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'Get Real' Prime Minister, say School Principals!

Source: NZ Principals Federation

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Prime Minister Bill English, in campaign mode, has announced that national standards would be extended and millions of dollars would be poured into primary children having the option to learn one of several different languages from Mandarin and Korean, to Spanish or Te Reo Maori. There would also be a considerable sum poured into secondary schools for digital technology.

'Clearly the Prime Minister hasn't been listening to his Minister of Education,' said Whetu Cormick, President of the New Zealand Principals Federation (NZPF). 'He is completely out of touch with the priorities facing schools.'

'National standards have made no significant change to the achievement levels of priority learners since their introduction and that's why the Government introduced them. We have chronic teacher shortages and we are struggling to address the severe behaviour issues presented in our schools every day,' he said.

'We have the children of methamphetamine addicts, who have extreme behavioural challenges, we have young people from homes where poverty pervades every aspect of their lives and we have children with severe autism, mental health issues and other afflictions which require specialist support, which many schools cannot access,' he said.

'For the Prime Minister to suggest that more national standards, foreign languages in primary schools and specialist digital technology teachers are the most important priorities, shows a man completely out of touch with the realities facing schools today,' said Cormick.

'Teaching foreign languages, like Korean and Mandarin would be a great aspiration once we have addressed the issues of actually having teachers in front of the class in the first place, and sorted the mess that is our current special education funding,' he said.

'Minister Kaye understands that the number of young people with mental health and other serious behavioural issues in our schools, is growing. Like us, she wants workable solutions to those issues,' he said, 'and has offered a small budget - relative to the money being announced by the Prime Minister for his latest policies - to begin addressing this.

'We have repeatedly put the teacher shortage issue in front of the Minister and the Ministry,' said Cormick, 'and Auckland principals in particular, are now at the end of their tether trying to juggle staffing to cover the gaps,' he said.

'Solving this issue takes a considered strategy including how to lift the status of the profession to make it an attractive option and how to address the cost of living and housing in Auckland. That's the sort of announcement we expect from the Prime Minister,' he said.

'Clearly, right now, addressing special education and teacher shortages are far higher priority than pouring millions into expanding the poor performing national standards system and teaching primary children Korean or Mandarin,' Said Cormick.

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