

MOOT TOPICS FROM 2013

Novopay

The Novopay shambles has now dominated schools' administration since inception, and shows few signs of weakening. It has been a source of great stress for very many schools, administrators, and principals. That has only diminished slightly, and the SOY processes for 2014 have led to a new raft of problems for many schools.

The latest is the form to sign-off on errors and leave balances, and this is proving to be another huge impost on time and energy. There are plenty of stories reaching us about stress levels and we are using these in Wellington to lobby for an ongoing adjustment to operational funding to reflect the new reality.

Novopay has no Plan B, and we continue to ask that the Ministry starts to plan its replacement.

Teachers Council Review

The Bill is now before the House and we are preparing a submission to the Education and Science Select Committee in which we will raise the following concerns:

PACT Tool

The NZPF boycott has not been lifted, and we thank and acknowledge those schools that have supported the position we took last year. The Ministry has hunkered down and is promoting the software quietly and without fanfare, obviously hoping that it will be seen by schools as so useful and fit to purpose that schools can't resist taking it up. There are offers of professional learning around the software being made, and presumably accessed, although we have little way of gauging that.

Special Education

Special Education was a major issue raised at last year's Moot. Our survey of principals indicated plenty of frustration with the current landscape with many asking that greater resource was offered to schools.

The Principals' Federation responded by suggesting that a national Hui was needed to uncover the issues that were limiting schools' ability to successfully include students, and at the same time to build a better connection with the Disability Sector and allow an informed dialogue to occur. It is also important that the Disability Sector is fully aware and informed of the in-school realities for teachers and schools around resourcing issues and inclusive practice within a class of thirty learners.

Initially this was agreed with the Minister, but then her support was withdrawn. NZPF is now partnering with other sector groups and the Disability Sector to arrange our own Hui, and this is already in its early planning stages.

We will keep the sector informed as its shape is determined.

Charter Schools

This strange addition to the landscape following an infamous “cup of tea” is now part of NZ’s Education landscape. Charter Schools are totally opposed by NZPF, and we have had a number of media releases and interviews which have explored the reasons for this opposition:

- They are funded inequitably
- Charter schools allow untrained teachers to practice
- Their accountability to scrutiny is significantly different to state schools
- They can manipulate their school population
- They undermine the nature and equity implicit in public education
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Notwithstanding this opposition we have five Charter Schools and there are more planned. This determined and politically motivated strategy further erodes our confidence in the broader Government agenda and some lends weight to dark theories of privatisation and reducing the State’s involvement in education provision for all.

PLD Provision

In conjunction with concerns raised by other groups, including NZEI and PPTA, we finally achieved agreement on a review of the delivery of PLD across the country. A review group has been formed, and meets every three weeks or so. The working party has an emerging theme, and once again we have been at pains to point out the need to keep the sector informed of its direction and intent.

Helen Timperley is a member of the group, and helps us ensure that we continue to plan our thinking around a strong evidence base.

The concerns identified by a range of different surveys of teachers and principals, including the one completed for NZPF, have all been considered and are informing direction. These concerns include (along with others) the narrowing of curriculum development to literacy and numeracy, challenges in accessing appropriate PD, and the life cycle and timing of PD initiatives.

A time frame of twelve months has been established for this work, and we hope that a communication which details philosophy, and direction will be more widely shared soon.

Statutory Interventions

2013 saw a number of principals lose their jobs following a statutory intervention. We took a series of concerns based on actual cases to the Ministry of Education, and immediately received strong support for our concerns.

The very same day that we met, the Minister moved to announce a formal review, and has convened a working group to consider the issue and make recommendations for action.

This has been strengthened by a range of different channels seeking feedback from the sector, including an NZPF survey.

The IES Working Group has also urged that the notion and detail of Change Principals positions should be informed by the Statutory Intervention Review Process, and not stand in splendid isolation, or even contradict the objectives of the Review.

We are hopeful of better outcomes for schools facing trouble through a more inclusive and supportive approach that recognises the complexity of each landscape, and no longer seeks to quickly solve a school's problems by getting rid of its principal.

Property Issues

Many principals raised a range of different property issues which the Federation raised with Property Policy people here in Wellington. These responses were shared in Flyers last year, and we also resolved to be more proactive in promoting the communications from the various property forums which are offered each term across the country.

It was acknowledged that these Forums were very useful, but their information does not always reach every school board and principal, who are left wading through the interface with School Property People.

Relationships with the Ministry

It is clear that real damage has been done to the relationship between schools and Ministry staff, in the period which has seen National Standards and other unwelcome policy driven into a largely unwilling sector.

Those concerns were frankly and bluntly shared with Peter Hughes early last year.

The appointment of Peter Hughes as Secretary for Education has been largely well-received in most quarters and it is clear that he has had significant impact within the Ministry of Education, although there are still signs of the old domineering culture to be observed.

He has however, been adroit at turning the tables on the sector by engaging them in solution finding, and then visibly changing decisions and making calls that reflect the sector's impact.

This of course is something of a two-edged sword, as he clearly is there to support the introduction of Government policy, and these concessions simply wrap the tentacles of that agenda ever more tightly around us.

Schools will ultimately be the judge of whether a culture change has occurred, and whether or not they are satisfied with the way the Ministry of Education "backs them to win." There are nearly 3000 people working in the Ministry, so he certainly has his work cut out. It must be said that Peter Hughes has cut to the heart of many of the issues that have plagued individual principals, and taken a personal interest in resolving problems.