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New Zealand's school principals*

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Tēnā koe Bernadette

Recently, a number of school principals have received OIA requests from Dominion Post journalists seeking national standards data from schools. Can we assume that the journalists intend to create league tables from this data to rank schools?

Should this be the case I draw your attention to some of the risks associated with this data especially in its current form and if used to publish league tables, the potential to mislead the public. The national standards data is in its infancy. This is the first year that schools have been required to submit reports on national standards. This first set of data has been variously described by the Prime Minister as 'ropey' and by both the Minister of Education and the Secretary for Education as unreliable and inconsistent. To date there is no mechanism for moderating the data.

Secondly, even if the data was reliable and robust and reliably moderated, this data covers only two subject areas and cannot possibly reflect the whole performance of a school. To use the data alone to rank schools could mislead the public. Parents may assume that the league tables are constructed from a comprehensive set of information worthy of comparing schools, which they would not be.

I would also draw your attention to the fact that whilst New Zealand is located in the top few countries of the OECD for literacy and numeracy achievement, none of the countries that sit alongside New Zealand rank schools using league tables. Further, since introducing league tables, the USA, UK and Australia have dropped in their OECD achievement rankings.

Principals are concerned that league tables harm rather than enhance achievement in children and by creating a culture of competition they have the potential to do long term damage as teachers are driven to focus more narrowly on the two subject areas that would have become high stakes.

I respectfully ask that you consider the implications of publishing league tables before approving them.

Ngā mihi nui

Paul Drummond
National President