

CONFERENCE 2018 SPEECH

This time last year, I stood at the conference podium in Queenstown and pleaded with Education Minister Nikki Kaye to STOP!... I begged her to give away her ambition to introduce National Standards Plus!

It is hard to believe that one year later I stand here and ask, 'Does anyone even remember national standards?' When the new coalition Government was announced in October last year, national standards, along with charter schools were immediately sent to the scrap heap.

We have entered a new era and now we have been handed the responsibility of helping the new Government reshape our education system for the next thirty years. We start from a good place. We **all** agree that

1. We want a high-quality public education system where every child can attend their local school and every local school will be a great school
2. We want our curriculum, not data and targets, to drive schooling decisions
3. We want a long-term plan for education that will not be disrupted by changes of Government in the future
4. We want schools to have all the support and resources they need to give every child the education best suited to them
5. We want our teachers and our leaders to be well supported, and to have access to advice, mentoring and coaching as and when they need it
6. We want an end to competition between schools and within schools
7. We want Equity to sit at the heart of education
8. We want support for schools to embrace and value diverse cultures
9. We want a system that is excellent. Not in a competitive way but in a qualitative way
10. We want the best teachers in front of our young people every day
11. We want a workforce that is sustainable and a profession that enjoys high status in our communities

These are our shared aspirations. Now the work begins to make them a reality.

Today I am going to update you on some of the important things that have been happening this past year. I will then address some of the issues that I know are concerning you right now.

But first - let me extend a very warm welcome to Minister Chris Hipkins, Minister Tracey Martin and Minister Jenny Salesa. Naumai Haere mai etc. We are deeply honoured to welcome all three of you to our conference this morning. I also thank another senior Minister Grant Robertson, for attending our Powhiri last night and officially opening our conference.

Your presence here today and participation in our conference, sends a strong message that you respect our profession and you want to work with us.

To the President of the International Confederation of Principals, Fiona Forbes, a very warm welcome to you and to our colleagues from the Australia Primary Principals' Association, including President Dennis Yarrington, a very warm welcome!

And to all the principals right here in front of me, thank you for being here and thank you for the stunning work that you do every day in your schools. I heard Minister Hipkins once say about principals, 'We gave you an impossible job'. It is so complex and so demanding and stressful, and you do it with minimal support. What's more, it is getting more difficult by the day. What is remarkable about each one of you is that your core motivation is always to do the absolute best you can for each of the children in your schools. You are extraordinary people and on behalf of all your children and parents I say thank you!

To all the presidents of regional associations out there, welcome to you, and my personal thanks to each of you. Thank you to everyone who has invited me to your regional meetings and events this year and thank you for attending our Moot in March. You helped set the agenda for the NZPF executive for the year.

This year, our conference theme is 'Creative Leaders, Flourishing Futures'. We have some fantastic keynotes to provoke and challenge your thinking and others who will take you right out of your comfortable corners to show you an alternative world you may never have thought possible. It is time to let your creative side out and see where it might take you!

This past year has been one of the most extraordinary I have experienced since becoming a principal. It was such a relief to get rid of national standards which brought so much anguish and low morale to our profession. This new Government put an end to our schools and teachers being judged on national standards data. We now have a government that understands children are diverse, not standard, and do not all learn at the same pace or in the same way. They understand that the context of each of our school communities is different and that the school curriculum must reflect that. We can leave behind the narrow curriculum of reading writing and maths now because our new Government agrees that the curriculum must be rich and deep and broad to allow all our young people to have access to the best learning opportunities we can offer.

We know that unravelling the past ten years cannot be done in a nano-second. Even though we want everything fixed right Now!

We also know that if we don't get the right strategies and plans in place, in a few years' time we will be going through all this again.

The approach to moving forward is being built on a very extensive foundation of consultation.

It is not just consultation with the profession. Parents, students, special groups and other regional groups have all been canvassed through summits, meetings and focus groups and if that didn't capture the country's views there were also online surveys. I cannot recall any other time in my career that there has been such wide consultation on education.

Out of all the Korero has come several themes or strategic work streams. One of the most pivotal is **Tomorrow Schools**. That is the policy, introduced 30 years ago, that shifted our schools from Education Board control to local community autonomy. It gave every school a Board of Trustees, made up of local community members to govern our schools. Schools were able to construct their own curriculum in collaboration with their local communities. These are mostly seen as good things but the policy has its down sides. Some schools are not able to attract people with the necessary governance skills to sit on their Boards and **Tomorrow's Schools** created competition which resulted in a culture of marketing schools to attract roll growth.

Equity has been addressed through decile funding of schools which has the unfortunate consequence of parents perceiving that low decile schools are of low quality and high decile schools are high quality. The result is that school populations have drifted towards high decile schools. High decile schools are therefore experiencing all the roll growth while low decile schools are diminishing in size creating a two-tier system. I do not believe that a two-tier system was the goal of equity.

Along with **Tomorrow's Schools** came the Ministry, ERO and a gradual reduction in advisory and support services for teachers and principals.

I have yet to meet the principal who wants to give up having autonomy over their own school. I have also yet to meet the principal who does not think that we urgently need more support, advice and PLD available to teachers and principals.

And I have yet to meet the principal, Minister, who doesn't want to see a complete change in the culture of ERO. Perhaps it is a hang over from national standards, but ERO is seen as narrowly focused, judgemental, unfair and punishing. It is not about evaluating schools to help them improve - as we would expect. Principals everywhere believe there must be changes to the culture and intentions of ERO.

The review of **Tomorrow's Schools** has had to come first and it's had to be extensive because so many factors feed into it.

There has also been a very thorough review of NCEA qualifications, and the frequency of student assessments. Questions of over-assessment have been raised and further there have been questions for the group to discuss on whether we actually need three secondary level qualifications. Separately there is also a review of curriculum progress and assessment for years 1 – 8 now that national standards have gone.

These people are excitedly grappling with new ways to show progress in the learning of our young people. At the same time, we want to be able to say how our country is doing as a whole. So there are debates about how best to paint that national picture so that it is meaningful and representative of our young learners.

We are also looking forward to debating some other new ideas and we are especially excited about the notion of a Leadership College. Earlier this year I discussed Centres of Leadership with our colleagues from Ireland, Ontario and the UK, who were attending the ICP meeting and I look forward to sharing some of these ideas when we begin work on developing our own Leadership College.

Alongside this exciting work some not so exciting problems have surfaced. I know that these are some of the most concerning issues you as principals are facing right now.

The first of these is NOT new and is the result of a policy called INCLUSION. I have yet to meet the principal who would not support the right of every child to have access to an education that is best suited to their needs and as far as possible to have that education delivered by the child's local school. What went wrong was introducing the inclusion policy without the support to go with it!

We have watched support for young people with special learning needs erode over the past decade and at the same time we have experienced exponential growth in the number of young people presenting with severe behavioural challenges. There are no winners from this situation. Teachers cannot manage these children in their classes; other children's learning suffers; parents complain; principals are constantly under pressure to mediate, to work harder to get the expertise these young people need, and all too often, that expertise is nowhere to be found.

This has gone on too long. Minister Martin knows that. She has been one of our greatest allies in the special education space for a very long time, long before the last election. Two weeks ago Minister Martin launched a draft Disability and Learning Support Action Plan.

On being elected to Government, Minister Hipkins also acknowledged the state of special education and said, 'we will not have a review of special education. We already know what the problems are. We will go straight to the plan. That's what Minister Martin has done and the plan is out for consultation right now. I urge you, please send in your feedback. This is what you have been asking for - for a very long time!

Another serious issue facing many of you right now is the teacher shortage. To begin with the figures were unclear as the Ministry had not before had a Workforce Strategy or any data on staffing projections. There was no planning model to work from. Teacher shortages crept up on us and before we knew it, we had shortages right across the country. It didn't help that we had trained 40% fewer teachers in the previous decade, even though we had

400,000 more children and that the morale of the profession had been significantly reduced over the past ten years.

The problem is, we now face shortages that we are unlikely to fix before the start of next year. I acknowledge the work you are doing Minister, pouring resources into recruitment drives and advertising and the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment has also listed Teaching as an area of skills shortage in New Zealand.

I appreciate that, like us, you too were not aware of the severity or extent of this problem until more recently. We too are examining our own contacts to identify any areas or countries that have trained teachers out of work and have identified some which may help. It is unlikely however that our best collective efforts will be enough to cover all our vacancies for next year. If you have any new ideas on solving this troubling issue, Minister, please do share them with us!

But we are not about to dwell for too long on the negatives. I'm sure, Ministers, you have taken all the notes you need! This week we are here to get creative, to network, to collaborate, to soak up a bit of Wellington culture and to return to school filled with a new sense of freedom, to take some risks, and challenge our young people with fresh ways of seeing our world.

