

PRINCIPAL'S DESK [27/10/2009]

More on the new 'National Standards'

The impact of National Standards in literacy and numeracy on primary and intermediate schools across New Zealand must not be underestimated, and the approach taken to incorporate these into the successful programmes that schools are already running requires careful consideration.

- *The standards describe the benchmarks all children need to meet to keep up with the curriculum at primary and intermediate schools.*
- *Teachers will decide whether a pupil is at, above, below or well below standards of literacy and numeracy.*
- *The standards will require teachers to reach a view on a child's progress growth based on comprehensive evidence including tests and observations.*
- *The Education Review Office will check schools to ensure they are using the standards properly.*
- *The board of trustees will have to report to the Ministry of Education by May 2012 on the numbers and proportions of pupils at, above, below or well below the standards.*

At Elmwood Normal School our priority is to balance the importance of being able to report on our children's levels of attainment in a set of nationally accepted benchmarks with our current direction and focus in developing thought processes, key competencies and values, and extending learning abilities thorough the creative and innovative teaching styles our teachers are encouraged to employ.

Fortunately at Elmwood we have been using a comprehensive range of assessment and reporting procedures that already provides quality information on achievement growth, trends and comparisons within individual and age group expectations. Our current procedures are well placed to incorporate the National Standards, and I therefore expect the refinement needed to incorporate any national testing tools that are yet to be developed will simply be an addition to what we already do.

Our challenge will be to ensure that we do not lose sight of the vision that we have for the 'Elmwood Learner' and the exciting work we are currently developing through children's voice, learning conversations, key competencies and values education. While reading, writing and arithmetic have been given high priority by the current government, parents can be assured that we most certainly will not be undervaluing or sacrificing our vision or the importance of social sciences, technologies, the arts and sports as we believe these have a significant positive impact on the development of our children.

There is much controversy and concern around the possible introduction of school league tables. We are also disquietened, but not because we have any concern about

where this school might be placed. Rather our concerns relate not only to the additional focus on 'minimum benchmarks' and the mediocrity that this can drive, but also to the unfairness this creates between decile locations.

Of course there will be teething problems with the new standards and it will be incumbent upon educators to work with the Ministry of Education to find solutions. Indeed this may take several years before all are satisfied. Undoubtedly however, the successful implementation of the new standards will rely greatly on educators themselves, how they approach and embrace these and how they successfully incorporate them into their current programmes without undermining what they are currently delivering well and striving for.

We encourage feedback on our reporting processes. Please feel free to discuss how this is working for you and your child with the classroom teacher. It is important to us that you are receiving quality feedback on a regular basis that informs you in simple and honest terms "where your child is at".

Kevin Gooch
Principal