



# PRINCIPAL MATTERS

NGĀ TUMUAKI O AOTEAROA

THE MOST RESPECTED AND INFLUENTIAL ADVOCATE FOR NEW ZEALAND'S PRINCIPALS

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### President's Message



Kia ora e te whānau

This week, after writing to the [Secretary for Education](#), I spoke publicly expressing concern about falling rates of achievement particularly in mathematics and science.

Declining rates of achievement, as reported in the league tables of international assessments, prompt no discernible response from me, but the pattern of our own performance over time on those international assessments is troubling. Even more concerning is the poor performance of our Year 8 students in our own trusted National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA). Now that definitely has my attention.

In 2018, in NMSSA Mathematics, 81% of Year 4 pupils achieved 'at' or 'above' curriculum expectations while 45% of Year 8 pupils achieved 'at' or 'above'.

In 2018, in NMSSA Science, 94% of Year 4 pupils achieved 'at' or 'above' curriculum expectations while 20% of Year 8 pupils achieved 'at' or 'above'.

This data is concerning and we must raise a flag on the potential causes and likely responses.

I, like many principals, was pleased to see the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) of 2007 replace the former curriculum which was crowded with objectives and did not support the relevance

and engagement that has flourished under the revised curriculum of 2007.

Some 13 years on it is time to set aside our wholesale love of the NZC and the local freedom it has given us, to ask some searching questions.

What has the intent of the NZC enabled and what, if anything, has that intent disabled?

The generic nature of the NZC was not a mistake or simple happenstance. The curriculum was purposely designed with a clear front end that spelt out the *Principles, Values and Key Competencies* and a back end that had generic *Learning Areas* with associated *Essence Statements* and generalised high level *Achievement Objectives*.

The purpose of such a design was to enable each school to establish the detail of 'what is taught' in partnership with their community and 'construct' curriculum with the students so that it reflected contexts that are meaningful to them.

Brave stuff!

However, any curriculum that is purposely designed to be generic to allow for localisation has the potential to struggle as a nationally coherent entity.

The NZC is brilliantly conceived but the detail and resources to help inform the *Learning Areas* is absent and the implementation of the curriculum was crowded out by the diametrically opposed ideology of National Standards- a hugely damaging policy launched quickly on the heels of the NZC and which undermined the successful implementation of the NZC.

Too greater emphasis on localisation and decentralisation without clear information about what learning cannot be left to chance risked the curriculum becoming devoid of the important ideas and approaches that bring coherence to any national system of education.

Better describing the NZC is not a cry for a demanding, tight, regimented, outcome-based approach but for greater specificity that empowers teachers to design powerful student-centred teaching, knowing what it is that informs their teaching. Too many teachers are uncertain about what the

curriculum requires of them. Holding clarity about teaching goals is key to being an effective teacher.

Ironically, the better we tool up teachers to clearly understand what the curriculum requires, the better they can design learning that reflects the nexus between intentional teaching goals and meaningful personalised student learning.

We must call out the flawed thinking that labels strong teacher intention and clear knowledge goals as somehow damaging of student agency. That is nonsense!

The risk of such a conversation is that it invites a binary response-some will interpret questions about a lack of specificity in the NZC, as a call for a detailed centralised curriculum. To do so would be a mistake.

There is a sweet spot, and it is our responsibility as practice-based leaders to find it.

To this end I have met with the Ministry of Education this past week. I emphasised the appropriateness of principals providing strong advice on how the NZC can be successful and on changes necessary to achieve this.

We want to bring a strong professional voice to this conversation so that we can guide the Ministry of Education as they respond to our call for improved curriculum leadership.

The Ministry of Education has accepted our invitation to work with NZPF to gather this important information from principals to help them see what changes are necessary and in what areas of the curriculum.

There are also important discussions to be had about the effectiveness of our market driven PLD model and the value of a powerful sector enabled curriculum advisory service.

I will meet again with the Ministry of Education next week and inform you of our plan for progress. We need to move at pace to work up our advice.

In the meantime, there are some very interesting discussions in the media about future directions so do follow these on the NZPF facebook page. I for one am heartened that these conversations are taking place. They are well overdue.

Ngā manaakitanga

Perry Rush

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## NZPF Notices



### NZPF Moot

The NZPF Moot will be held on Friday 26 March at the James Cook Hotel Grand Chancellor, Wellington. Invitations will be sent out to all regional and large cluster presidents. This is a one day event which provides an opportunity to give feedback from regional membership.

What we look forward to is a robust debate on prominent issues that you raise.



### NZ Principal Magazine also Online

You and/or your team members can easily access the NZ Principal Magazines online, as an e-magazine or as a PDF. Additionally you can search for a previous issue, an article by title or by the author of the article. All magazines back to Term 1 2012 are available in this format. To view or search click [here](#).

## Useful Information



### Leaders Connect Zoom Hui with Perry Rush - Thursday 18 February 4-5pm

*Rethinking Curriculum: Problems, Dilemmas, Possibilities, and the Way Forward*

Curriculum leadership is our bread n butter! Work now taking place in the Ministry of Education seeks to provide greater support for curriculum. What change should we now insist on to better enable the curriculum and student achievement?

In the spirit of Leaders' Connect, as well as a Q&A time with Perry, there will be time for engaging in small group discussions for support and idea sharing.

Do come and join Perry and other principal participants for this hui.

Register at <https://leadershiplab.co.nz/events/curriculum-leadership/>



### Getting Started - support for new school library staff

Beginning in Term 1 the National Library's Services to Schools are offering a free programme of support for staff new to working in the school library.

The programme includes opportunities to learn online, access to resources for professional learning, and expert advice and support from our team of staff around NZ. To find out more, and get your new library staff off to a great start, [visit our Professional Learning and Support website now](#).



### Attention All Principals of Year 11-13 Students

The *Blake Inspire* programme, fully sponsored by the Ministry for the Environment, is now inviting applications from students to participate in its 2021 programme. There will be two options, one in the Waikato and one in the Auckland region.

Participating students will work with leaders, scientists and environmental experts to develop leadership skills and knowledge about environmental issues and learn how they can take action. Spaces are limited to 70 students. [Click here](#) for more information.

## Business Partners

NZPF assures its business partners that, as members, you will contact them to have a conversation if you are purchasing products, services or solutions for your schools that a business partner supplies. Please support our partners as their assistance to NZPF means better membership services to you.

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