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To: Steve Maharey <smaharey@ministers.govt.nz>
cc:
Subject: NCEA Marking

14/12/2005 12:18 pm

Dear Sirs,

I am disturbed to be hearing so much mud being thrown at the NCEA marking system this year.

In his criticisms Bill English appears to be mistaking 'marking schedules' for standards. A marking schedule is NOT a standard. It is a guide by which a marker may come to recognise a standard, and that is all. Sometimes the marking schedule is too rigid or too vague to be able to effectively recognise that a standard has been reached (or not). When such situations arise the marking schedule must, necessarily, be changed.

NOT to change marking schedules when these situations occur is the WRONG thing to do - not the other way around. Bill English would be up in arms if too many people failed who shouldn't have, or too many people passed who shouldn't have. This check marking system is ensuring that students who reach the "standards" required are being better recognised this year.

Allan Peachey should be aware of this and be able to tell the National party Education spokesman the difference.

Last year the system was criticised for producing inconsistent and fluctuating results, this year the system is being criticised for implementing a system aimed at minimising variation and maximising consistency. I feel it is being used as a political football without principled positions being held.

Scaling, or some other method of managing unexpected results in external exams, has ALWAYS been necessary and always will be necessary given that the exams and questions and markers etc are different each year. Yes, the system of making changes to marking schedules may mean that the spectre of the old "scaling" is resurfacing to some extent with the "profiles" being developed for each standard. But I think we can agree that this is somewhat better than the problem of previous years with students who should have passed or gained merit or excellence being penalised by rigid and pedantic marking schedules that didn't take into account student knowledge.

I am comfortable that the process being undertaken this year is a step in the right direction and will produce more valid results than the variation and inconsistency that has occurred over the last few years.

Please try to improve the level of debate on NCEA marking for the sake of students, parents and teachers.

Sincerely
Sean Hawthorne
HOD English