

## *INSIGHTS AND OVERSIGHTS 1*

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### **Education Policy and Regulation: Evidence Based or Babble and Quackery?**

It is probably not unreasonable to observe that education policy and regulation in New Zealand is a hotch-potch of educationally reasoned, administratively contrived and politically motivated resolve. And while it is of little comfort, this manipulative concoction is probably not unlike the state of affairs in most Western systems. As leaders in education we repeatedly see and know this state of affairs, but those of us who are committed to good sense and real world views of schools, teachers, children and communities, it is unacceptable to simply lie back and swallow endless rhetorical spin with mindless dumbed down passivity. Robust and believable policy invariably derives from well considered collaborative effort, with those engaged in the collaboration being representatively proportionate to the sector at large. After all, the considered mind of one minister or manager can amount to no more than the considered mind of a single principal, teacher or parent. In a little country like New Zealand, collaborative decision making should be entirely possible, yet in too many cases it simply doesn't suit those with power to have their preconceived policy or regulation interrogated, challenged or disproved – especially by those whom they would have wearing and doing it.

Over recent years observers, analysts (non-governmental) and education professionals have bemoaned the intrusions of creeping centralism and compliance capture in our erstwhile self-managing “Tomorrow's Schools”. Some would go so far as to say that the creeps have broken into the trots! One national daily referred to this current trend as Statism. “Statism is usually defined as the practice of concentrating economic and political power in central government in order to weaken the position of individuals, institutions or communities. Labour governments throughout our history have, without exception, practised statism ... and the present Government, which occasionally likes to describe itself as practising ‘democratic socialism’, is in fact one of the most statist Labour administrations of them all (Otago Daily Times).

Two among many glaringly stupendous (in this case, meaning “impressively stupid”) examples of governmentalism are seen in the Planning and Reporting regulation with its chain of bureaucratic machinery premised on false assumptions about stimulating and improving teaching and learning, and, more recently, pursuant to section 60A of the Education Act 1989, the Minister makes the following amendments to the National Education Goals and the National Education Guidelines:

Goal 5: Priority should be given (through a broad education and a balanced curriculum covering essential learning areas) to the development of high levels of competence (knowledge and skills) in **literacy**, **numeracy**, **science** and **technology** and **physical activity**.

NAG(a)(i)(c): giving priority to **regular quality** physical activity that develops movement skills for **all students**, **especially in years 1-6**.

So, what does all of this mean for besieged principals and teachers? The worldly wise, foot sure, head strong and confident will say “nothing new”. The naïve and trembling complier will look to the latest Education Gazette for articles of inspiration, for providers of new packages, new solutions, new professional development, new resources, new planning formats, new evidence based measurement devices, and, new surveillances from ERO! And so the insidious new age commerce and industry of education spins on! And still there will be no best evidence synthesis on the power of happiness for advancing teaching and learning, teachers and learners.