



## **National Standards: What difference are they making?**

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The introduction of mandatory National Standards into primary and intermediate schools in 2010 was one of the most contested policy changes in New Zealand education (Thrupp & Easter

2012). The policy rationale was to improve student achievement by setting out expectations – standards – of the knowledge and skills students should have at each year level in reading, writing and numeracy. The use of the standards in reporting to parents was intended to provide them with clear and nationally consistent information about their child's progress, in part to encourage more parental support of their child's learning. The inclusion of student performance levels on the National Standards in schools' annual reports was intended to provide system-level information on patterns of student performance, as well as identify schools with high proportions of students performing below standards. There was an intention of additional support for such schools and students.

The National Standards policy and its early implementation hit a number of raw nerves. Schools were embarked on making the revised New Zealand Curriculum their own, a curriculum that stressed tailoring local and individual learning, and that emphasised pedagogy and the key competencies as well as curriculum areas. National Standards seemed like a throw-back to a much earlier era, risking the narrowing of the curriculum to the areas that would – could – be measured over time and reducing the scope of teachers to engage students who had not been well-served when those areas were the main emphasis (Hinchco 2011). Academics and assessment experts alongside principals and teachers questioned the assumptions underlying the National Standards: that a standard trajectory of development towards achievement of at least NCEA Level 2 existed that could be securely described at each year level (Elley, 2010, Hattie, 2009, NZCER 2010, Thrupp, Hattie, Crooks & Flockton 2009). The haste with which the standards were developed and the unwillingness of the government to trial the standards added to this distrust. The language used to categorise students in relation to the standards weighed heavy for teachers and parents alike, with fears that students categorised as 'below' or 'well below' a standard would lose confidence and motivation (Wylie, Hodgen & Darr 2009).

There was relief that the National Standards were not to be measured with single tests. But the use of overall teacher judgements (OTJs), drawing on locally decided evidence, raised other issues that were particularly acute. The timeframe for implementation was unrealistic. Schools were asked to report against the standards in mid-year reports to their parents in 2010. Consultation on the National Standards was undertaken just a year earlier; development of the Standards themselves and guidance around them meant schools had little to work with until very late in 2009, with confused and minimal professional development for principals (rather than teachers). OTJs require sophisticated judgement, drawing on sound understanding of curriculum and the different assessment measures used. They also need sound moderation within and across schools if they are to be used as intended at both the school and system levels. It was no wonder that the 2010 NZCER national survey of primary and intermediate schools showed low levels of confidence among teachers and principals about their OTJs and the consistency across schools (Wylie & Hodgen 2010).

The introduction of the National Standards exposed the absence of an infrastructure for schools and the teaching profession to keep building and contributing to knowledge of effective teaching, including the interpretation and use of assessment, rather than having to re-invent the wheel

separately at each school (Wylie 2012, pp 201-207). It also widened rather than bridged the divide between self-managing schools and the Ministry. Principals and others warned against the creation of media 'league tables' of schools using National Standards data, and this came to pass in 2012, using 2011 annual school reports. Not surprisingly, the media were struck by the differences between schools related to school socio-economic decile. School data were treated as robust and consistent, not a perspective shared by those in schools and those working with them. As well as the lack of a coherent and ongoing national Ministry of Education programme to support the introduction of the National Standards, it was clear from the existing research and evaluation that schools came to their work on National Standards with different levels of understanding and strength in assessment and curriculum (ERO 2010, ERO 2012, Thrupp & Easter 2012, Ward & Thomas 2012, Wylie & Hodgen 2010).

Over the last year, two more reports have given insight into what schools have made of the National Standards, and what that might mean for the stated aims of the National Standards policy. Thrupp (2013) shows how school-specific factors in addition to assessment and curriculum knowledge and practice contribute to differences in individual schools' pace and manner of change; as well as their understanding and 'enactment' of OTJs. He raises questions about how well the changes schools have been making are actually contributing to student learning, and improving achievement.

Ward & Thomas's 2013 report on their 2010-2012 evaluation work with a national sample of schools shows, among other things, little growth over that period in teachers' reports of having a better understanding of what students need to achieve at the level they teach (30 percent thought they had this as a result of National Standards in 2012), or of having more knowledge of effective strategies for teaching (47 percent thought so in 2012, 43 percent thought so in 2010); (Ward & Thomas 2013, p.74). While there was some improvement in principals' ratings of the level of support they had from the Ministry of Education for the work and intended use of the National Standards between 2010 and 2011, there was little improvement between 2011 and 2012, and most principals in this sample "still rated themselves as unsupported or minimally supported in most of the areas listed above" (Ibid, p. 97). The evaluators' analysis of actual school reports sent to parents in terms of their clarity, identification of their child's next learning steps, and ways families could help their child at home does not show steady increases in quality. Only 43 percent of the 2012 reports to parents were judged to be clear.

Ward & Thomas also reported high levels of concern among principals in their sample about narrowing of the curriculum, league tables, demotivation of students who were consistently below the standards, and national testing being introduced; levels of concern that stayed high or grew even more between 2010 to 2012 (Ibid, p. 100).

This paper reports overall findings from NZCER's recent 2013 national survey of primary and intermediate schools to shed more light on the changes schools have made to their assessment and teaching practices as a result of the introduction of National Standards.<sup>1</sup> Some of the questions we asked picked up on Thrupp's case-study work to see how extensive some of the practices he

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<sup>1</sup> The picture given here will be expanded in early 2014 by using multivariate analysis to chart any variations related to school context, such as socio-economic decile, and other variables.

documented were at the national level. This paper touches on other material from these comprehensive surveys to look at these changes in the context of the work schools are doing in relation to other aspects of the New Zealand Curriculum, and their use of the National Standards in reporting to parents. It also provides parent and trustee perspectives on the National Standards. What we find suggests that the National Standards policy aims are unlikely to be realised without a more systemic approach that focuses more on the use of assessment for learning, and builds and shares knowledge of effective use of National Standards in improving student knowledge, understanding, and motivation: that puts National Standards within the wider context of curriculum, learning and assessment, rather than being an end in itself.

## **NZCER national surveys**

NZCER started regular national surveys of primary and intermediate schools in 1989, to track the implementation and effects of the *Tomorrow's Schools* policy.<sup>2</sup> We have continued them in order to provide a regular national picture of what is happening in schools and classes, and how that relates to any policy changes. The surveys are comprehensive, so that we can gain some insight into how changes in one aspect of school life are related to changes or continuity in other aspects of school life. The surveys are funded through NZCER's purchase agreement with the Ministry of Education; they are also supported by sector groups through encouragement of members to fill out surveys. We carry out the surveys every three years, using a different representative sample of around 20 percent of schools each time.

In 2013, the National Survey went early Term 3 to the principal, the board chair and one other trustee (we asked the board chair to give the survey to someone whose opinion might differ from their own), and a random sample of 1 in 2 teachers at a representative sample of 351 primary and intermediate schools<sup>3</sup>; and to a random sample of 1 in 4 parents at a cross-section of 36 of these schools. The response rates were 51 percent for principals (n=180), 40 percent for teachers (n=713), 40 percent for trustees (n=277), 34 percent for parents (n=684). There is somewhat of an under-representation of principals and trustees from decile 1-2 schools and small schools; and some under-representation of teachers from decile 3-6 schools, and over-representation of teachers from decile 9-10 schools. Parent responses are fairly evenly spread over deciles, with low numbers for decile 7-8 schools.

## **Views of the National Standards themselves**

After three years of working with the National Standards, only a few principals think of the standards themselves as robust, or providing a valuable record of student learning at their school.

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<sup>2</sup> We began surveys of all secondary schools in 2003, also on a 3-yearly cycle. Overall results from the 2012 secondary survey were published earlier this year (Wylie 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Melanie Berg gives more detail about the 2013 primary National Survey sampling frame and methodology in her paper to this NZARE conference.

We will publish an overview of the main findings from the 2013 primary National Survey in early 2014, with some thematic reports and papers to follow.

Teachers, who make OTJs, are more sanguine than principals about their ability to understand the standards and make judgements against them; but even so, the proportion who have confidence about this work is still less than half. Somewhat more teachers than principals think the standards are robust, and that they provide a valuable record of learning at the school. Trustees are the most inclined to see National Standards as providing such a record, but again, not at high levels.

**Table 1 School Views of the National Standards**

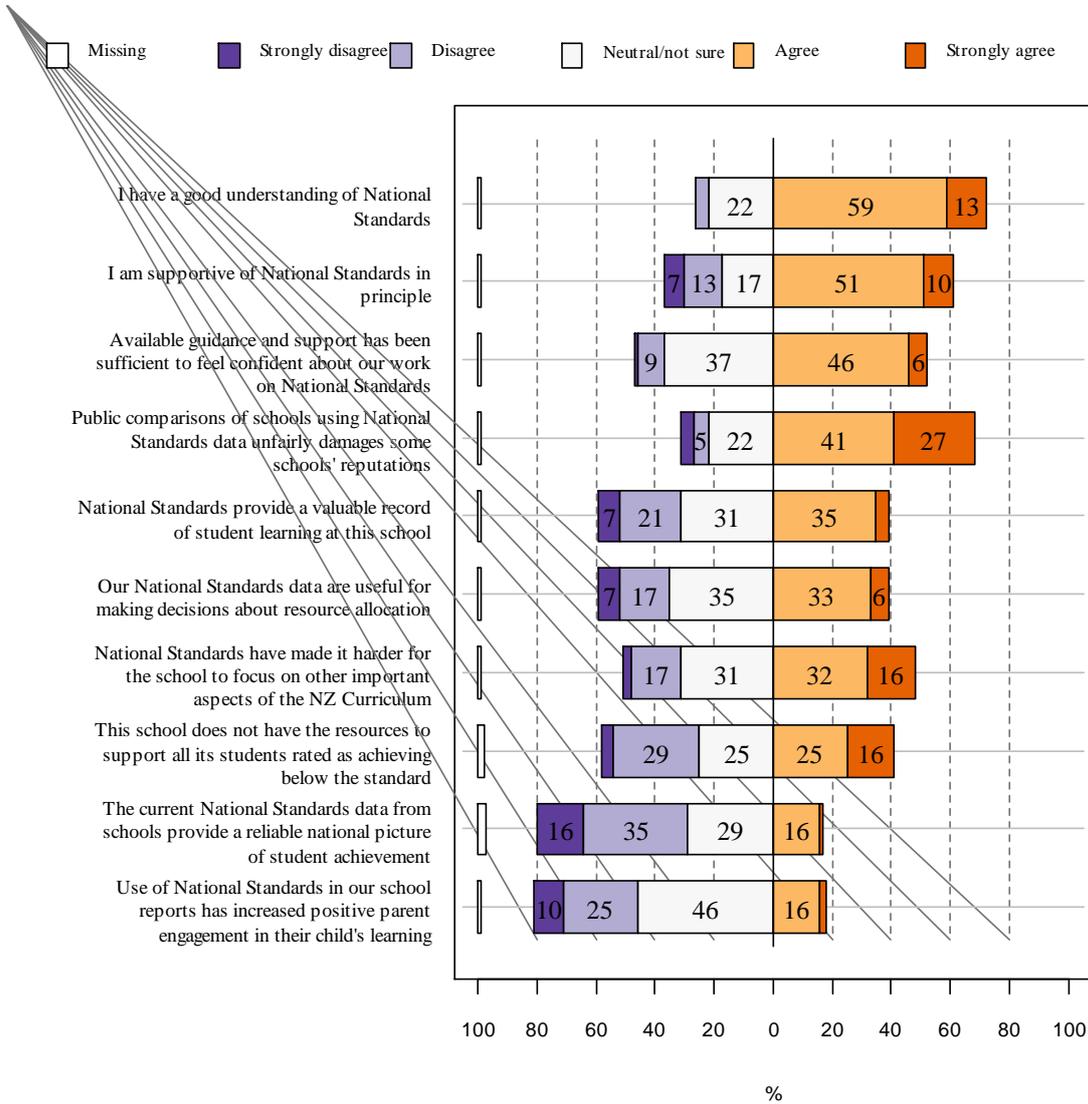
<b>View (strongly agree &amp; agree)</b>	<b>Principals (n=180) %</b>	<b>Teachers (n=713) %</b>	<b>Trustees (n=277) %</b>
Statements about expected achievement are clear	30	49	<i>not asked</i>
Easy to make reliable judgements of student performance against	15	37	<i>not asked</i>
The standards are robust	7	15	<i>not asked</i>
NS provide valuable record of student learning at this school	14	23	39

Only 17 percent of principals thought it was easy for their school’s parents to understand the National Standards; and only 21 percent thought it was easy for their school’s board to understand them.

## Trustee and parent perspectives

Trustees and to a lesser extent parents are largely confident that they understand the National Standards. Figure 1 shows 72 percent of trustees reporting that they have a good understanding of the National Standards. Sixty-one percent are supportive of the National Standards in principle. Yet this support comes with some caveats. Trustees are sensitive to the effect of league tables – public comparisons of schools – with 68 percent thinking that this unfairly damages some schools’ reputations. The proportion of trustees who see National Standards data as useful in making decisions about resource allocation (39 percent) outweigh those who do not (24 percent), but 35 percent are unsure about the difference they make. Forty-one percent think their school does not have the resources to support all its students achieving below the standard. Just under half the trustees think that National Standards has made it harder for the school to focus on other important aspects of the New Zealand Curriculum. Seventeen percent think that use of the National Standards in their school has increased positive parental engagement in their child’s learning.

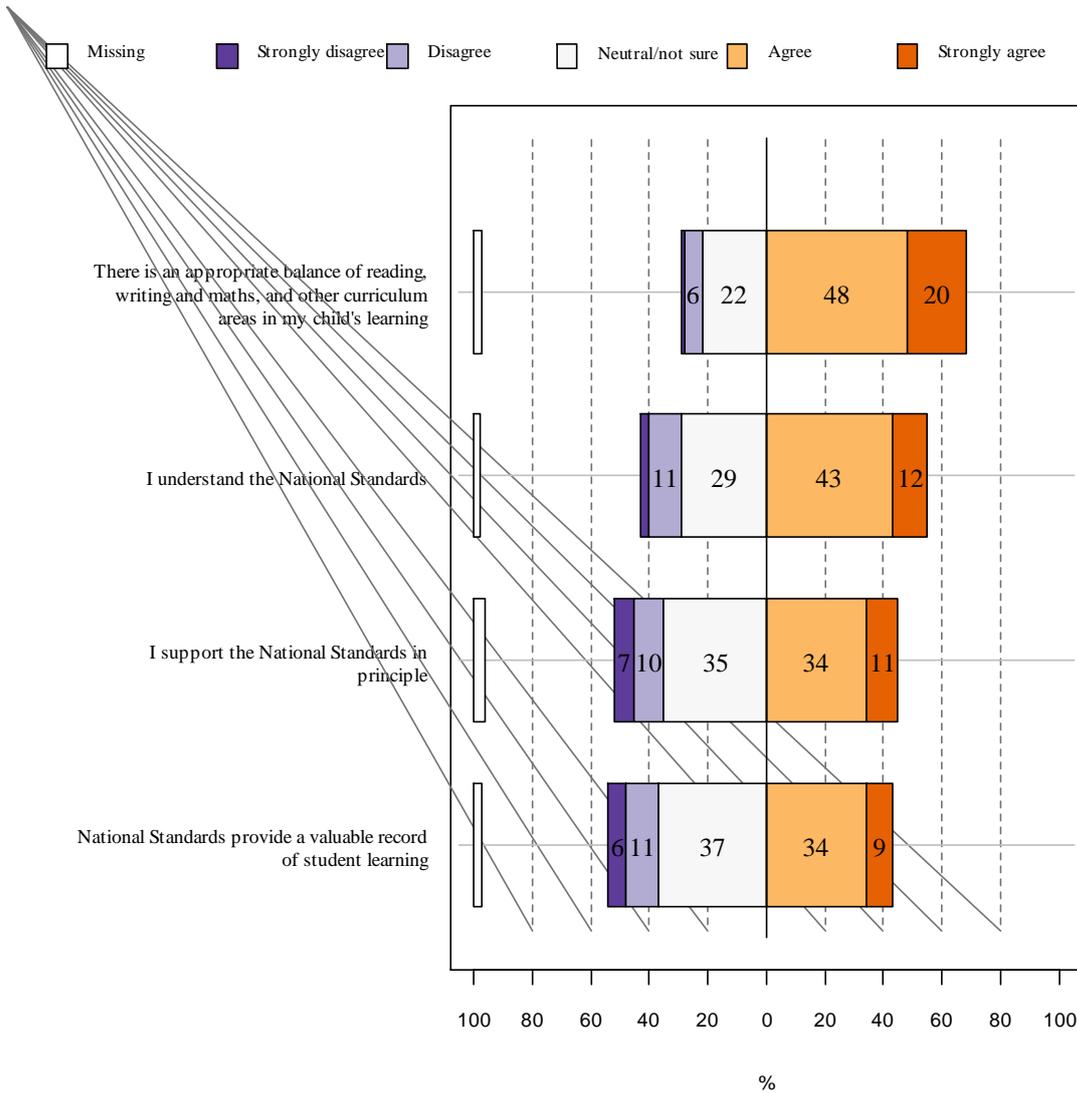
Figure 1 Trustees' views of the National Standards



Forty-three percent of the trustees responding also made a comment about the National Standards. A third of these comments queried the reliability or validity of National Standards data. Other concerns expressed by 14-21 percent of those commenting related to negative effects of reporting school results, issues with their development or roll-out at the national level, not taking individual student difference sufficiently into account, and negative effects from labelling students below the standard. Seventeen percent of the comments from trustees expressed a positive view of the National Standards with some caveats; an additional four percent made unalloyed positive comments.

Just over half the parents responding thought they understood the National Standards; 45 percent supported them in principle, and 43 percent thought they provided a valuable record of student learning. Among the remainder, more parents were unsure than gave clear negative answers. Just over two-thirds thought their child experienced a balanced curriculum.

Figure 2 Parent views of National Standards



Additional comments on the National Standards were made by 29 percent of the parents. Most of these raised some concerns, with comments related to the nature of reporting around National Standards, the effect of labelling students below standard, not taking individual differences into account, and to a lesser extent, criticism of the setting of the standards, their reliability or validity. Six percent of those who made comments were positive, with another 8 percent expressing positive views with caveats.

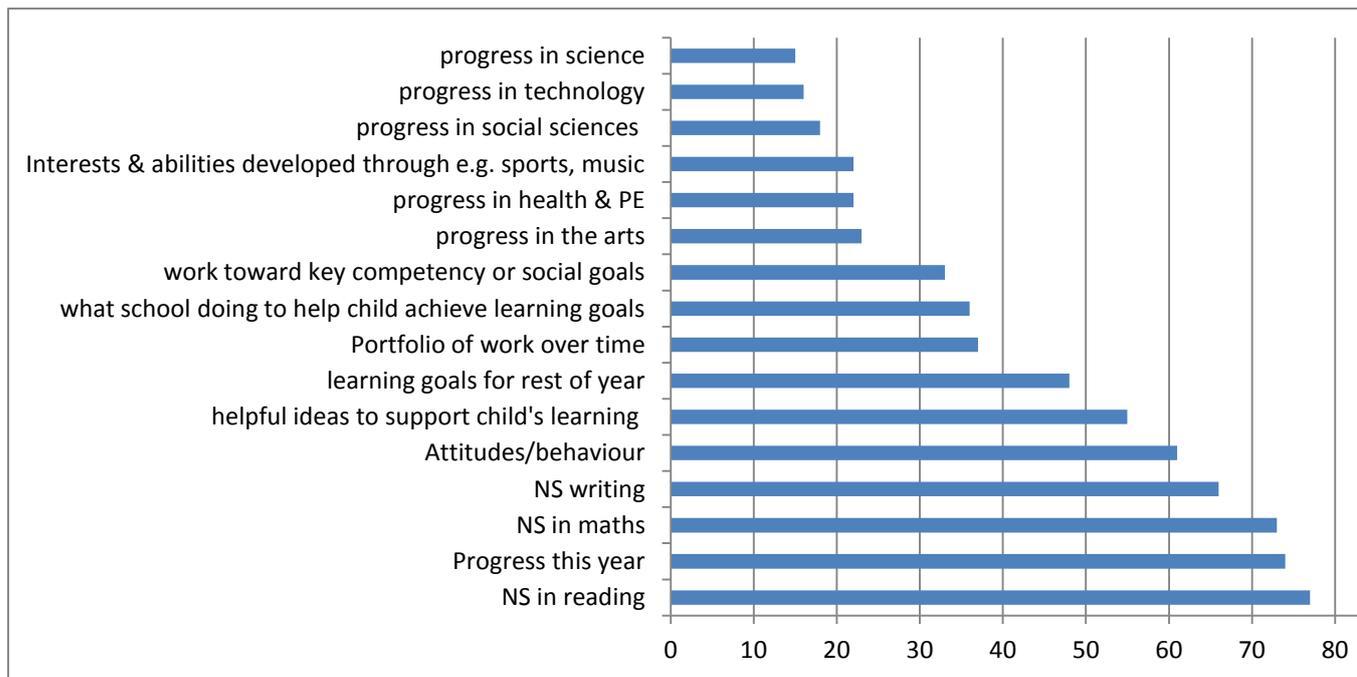
Most parents thought that their child's school helped them make progress in relation to the National Standards (85 percent; 37 percent strongly agreed with this item, 48 percent agreed).

Three-quarters of the parents thought that the information they got from their child's school in relation to the National Standards was very good (41 percent), or good (34 percent). Nineteen percent would like more information about their child's National Standard judgement.

Around three-quarters of parents said they got clear information about their child's performance in relation to the National Standards in reading and maths in their 2013 mid-year report. This shows some improvement over 2010, when 63 percent thought they had clear information in

relation to the reading standard, and 59 percent, in relation to the maths standard. Writing had improved from 52 percent to 66 percent. The other aspects of children’s development that we asked about show no change from 2010: no cutting back of reporting, say, on key competencies, but no increase either. Nor was there any increase on those who said they got useful ideas to support their child’s learning.

**Figure 3 Parent views of the clarity of information included in their child’s 2013 mid-year report (%s, n= 684)**



Overall, then, trustee and parent perspectives indicate more trust in the nature of the National Standards than is held by the teaching profession who work with them. Some improvement in the clarity of reporting is evident in relation to the National Standards, but not necessarily tying this into what parents can do to support their child’s learning – to maximize the use of this information.

## Teachers’ perspectives on the National Standards

National Standards did not fill an empty space, since most teachers were already using a range of assessments. It has not led to radical change in assessment practice in many schools. The policy has encouraged some shifts in what is used and how it is used, and more professional learning around assessment use and interpretation of results. It has added assessments for around half the teachers, but for most, not at the expense of formative assessment. It has encouraged schools to ensure more consistency in which assessments are used, and when they are used. Such

consistency across teachers aligns with moderation of teacher judgements. Moderation is more common. This has the potential to not only support consistent judgements of evidence about student performance in relation to the National Standards, as part of the wider New Zealand Curriculum, but also to support professional learning to enrich learning opportunities (Hipkins & Robertson 2011).

A minority of teachers are working at schools where the introduction of National Standards has meant more uniformity in practice. For example, 20 percent were in schools which had handed the administration of definitive assessments to senior school staff, rather than develop teacher capability.

**Table 2 Teachers' reports of changes to their school's assessment practices because of National Standards**

<b>Changes to assessment practices because of National Standards</b> <i>(n=713)</i>	% strongly agreeing	% agreeing
Increased professional learning around assessment use & interpretation of results	16	55
Increased moderation between teachers of same year level	17	53
School-wide timetable for assessments used to make OTJs	15	45
Increased moderation between teachers of different year levels	12	47
All teachers now use the same assessments to make OTJs	10	45
Changes to assessments	8	42
More use of summative assessments	5	33
More evidence about reading, writing and numeracy gathered from curriculum areas other than English and Maths	15	32
More use of standardised assessments	7	39
No individual choice on the assessments a teacher uses with their class	6	20
Senior school leaders administer all the definitive assessments that are used to make OTJs	3	17
Less emphasis on formative assessment	2	12

Few teachers are relying on single sources of evidence to make OTJs, as Table 3 shows. More schools are using their own writing exemplars, suggesting some collective work within the school.

Quite a few schools would seem to be using both their own and the Ministry's writing exemplars. Table 3 below gives some comparisons with teachers' answers in 2010, where the same items were used in 2010. Peer assessment and student self-assessment have stayed much the same.

**Table 3 Sources of evidence used to make OTJs<sup>4</sup>**

<b>Sources</b>	2013	2010
	(n=713)	(n = 769)
	%	%
Teacher observations	91	92
GLOSS, IKAN, NUMPA	88	-
A standardised assessment (e.g., PAT, e-asTTle, STAR, Observation Survey)	87	-
Literacy Learning Progressions	73	-
Work in areas other than English, Maths & Science	67	-
Writing samples benchmarked against school's exemplars	75	62
Instructional text levels	60	-
PM benchmarks	58	-
PROBE	53	-
Student self-assessment	43	48
Peer assessment	34	31
Reading benchmarked against Ministry exemplars	31	-
Writing samples benchmarked against Ministry exemplars	63	71
ARBs	23	-
Previous school report	18	-
Student self-assessment related to standard for their year	15	-

Teachers' responses on the difference made to their teaching by their use of National Standards show that most gain has come from moderation work with other teachers: from the discussions around the interpretation of student work. Just under half also think they are more attentive to

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<sup>4</sup> The range of sources used by teachers is likely to vary by year level.

each student's rate of progress. National Standards are producing more useful data for teaching decisions and meeting the needs of the student groups who are the main focus of current educational policy for a quarter or less.

**Table 4 Teachers' views of the difference made by National Standards to their teaching: data-related**

<i>(n=713)</i> <b>View of Difference</b>	% strongly agreeing	% agreeing
Moderation work around OTJs gives me useful insights for my practice	8	62
More attentive now to each student's rate of progress	6	39
Students frame their learning goals in terms of NS now	3	30
Better data to make decisions around teaching & learning at classroom level	3	23
Better data to identify the learning needs of priority learning groups	2	17
Better data to identify the needs of ESL students	1	12

However, the additional assessment work noted and increased professional learning around its use reported in Table 2, and the inclusion of NS in student goals as shown above, has yet to be evident in marked differences for student achievement, as shown by the first item in Table 5.

Table 5 **Teachers’ views of the difference made by National Standards to their teaching: work with students**

(n=713)	% strongly agreeing	% agreeing
<b>View of Difference</b>		
No big difference to student achievement because I previously identified individual student need & worked hard to increase rates of learning progress	39	39
Particular focus on students achieving “below” or “well below”	8	39
No big difference in student achievement because I need additional support to really change rates of learning progress	13	31
Anxiety about their NS performance has negatively affected some students’ learning	13	28
It is harder to pay attention to students achieving “above” the standard	8	22
Parents of students achieving “below” or “well below” are more engaged in their children’s learning in positive ways	2	16

The picture from this table raises some interesting questions. Is the ability of National Standards to play an effective role in increasing student achievement limited by some of their construction – for example, the use of ‘below’ and ‘well below’ to categorise student *performance* may well feel like a judgement on the *student*? Is it limited by knowledge and available time to use the results well – to focus on those who are achieving ‘above’ the standard as well as those achieving ‘below’? Is it limited because it is not providing new knowledge of student strengths and needs? Is it limited because we need to build and share more knowledge of how teachers work well with parents of students categorised as performing ‘below’, so that there is more support for student learning?

The unfortunate labels given to performance levels in relation to the National Standards (other educational systems use more neutral terms such as ‘basic’ or ‘proficient’) are used in reports to parents and whānau twice a year, by 81 percent of the teachers. Students were also taking an active role in the mid-year review of their progress with 69 percent of the teachers: thus students will be aware of these labels.

Teachers were tempering the use of the four levels in their reporting to parents (and students), with 61 percent saying that they used the term “working towards” for all students who were not clearly at or above the standard. Exemplars of the levels, which might be helpful in unpacking what the National Standards cover, were used by 32 percent of the teachers to give parents a picture of their child’s achievement level, and 29 percent also used them in student-led conferences with parents.

Half the teachers also reported that the majority of students in their class quite often or most of the time set goals with them in relation to the National Standards, as they did in relation to the Key Competencies. Such goal setting is much less likely in other curriculum areas, such as science or the Arts.

Sixty percent of the teachers felt that their National Standards work had created more work for little gain. Table 6 also shows that quite a few think it has eroded other aspects of their New Zealand Curriculum work, and how they teach.

**Table 6 Teachers' views of the difference made by National Standards to their teaching – curriculum**

<i>(n=713)</i> <b>View of Difference</b>	% strongly agreeing	% agreeing
I feel I can't do justice to all the NZC learning areas	31	35
National Standards have created more work for little gain	25	35
National Standards have narrowed the curriculum I teach	21	29
My teaching feels less creative	17	25
National Standards have made it harder to integrate different curriculum areas	17	25
Schoolwide timetable for literacy & maths now makes it difficult for me to integrate curriculum areas	9	16

## **National Standards in the wider context of the New Zealand Curriculum**

We compared teachers' answers to questions about teaching practices related to the New Zealand Curriculum in 2013 with answers to the same questions in 2010. There has been little increase in the frequency of these practices in classrooms over the period but also no decrease. We also looked at teachers' reports of the use of ICT in classes, expecting there to be some increases here since 2010. Use of ICT to practice skills individually, and to work with data individually has grown somewhat. But the more collaborative, creative possibilities that e-learning allows did not increase over the 2010-2013 period.

We also looked at how schools were working as professional learning communities, and again, there was no increase over the three years. This compares with the increases that were evident between 2007 to 2010, when schools were focused on making the New Zealand Curriculum their own.

This raises the question of whether the introduction of National Standards has come at the cost of further development of the curriculum, pedagogy, and advances in internal professional culture that were evident between 2007 to 2010 (Wylie 2011).

Asked about their current work with the New Zealand Curriculum as a whole, around two-thirds of teachers and principals in 2013 feel that the New Zealand Curriculum remains strong or continues to develop in their school. Around a third feel that it has lost their attention. And around a fifth of teachers think that their New Zealand Curriculum work has narrowed to the extent that “National Standards drives what we do in this school.”

**Table 7 Schools’ current work with New Zealand Curriculum**

View	Principals (n=180) %	Teachers (n=713) %
New Zealand Curriculum drives what we do in this school	38	39
Continuing to build approaches & practices that align with the New Zealand Curriculum	36	43
The focus on literacy & maths has taken our attention away from other aspects of the New Zealand Curriculum	34	31
National Standards drive what we do in this school	3	21

Fifty percent of the principals made comments on the New Zealand Curriculum. Half of these comments are about tensions between the wider New Zealand Curriculum and National Standards. Forty-three percent made positive comments about New Zealand Curriculum; 29 percent, positive comments about its ability to cater to individual student and school need. Critical comments on the New Zealand Curriculum were made by 2 percent of the principals.

Nineteen percent of teachers commented also on the New Zealand Curriculum. Again, tensions between the wider New Zealand Curriculum and the National Standards predominate (50 percent of the comments). Thirty-one percent were positive about how the New Zealand Curriculum could be tailored to individual student and school need. Thirty percent made generally positive comments about it.

## **Principal perspectives**

We asked principals about the difference use of the National Standards had made at their school.

Moderation is reported as a useful addition at the school level. This is the most positive change principals report from their schools’ work with National Standards. Forty percent think their

school has become more attentive to students' rates of progress; 31 percent that they have better data at the school level to make decisions. Anxiety about making OTJs is seen to affect some teachers' performance in 41 percent of the schools.

**Table 8 Principals' views of the difference made by National Standards use at their school: data use**

<i>(n=180)</i> <b>View of difference</b>	% strongly agreeing	% agreeing
Moderation work around OTJs is useful professional learning	13	70
Anxiety about making OTJs has negatively affected some teachers' practice	9	31
More attentive now to each student's rate of progress	4	36
Better data to make decisions around teaching & learning at school level	2	28
Better data to make decisions around teaching & learning at classroom level	1	27
Better data to identify the learning needs of priority learning groups	2	19

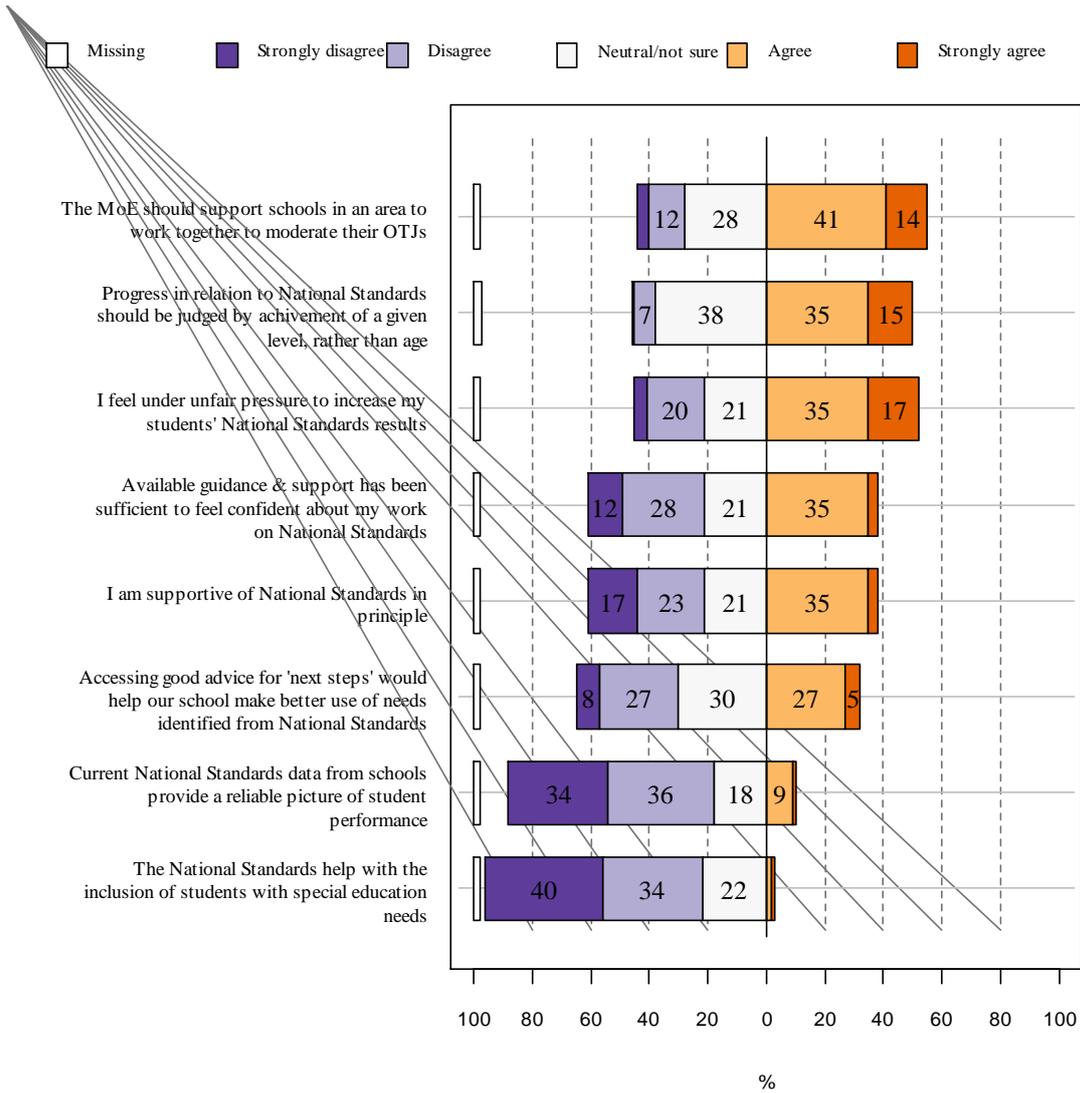
Around two-thirds of the principals think that the National Standards have come at some cost to the curriculum as a whole, without providing gains commensurate with the attention they have taken. Many think they need additional support to make the linkages between identifying need and responding effectively to it. Few see the gains in parent engagement that the policy assumed would follow the use of the National Standards in reporting to parents and whānau.

**Table 9 Principals' views of the difference made by National Standards to work with students & teachers' work**

<i>(n=180)</i> <b>View of difference</b>	% strongly agreeing	% agreeing
No big difference to student achievement because school previously identified individual student need & worked hard to increase rates of learning progress	41	41
National Standards have created more work for little real gain	37	33
National Standards have narrowed the school's curriculum	30	37
Particular focus on students achieving "below" or "well below"	11	52
No big difference to student achievement because to really change rates of learning progress, we need additional support	21	41
Anxiety about their National Standards performance has negatively affected some students' learning	11	31
Less attention paid to students achieving "above" the standard	5	31
Parents of students achieving "below" or "well below" are more engaged in their children's learning in positive ways	1	13
Students frame their learning goals around National Standards	0	14

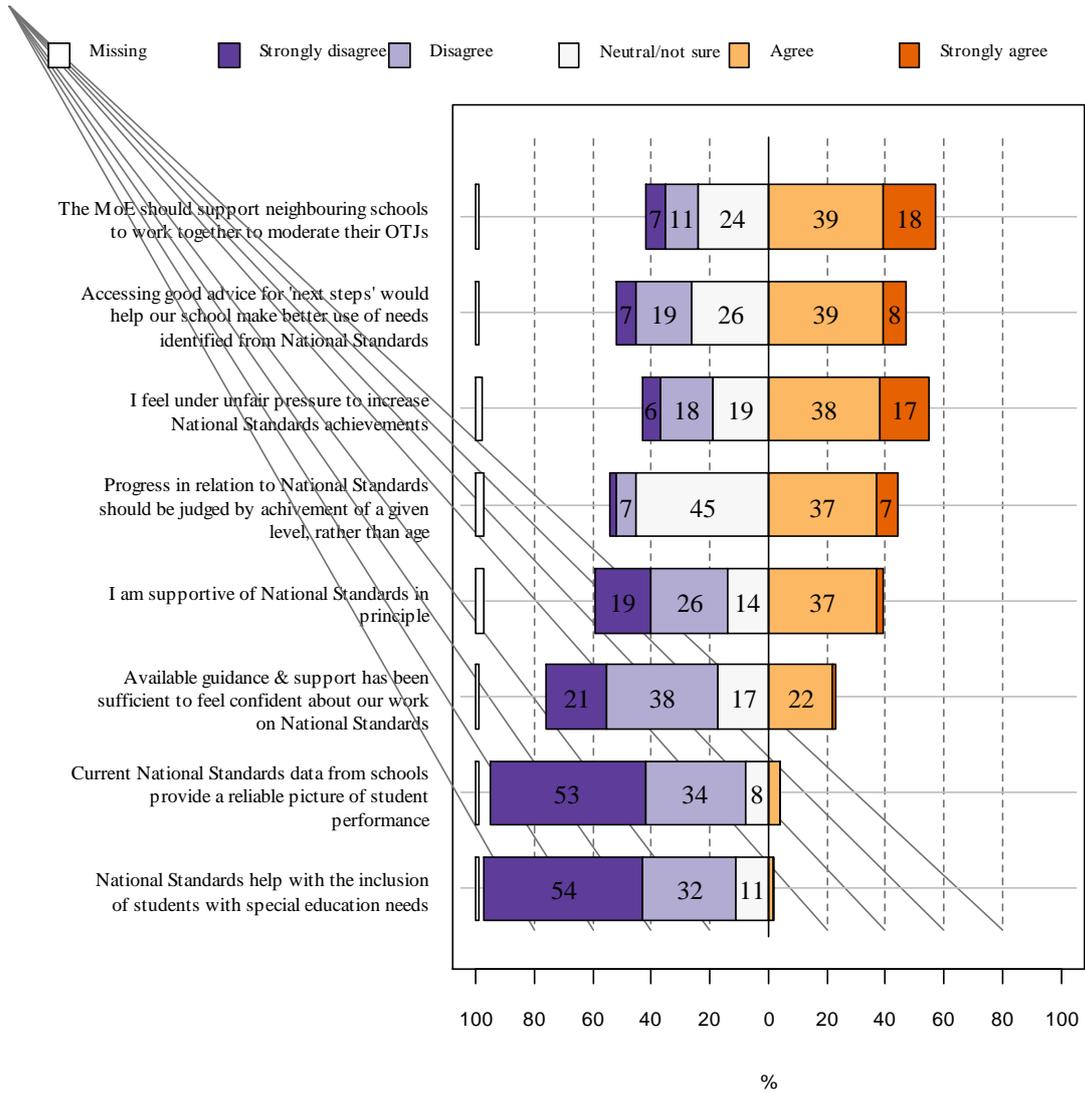
Finally, we asked both teachers and principals about aspects of the National Standards implementation, and where improvements could be made. Figure 4 shows that teachers remain interested in support for schools to work together to moderate their OTJs. Such work would likely provide assurance for them that the National Standards data from schools provides a reliable picture of student performance, something that only 10 percent of teachers currently believe. Teachers are also supportive of looking at student progress in relation to achievement of curriculum levels rather than age. There is a range of views evident about the quality of guidance and support, and whether their school needs good advice about 'next steps', pointing to uneven availability of this in schools. There is also a mix of views about support for National Standards in principle: 36 percent do, 40 percent do not, and 21 percent are unsure. Fifty-two percent report unfair pressure to increase students' National Standards results; 21 percent are unsure or neutral about such pressure, and 24 percent do not experience this.

Figure 4 Teachers' views of National Standards



The picture from principals is similar. But less than a quarter are positive about the guidance and support around National Standards that their school has received.

Figure 5 Principals' views of National Standards



## Where next with National Standards?

Expectations of increased student achievement are very high. By 2017, 85 percent of all New Zealand students are expected to be performing at or above standard in a recently added Better Public Service Goal. Currently, at the national, aggregated level, 77 percent of students are judged as meeting the standard for reading, 74 percent for maths, and 70 percent for writing. The figures are lower for priority groups. There was little change at the national level in student performance between 2011 and 2012. Making progress towards such a goal would seem to need some things to be done differently.

What the 2013 national survey data suggest is that teaching and school practice has changed in many schools as a result of the introduction of National Standards. Moderation is the most valued of these changes, probably because it sets the National Standards in a context of professional learning and sharing of knowledge and understanding. There is an appetite for moderation work to occur between schools, which would also provide teachers with reassurance about the validity of their own OTJs and understanding of the National Standards.

The survey findings also raise the question of why, with many schools making changes and ‘enacting’ the National Standards, and being more conscious of rates of student progress, we do not see more teachers and principals reporting gains from their use. More close-grained work is needed to understand this, and to understand why it is that the information provided by National Standards does not seem to be enough to spur parents of low performing students to become more engaged in their learning; or, turning that around, to learn more about what teachers and schools which do see some improvement in this are doing. Or what is happening where students’ anxiety about their National Standards performance is affecting performance – as well as when this anxiety is not an issue. Case studies of this kind could be useful to better understand what support and knowledge building and sharing could help achieve the intended use of the National Standards. Such studies would need to also enquire about the existing platform for this work, in terms of assessment use for learning, say, or work with parents around learning so we gain an understanding of the conditions which might be needed to be first supported.

There are issues to be addressed around gaining greater coherence in teaching and learning, so that teachers can justifiably sense that their curriculum is balanced, and that attention to one group of learners is not occurring at the expense of another. Again, this is something that needs some national work and support, rather than leaving up to each school, with their different platforms, strengths, and contextual demands.

The National Standards work is one part of the role of primary teachers. Other parts of the national survey data from 2013 suggests that they are feeling stretched too thinly, with less sense of coherence about their work. They are slightly less positive than in 2010 that their workload or work-related stress is manageable. Thirty-two percent think they can’t do justice to all their students because of their workload. The desire for more coherence, depth, and ability to focus also came through when we asked teachers what they would change about their work as a whole. Further support and development of the National Standards needs to take this into account, and to position them more clearly within the larger picture, which in the next few years is to include a greater emphasis on e-learning.

The Ministry of Education's National Standards Aggregate Results Advisory Group recently recommended more of a learning approach to the use of the National Standards, including an 'overall process of ongoing review', as well as shared understanding of what the National Standards are about, and more joint work between the Ministry, the teaching profession, and those who support teaching. These survey findings support such an approach – a change in what has happened so far – if the policy intentions of the National Standards, to support better teaching and learning, are to be realised.

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