

**MARIST CATHOLIC SCHOOL
HERNE BAY
(Marist)**

Reporting Against National Standards

*To gain further knowledge in relation to
effective approaches for reporting against
National Standards to strengthen our
Marist reporting practices and enhance
our learning community*

**Term 2
2011**

**Robyn Pivac
Principal**

In 2010 schools were mandated to make changes to written reporting practice incorporating new legislation (Nag 2A), that required schools to evaluate and reflect on current practice. One of the changes was the requirement of schools to report to students and their parents on the student's progress and achievement in relation to National Standards - and reporting to parents in plain language in writing must be at least twice a year.

An article in the New Zealand Herald on 23 August 2011 reported that a new Ministry of Education report found that only a third of the reports sent home at the end of last year contained the required National Standards information and were easy enough to understand!

Although the response from schools throughout New Zealand to the mandated requirements has been variable, all twelve of the Auckland schools I surveyed have made changes to their written reporting practice. These schools have spent considerable time and effort reviewing assessment and reporting practices and aligning these with National Standards. While the range of reporting methods used in these schools included student led conferences, portfolios, progress books, learning journals and informal communication, all had written reports.

In parent surveys on reporting, conducted over the years at Marist, written reports are consistently rated highly and parents value the information in these. Therefore it is imperative that written reports are easy for parents to understand.

All twelve schools produced written reports to further develop an effective learning partnership. All principals contacted emphasised the importance of written reports in supporting student learning. Most reports had a space for a principal's comment. All reports included next steps or how parents/whanau could help at home to further support students' progress. These next steps were in plain language, easy to follow and would be easily understood by parents.

Most information in the reports was common to all the schools. Schools used the *above*, *at*, *below* terminology and all but two schools avoided using '*well below*'. At the half year two schools used 'moving towards the standard' and one 'causing concern' and another 'needs work' rather than 'below'. One school used 'National Year Group Expected Stage' instead of National Standard. Four schools included an overview for Years 1 – 6 to explain National Standards to parents and four included what the Standard is for a particular year group.

Written Report Analysis

	Yes	No
Purpose Statement	9	3
Assessment Evidence	12	0
Information on National Standards – commentary or table	8	4
Assessment against National Standards	12	0
Key Competencies	11	1 National Standards checkpoint only
Next Steps / Goal Setting	12	0
Student Voice / Self Assessment	1	11
Report Easy to Understand	9	3

The Senior Leadership team at Marist agreed that 9 out of 12 of the reports analysed were easy to read, however the best judge of this would be parents. Each school would be providing ongoing information to their community in writing such as Newsletters and having informal discussions that would make information in their report form meaningful to their parents.

The 23 August 2011 New Zealand Herald article also stated that “Although 48% of the schools sampled sent home reports adequately describing achievement, nearly a third failed to sufficiently say how they were doing in relation to National Standards. A further 21% did not even mention the Standards.” All but one of the report forms surveyed clearly showed parents where their children were in relation to National Standards. This school put in achievement levels and left it up to parents to make the judgement as to where the child was in relation to National Standards.

The major difficulty expressed by principals was the requirement to report on students from Years 1 – 3 after six months at school and after one year at school. One school tried reporting on the Year 1 – 3 students’ birthdays but found it too difficult. Two schools overcame this problem by reporting at the end of each term to meet this requirement. Others include the information at the half year and end of year reports. This means some students receive an end of year achievement report at the half year and a half year progress report at the end of the year until they are in Year 4. Most schools have designed different reports for the half year and end of year and some of the schools have different reports for Years 1 – 3 and Years 4 – 6. It would be more practical for schools to report to parents on their children’s achievements at the end of the year for Years 1 – 3, just as it is for Years 4 - 6. Most schools already report to parents after six weeks at school, on School Entry Assessments results and after one year at school on Diagnostic Survey results.

The general feeling was that the implementation could have been better managed. More discussions with principals and teachers should have taken place and a trial set up. Designing without input from the profession was not helpful. Teachers were confident in the accuracy of the overall teacher judgements they made. Moderating work empowers teachers and leads to providing more diagnostic feedback to students. The teacher and the student are at the heart of overall teacher judgements.

Designing new reports that showed student progress against National Standards cost schools not only money but also time. Teachers from some schools stated that their new reports took longer to write. Time spent by teachers working on these new reports will probably be reduced as teachers become more familiar with the new systems and formats.

National Standards was introduced to decrease the percentage of underachieving students in New Zealand. Most western developed countries have one in five students underachieving – in New Zealand tails of underachievement are found in the seriously disadvantaged communities with poverty and health issues. Unfortunately the number of families on the poverty line in New Zealand has increased and the gap between wealthy and poor has widened as in other western developed countries. Ivan Snook, Emeritus Professor of Education at Massey University, has stated that the largest source of variation in student learning is attributable to differences in what students bring to school. There are obviously underlying inequalities.

Having high expectations for teaching and learning is desirable as expectations are powerful determinants of achievement. Research also shows that there is a strong link between quality teacher training, quality teachers and quality learning and achievement. National Standards alone are not enough to reduce underachievement in New Zealand.

The New Zealand system of National Standards with its reinforcement of teacher professionalism is arguably superior to overseas models of national testing even though it is harder to implement. Our curriculum is not prescribed as in England. We have flexibility in the teaching of literacy and mathematics and there is scope to deliver the curriculum in ways that suit our schools. Being able to set our own targets actually sets schools in the middle of National Standards.

As a final thought, I liked the inclusion of this prayer at the end of one school's report. It certainly puts things in perspective:

The vision will be achieved in its own time. If it seems slow in coming..... wait for it – for it will surely come. And meanwhile, may we work together with wisdom and determination and patience and discernment. Amen.

Robyn Pivac
Principal
Marist Catholic School
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