



PRINCIPAL MATTERS

NGĀ TUMUAKI O AOTEAROA

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

Level 8 The Bayleys Building,
36 Brandon Street
Wellington NZ 6011

PO Box 25380
Wellington 6140
nina.netherclift@nzpf.ac.nz



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President's Message



Kia ora e te whānau

This past week I have been contacted by a considerable number of principals concerned about the recent changes to the TAPEC Operational Guide for Schools.

The addition to the guidelines pertaining to the regrading process has come after the horse has bolted.

Principals were encouraged, in NZEI training, to review job descriptions, discuss, and agree with Teacher Aides (TAs) their placement within the range of grades with respect to an emphasis on 'pulling' TAs up the scale through NZEI's 'pull up' placement expectations.

Principals engaged in this process in good faith - to support TAs regrading requests - and deliver to the spirit of TAPEC.

Regrading was agreed, based on the information provided to principals in principal - focused training sessions. That information reassured principals that in a situation of a regrade, the Ministry would cover the cost of the pay increase.

However, the guidelines that informed such a process, were not established at the time that many principals and TAs met to review jobs descriptions and agreed on employment expectations.

The recently published Ministry of Education guidelines have had the effect of changing the rules after the fact.

We now learn that a regrade is deemed to be 'exceptional' implying that only in rare instances would a regrade be appropriate. This is not the message received by principals during NZEI training modules about the need to freely regrade for TAs highest regular duty and that the cost of this would be fully recovered.

Then we learn that there is an approval process that provides no guarantee that the decisions made with your TA, in good faith, will be supported and therefore funded. This could mean that your regrading agreement with your TAs is rejected, leaving Boards of Trustees to pick up the tab for many thousands of dollars to support an agreed regrade. In some schools this could be tens of thousands of dollars.

Let's be clear. Such a situation will reduce service for young people, as principals will need to manage back their TA workforce to cope with greater individual TA expenditure.

What an appalling possibility!

I would have no truck with an approvals process clearly established before principals started negotiating with TAs, but it is certainly not fair to introduce such a process 'after' principals have formed employment expectations.

I also want to express my concern at the unfortunate statement on the application form that warns principals against making 'false statements'. This is not a 'high trust' or affirming view of the integrity of principals and I would ask the Ministry to remove it.

The spirit of TAPEC is to do better for a workforce historically under-valued and under paid. Principals have always grappled with how to deploy their TA workforce to support an impossible range of learning and behaviour needs. The TA resource is insufficient in every school. It is the scarcity of the resource in the face of huge demands for learning and behaviour support that has contributed to some TAs historical grading placements. Principals must judge how to make a meagre TA resource spread across a bottomless well of need. Such pressures have the effect of depressing rates of pay. This is

the environment within which principals must work. That does not excuse low rates of pay, but it does provide context that should support a more generous implementation of a regrading process than the one currently supported.

In our recent NZPF post road trip survey, 89% of principals disagreed that there were sufficient funds to cover the learning support needs of young people. The pressure to deploy a scarce TA resource to need is immense and I am proud of the work of principals who try to make this impossible equation work.

To make the approval process for a regrade request a desktop exercise, based on analysis of job descriptions, completely misses understanding the levers that pull on a principal's decision making and the environment within which principals work.

I call on the NZEI and the Ministry to guarantee that **no young person will be damaged** by the impact of their communication breakdown that inevitably will lead to schools being forced to downsize their TA workforce or reduce TA hours. As the situation stands, this will be a necessary consequence of having a regrade application rejected.

I suggest that the same spirit of support, aspiration and generosity reflected in TAPAC for TAs should also apply to principals.

Principals have been placed in an invidious position by a process that has failed to be transparent or safe. Currently neither the Ministry, nor NZEI or NZSTA are giving advice that is consistent and helpful in resolving a way forward.

This is inappropriate and I call on the Ministry, NZEI and NZSTA to join me to discuss how this situation can be resolved.

School Property Issues

Every so often I come across examples of outstanding service in our Ministry of Education. We are certainly quick to express our frustration with the Ministry so we should be equally committed to calling out excellent performance.

In the wake of the Green School debacle I wrote to Minister Hipkins setting out the challenges we as principals are experiencing in the provision for school property. The letter can be found [here](#). The Secretary for Education directed Kim Shannon (Deputy Secretary Infrastructure), Scott Evans (Deputy Head Infrastructure Delivery), and Sam Fowler (Deputy Head Capital Works) to meet with me to discuss the issues.

All three showed commitment to understanding the issues and seeking potential solutions. It is rare that one comes away from such meetings feeling there is a genuine commitment to improve services and follow through with action.

I will meet with them again over the next few weeks and, on your behalf, drive for solutions. I will report to you on how we are addressing the problems you are experiencing with property.

The Accord

I hold grave fears for the *Accord* Process. I have written to NZEI, PPTA and the Ministry again, seeking a response to the 10 *Accord* priorities generated by principals on the recent NZPF road trip. The *Accord* was agreed as part of our Collective Agreement settlement last year. This was a settlement that

left many principals dissatisfied that core issues had not been addressed. It is untenable to consider that the *Accord* process might result in little effective action on principal workload and wellbeing.

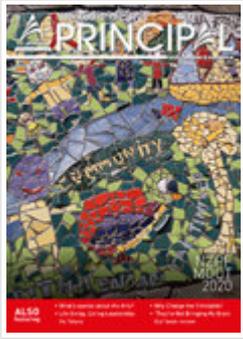
We await news.

Ngā manaakitanga

Perry Rush

perry@nzpf.ac.nz

NZPF Notices



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