompts—charter schools, Christchurch reorganisation] Do you see these things as being related to National Standards?
8. How are you actually making those decisions around OTJs?
9. Anything else?