

BACK TO THE FUTURE? COMPULSORY NATIONAL TESTING AND THE GREEN PAPER, ASSESSMENT FOR SUCCESS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS (1998)

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ABSTRACT *This paper provides a critical commentary on the Green Paper, Assessment for Success in Primary Schools, released on 7 May 1998. It reveals that the arguments advanced in support of compulsory national testing were neither new nor innovative. In fact, New Zealand had experimented with national primary school tests from 1878 to 1937 and had finally abandoned them because there was absolutely no evidence that they had improved the quality of teaching and learning in the nation's classrooms. We conclude that the Green Paper and the subsequent Information for Better Learning policy statement highlighted the then National government's neo-liberal obsession with using national tests not only to measure school 'outputs' and teacher 'effectiveness' but also to exercise greater political surveillance and control over teachers' work in the nation's primary schools. The Labour government's recently announced voluntary primary school literacy and numeracy assessment initiative avoids the pitfalls associated with compulsory national testing.*

SOME LESSONS FROM OUR EDUCATIONAL PAST: REVISITING THE 'STANDARDS' EXAMINATIONS

While it is a matter of historical record that the 1877 Education Act launched a national system of 'standards' throughout all New Zealand public primary schools, the call for a system of standards had in fact arisen earlier than 1877. The Canterbury Inspectors, in their 1876 Report, wrote that they looked forward to a time when the primary school system would give teachers 'definite approved work to do, and which tested the results of their labours by a universal standard'.¹ Clearly, in seeking to make primary education 'free, compulsory and secular' in the 1877 Act, the legislators of the day were confronted with the reality that, in order to ensure that the education system was truly universal, a common accountable prescription of work would need to be specified for all school age clientele. To this end, an elaborate scheme of 'standards' was formulated early in 1878 and gazetted in September of that year.²

The standards regulations, as they came to be called, were designed primarily to *classify* Standard 1 to 6 pupils according to their attainments on measured scholastic tasks. From this point on, the Department of Education confidently claimed that 'in every part of the colony the same standard of education was maintained' because all primary school children were taught the *same* subjects and were evaluated on a *uniform* basis.³ Furthermore, the fact that the child from a city school would receive the 'same' education as the child from a small, often remote, one-teacher country school appealed to the colonial, egalitarian ethos.

In introducing the Education Bill into the New Zealand House of Representatives on 24 July 1877,⁴ Charles C. Bowen could not possibly have

foreseen how the schools, teachers, parents, pupils, school inspectors and even the Department of Education would later react to his scheme of standards examinations. Initially, these examinations were intended solely as a 'check' upon the accuracy of teachers' estimates of their pupils' abilities. In line with the regulations, the inspectors made twice-yearly visits to each school: a 'surprise' inspection visit, and an annual examination visit wherein all pupil promotions were decided for the following twelve months. Pupils under the age of exemption (13 years) who failed the inspector's examination were obliged to remain in that standard for a further year, at the end of which they would again sit the examination and, if successful, be promoted to the next standard.⁵

THE STANDARDS REGULATIONS, 1878

Concerned to 'maintain standards', the Department of Education outlined in minute detail the subject requirements for each of the six standards in the 1878 regulations. The prescription for Standard 4 Geography, for example, was both precise and comprehensive: it specified knowledge of the countries of the world, their capitals and chief natural features. Thus for European geography, 20 capes; 12 straits; 20 gulfs, bays and inland seas; 30 islands; 40 rivers; 20 mountain ranges; 6 peninsulas and 2 isthmuses had to be memorised thoroughly with scholars 'expected to know the situation of places mentioned on the map'.⁶ Not surprisingly the practice of rote learning ('cramming') masses of facts, even if imperfectly understood, to be reproduced on examination day soon became the common characteristic of primary schooling. The prize was a pass in whatever standard class the child was in. The punishment was failure and repetition of the work in the following year.

Having laid down specific curricular objectives to which all teachers would have to conform, and by which the worth of their pupils' attainments would soon come to be judged by the inspectors and public alike, William Habens, the Inspector-General of Schools (1878-1899) issued a pamphlet entitled *The Standards* (1881) that contained detailed notes on the 1878 standards requirements and warned teachers against 'cramming' and 'rote learning' in preparation for the inspector's examinations. It began:

Teachers should always remember that the standards represent "the *minimum* of attainments of which the Inspector will require evidence at each stage". . . . The process known as "cram" applied to one standard will render further "cram" necessary for the next and the next. . . . [T]he standards are not meant to be used as a rack, to extort from children a broken utterance of the last facts and ideas that have begun to take hold of their memory and intelligence. They are not sent to school to pass in the standards, but to be educated. If they are being educated, a certain portion of their knowledge at each stage of their progress will settle down and become definite and solid – just as their bones harden – and the standard examinations are designed to ascertain the degree in which this process is taking place.⁷

Habens concluded with the telling observation, albeit forgotten in the 'drive for results', that

Any interpretation of these regulations is altogether mistaken which does not recognise that they are designed to discourage the mere learning of lessons, particularly of lessons that are not understood; [and] to promote a kind of instruction calculated to cultivate the intelligence of children, so that they shall not be set to do work that has no meaning for them.⁸

Despite Habens' protestations, the Department of Education was powerless to prevent the situation wherein only that which was examinable was taught. The race for 'percentage passes' had now begun.

SCHOOL 'EFFICIENCY'

While primary school teachers and the Department were adjusting to the reality of rapidly increasing school enrolments from 1878⁹, the changing perception of the purpose of the standards examinations began to assume a new importance. As early as 1879, the public were officially informed of the weight to be placed on the results of the annual standards examinations in assessing the *efficiency* of individual schools. In that year the Minister of Education, William Rolleston, confidently asserted that,

Other things being equal, *the best school in a district was the school which passed a larger proportion of children than any other in the district; and at a lower age; and a district was making progress if year by year the proportion of passes increased and the average age of passing became lower.*¹⁰

Given that the reputations of schools stood or fell on the results of the inspectors' annual examinations, fierce rivalry existed among schools to produce the highest percentage of passes.¹¹ Indeed, such competition was openly and actively encouraged by some education boards. In 1882, for example, one school in Napier advertised for a teacher in the *New Zealand Schoolmaster* and stated that the board would pay a bonus to the teacher 'on the results of the Annual Standards Examination of the school'.¹² In their applications for positions, teachers often quoted favourable examination statistics, secure in the knowledge that this would impress appointment committees.¹³

Ironically, it was the inspectors who were the harshest critics of the standards examinations. Arguing in his report for 1881 that the standards examinations encouraged curricular rigidity, uniformity and rote learning, William Hodgson, the Inspector for the Nelson Education Board, also wrote deploring the 'sweet simplicity of a list of passes and failures' and the

growing tendency, not only on the part of the general public, but on the part of many teachers who ought to know better, to gauge the success or failure of a school exclusively by the tables of results.¹⁴

So intense was the demand for examination passes that the few teachers who had departed from the prescribed standards syllabus, Hodgson observed, were 'not likely to repeat such an irregularity'.¹⁵ Despite his protestations, Hodgson knew that the public would continue to judge the primary schools by their relative

success on examination day.¹⁶ Rolleston's earlier vision of the school with the highest number of passes in the annual standards examinations being looked upon as the 'best' school in the district had now become reality.¹⁷

There seems little doubt that the intense public preoccupation with examination passes assisted in giving the standards examinations an exaggerated importance in the minds of many pupils, parents, teachers, education boards and inspectors. Many of the nation's newspapers were quick to respond to this 'examination fever' and helped to popularise the results of the annual standards examinations even more than did the voluminous official reports of the education boards, inspectors and the ministers of education.¹⁸ In the end, the inspectors' criticisms were short-lived: education officials continued to place much weight on examination statistics for reasons of *accountability*.¹⁹

Barely ten years after the standards regulations had been promulgated, high examination pass rates had become the sole arbiter of school 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness' - all of the nation's education boards now calculated and reported their standards pass rates annually in terms of a pass percentage, calculated on the basis of the number of pupils who passed a given standard, divided by the number who actually sat the examination. Thus, teachers and headmasters were appraised by the simple expedient of a pupil performance rating profile wherein the 'best' teachers (and schools) got most, if not all, of their pupils through the standards examinations. This 'ready reckoner' of teacher competence was one that could not easily be ignored.

Although the New Zealand Education Institute (NZEI) and numerous committees on primary education matters argued that the publication of percentage passes should immediately be abandoned, all twelve education boards continued to tabulate the pass rates of individual schools in their annual reports. Adamant that examination results indicated the relative 'efficiency' of its schools, the Otago Education Board in 1890 adopted the policy that 'in schools with a staff of three or more teachers, a percentage of failures exceeding 20 is considered evidence of inefficient teaching. In schools with a smaller staff, a failure of 25 is similarly judged'.²⁰ Although the Board abandoned the publication of pass rates in its annual reports three years later²¹ - local newspapers, however, did not - the Otago inspectors still maintained that such publication provided the 'chief lever of improvement in the schools'.²²

At the political level the Minister of Education, William Pember Reeves, echoed the sentiments of his predecessor eleven years earlier when he announced in his annual report for 1890 that,

the number of passes and failures . . . afford evidence of decided progress. . . . Of the pupils on the roll, 49.21 [per cent] passed one standard each in 1890; in 1889 the percentage was 48.45 and in 1888 it was 47.15.²³

Clearly Reeves still equated educational progress and efficiency with a high pass rate in the annual standards examinations. What he apparently ignored, however, was that the rise in the percentage pass rate might well be explained by less scrupulous teachers and pupils becoming more skilled in the use of a variety of examiner-beating tactics in order to outwit the inspector. Children's artwork was sometimes 'touched up' by their teachers, and special attention was paid to rote-learning paragraphs in the prescribed texts so that they could be regurgitated on demand.²⁴

The earliest official acknowledgement of 'examination beating' strategies came in 1882 when the North Canterbury Inspectors noted,

We have taken the trouble to find out the cause of so many children being absent on the examination day, and fear that it is attributable to the fact that in these schools the backward children are not only encouraged, but, in some cases, actually forbidden to be present.²⁵

Recognising the importance attached to examination results by the education bureaucracy, teachers often were tempted to use the system to their own advantage by ensuring that only those pupils most likely to succeed on examination day would be allowed to be present. Although this practice was obviously an unforeseen consequence of the standards examinations scheme, it nonetheless continued to plague the educational world for decades to come.²⁶

Notwithstanding all of these criticisms the 1894 Conference of Inspectors, while conceding that 'grave disadvantages attend the existing system of testing the work of our schools mainly by means of standard passes',²⁷ nevertheless opposed the abolition of the system of standards examinations.²⁸ However, one important concession was agreed to by the Inspector-General. Prior to 1894 only the inspectors could examine and promote pupils in the standards, but in June 1894 regulations were gazetted allowing head teachers to determine passes for Standards 1 and 2.²⁹ Five years later the concession was extended to Standard 5, now the legal standard for exemption,³⁰ so that by 1900 the only examinations required to be conducted by the Inspectors were those pertaining to exemption certificates in Standard 5 and 'Certificates of Proficiency' in Standard 6.³¹

The removal of the requirement for the inspectors to examine pupils annually in Standards 1 to 5 was a direct response to the increasing professionalism of the nation's primary teachers in matters educational. From 1900, those who knew the children best and who had been responsible for their academic progress were now to be entrusted with the power to classify them instead of having to accept unquestioningly an outsider's decision. Despite this important concession, the most important school examinations still remained under the direct control of the inspectorate. What is also clear is that the standards examination system had underpinned the expansion and development of the nation's primary schools to such an extent that it proved remarkably resilient to repeated assaults by educational reformers who sought its immediate abolition. Nevertheless, criticism of both the rigid syllabus of instruction and the standards examination system itself persisted with the public obsession over examination passes frequently leading to allegations of 'examination driving', 'cramming' and 'drilling'.

HOMEWORK

Another by-product of the 1878 standards was the practice of 'keeping in' children after school hours in the weeks leading up to the inspector's annual examination.³² Furthermore, complaints regarding 'slavery' to unreasonable amounts of homework that increased markedly as children progressed through the standards were frequently voiced.³³ Although these consequences had not been anticipated when the standards requirements were first promulgated, the reality was that teachers who were mindful of their future career prospects would not have dared risk departure from the examination syllabus and in fact did everything they

could to boost their pupils' chances of success in the examinations. Thus, only those pupils who were judged capable of passing were permitted to enter for the examination.

While it was undoubtedly true that inspectors continued to measure the efficiency of a school by its 'finished product',³⁴ the validity of this judgment was now being challenged. At the 1901 Conference of Inspectors, the newly appointed Inspector-General of Schools, George Hogben, announced that he personally supported the NZEI's recommendations that the individual standard pass be abolished, because it unduly fettered instruction, and that the whole syllabus be revised.³⁵ Put to the vote, the NZEI's proposals were agreed to by 21 votes to 7.³⁶ Although it appears certain that the general mood of the Conference was one of reform, delegates steadfastly refused to support the motion that 'the qualification for Standard VI [Proficiency] certificates . . . be defined with greater precision for the teacher's and the Inspector's guidance'.³⁷ Hogben, it seems, had failed to convince the inspectors of the need for greater uniformity of assessment on the grounds of fairness at the Standard 6 level.

PUPIL 'RETARDATION'

One method commonly employed to boost examination pass rates was that of 'retardation', a practice identified by the North Canterbury Inspectors as early as 1882. Twenty-seven years later the retardation of academically 'slow' or 'difficult' children in the lower standards until such time as they reached the age of exemption (14 years) was widespread: the Department of Education's annual report for 1909 revealed that about 38 per cent of all pupils left primary school at age 14 without passing Standard 5.³⁸

This practice did not escape the notice of the Southland Inspectors whose report for 1910 drew attention to the 'greater caution on the part of teachers in sending up poorly prepared candidates'.³⁹ But retardation was not confined to Southland schools. In a letter to the Editor of the *Otago Daily Times* in 1920, one perceptive commentator drew readers' attention to the widespread retardation occurring in Otago primary schools. The letter read:

If the [pass rate] averages of 22 city and suburban schools are taken for promotion from Standard 2 to Standard 6, it will be found that three of the four schools with the lowest averages are the only ones who have obtained 100 per cent Proficiency and Competency Certificates. In other words, *the schools which have retarded their pupils through the standards get the biggest credit for Proficiency.*⁴⁰

In reply, the Otago Inspectors readily admitted that many pupils in fact were being held back in Standard 5 longer than was necessary. Moreover, they identified the 'educational leakage' that occurred between Standards 1 and 6 as being the result of 'slow promotion' wherein children remained in a particular standard longer than a year because their teachers were 'too exacting in their promotions'.⁴¹ Such a strategy, the Inspectors observed, meant that children quickly became disillusioned with school and left as soon as was legally possible.⁴²

EXAMINATION COACHING

The extent to which instruction in examination subjects overshadowed all other classroom activities was revealed at the General Education Conference convened by Hogben in February 1910. Hogben's worst fears finally were confirmed when the Headmaster of Westport District High School, J. Harkness, produced evidence indicating a marked increase in the number of teachers 'cramming' and 'driving' their Proficiency candidates through the examination syllabus out of school hours.⁴³ In reply, Hogben noted that the Department was powerless to intervene because legally it had no authority over what teachers chose to do outside school hours.

'EFFECTIVE' TEACHERS

The combined influence of the repeated revisions in the standards examinations' pass requirements since 1904, the centralisation of the inspectorate in 1915,⁴⁴ and the adoption of a standard schedule of marking from 1917, wherein all candidates for the Standard 6 Proficiency Certificate were examined by means of uniform written tests in English and arithmetic, resulted in marked improvements in the uniformity of assessment procedures.⁴⁵ Encouraged by the obvious success of these new measures the Minister of Education, Josiah Hanan, announced that taxpayers could now be assured that they were in fact getting 'value for their money'.⁴⁶

The greater precision of assessment from 1917 also served to consolidate the status of the Proficiency qualification in the minds of many pupils, parents and teachers. Thus, while the Otago Inspectors still were censuring parents for 'judging the efficiency of a school by the percentage of Proficiency passes' as late as 1918,⁴⁷ officialdom continued to regard the Proficiency Examination as an 'objective' and reliable measure of a pupil's progress, of a school's worth and the performance (or coaching ability) of its staff. Indeed, when the numerical teacher grading system was introduced in 1919, many inspectors gave considerable weight to the results teachers achieved with their Proficiency candidates when evaluating their professional competence.⁴⁸ Echoing the same sentiment, the Minister of Education, C.J. Parr, reminded the public in his annual report for 1920 that the Proficiency Examination results served to 'gauge the accuracy, thoroughness and application with which the school work had been carried out'.⁴⁹ Accordingly, school authorities, long used to the importance attached to examination result, were keenly aware of the need to ensure that their schools fared well at examination time.

THE ROAD TO REFORM

Clearly, as long as the public continued to equate high pass rates with 'good' schooling, the examination treadmill could not be eased. The only solution to removing the examination stranglehold over the whole primary school curriculum, it seemed, was to abolish the one remaining external examination – Proficiency. Such a view gathered considerable educational momentum when the Syllabus Revision (Lawson) Committee in 1928 unanimously endorsed the abolition of the Proficiency Certificate and the substitution of a primary school leaving certificate to be awarded on the accrediting principle.⁵⁰ However, no official moves in this direction were forthcoming. Instead, the Department of

Education turned its attention to reducing further the variation between markers of the Proficiency Examination by way of a standardised scale of marking. Although the Department had introduced uniform written tests for English and Arithmetic in 1917, the new system introduced in October 1926 went further by instituting 'objective tests' for these subjects.⁵¹ Teachers were informed that,

[T]he more mechanical the marking can be made, the less likely variation in the standard of appraisal will affect the results. *The new methods are intended to eliminate the personal factor, the aim being to set questions of a kind that can be marked by anyone provided with the correct answers.* The essential difference between the old and the new method is that in the case of the latter the answers are either right or wrong . . . *Under the former method the examiner had to assess the value of each answer, and this gave an opening for considerable variation in judgement.*⁵²

The new marking system quickly found favour with the inspectors who reported that the examination papers were now much easier to mark, and that there were fewer requests for reconsideration of scripts because pupils could no longer blame the difficulty or 'unevenness' of the test as they had done under the old marking system.⁵³

THE ABOLITION OF PROFICIENCY

By the early 1930s, the weight of modern educational opinion supported the abolition of all primary school examinations. With the full backing of the Labour Party the NZEI President, H.F. Penlington, wrote to the government in June 1931 outlining its case against the Proficiency Examination.

*There is still the Proficiency Examination casting its baneful shadow down on the school, and detrimentally affecting school methods and school life. So much has the examination method engrained itself into our school life, both primary and secondary, that not only do many teachers find great difficulty freeing themselves from its clutches but many parents have come to look to the annual full-dress examination as the only bona fide test and guarantee of a child's progress. The examination has to be passed, a battle has to be won. If the child is successful, his is the glory and victory; if not, defeat with consequent discredit.*⁵⁴

However, the government steadfastly refused to consider the NZEI's argument on the grounds that the merest hint of abandoning primary school examinations would not sit well with a retrenchment-minded electorate. All this was to change when the Labour Party was elected to office in December 1935 with a clear mandate for education and social reform.

The immediate difficulty that confronted the Labour government was how to reconcile the conflicting objectives of providing a more lively, examination-free education to children in an environment which for so long had expected the schools 'to fit pupils to pass examinations'.⁵⁵ But before this issue could be addressed, legislation would need to be drafted to abolish the Proficiency Examination. In introducing this legislation into the House of Representatives on 23 October 1936 the new Minister of Education, Peter Fraser, observed that

Proficiency now dominated the primary schools to such an extent that they had become

. . . mere machines for turning out Proficiency-pass pupils, and the numbers mounted and mounted . . . In many instances, the number of pupils who passed the Proficiency Examination became the criterion of success or non-success of the school . . . the real object of education [was] lost sight of in an effort to push pupils over the Proficiency Examination hurdle.⁵⁶

The Leader of the Legislative Council, Mark Fagan, also mounted a stinging critique of the Proficiency Examination.

It dominates the thoughts of parents, pupils, and teachers; it leads to coaching along narrow lines; it places undue emphasis on subjects readily assessable by written examination, and depreciates subjects of cultural value not assessable by examination. . . . It makes teachers disinclined to experiment or to broaden the curriculum.⁵⁷

However, not all politicians saw the matter in such an obvious light. The traditional rhetoric of 'academic standards' remained foremost in the minds of politicians of conservative persuasion who alleged that because the Proficiency Examination signalled the completion of the primary school course, there was a need to retain it as an arbiter of 'standards'. Colonel Hargest (Awarua) was one such person who vigorously opposed the abolition of Proficiency.

We are doing away with a standard that the children have had to attain to in the past. . . . I contend that *there should be some sort of measuring rod or examination, otherwise the children will tend to slip back . . . they should be made to attain some standard.*⁵⁸

Perhaps not surprisingly, the former Minister of Education, Robert Masters, agreed. The abolition of Proficiency, he observed, was 'a leap in the dark', for its disappearance would allow 'the standard [of education] to come down again'.⁵⁹

Like his colleagues, William McIntyre (Nelson) adopted the conservative view that the Proficiency Examination 'guaranteed' that its holder had 'achieved a certain standard of education'.⁶⁰ Arguing that it was the teaching profession (NZEI) that supported its abolition and not the public, he went on to claim that

Efficient teachers do not complain about the Proficiency Examination. They were not afraid of an assessment being made of their own work or the work of their pupils.⁶¹

The private school authorities agreed. The abolition of Proficiency meant they could no longer demonstrate their teaching efficiency, vis-à-vis high percentage pass rates, alongside the state primary schools.⁶² In short, both McIntyre and the private school governors regarded the move to terminate the Proficiency Examination as signalling the loss of the principal means by which the nation's primary school teachers could be held accountable and thereby controlled. Despite

the strength of opposition to the proposal to abolish Proficiency, its demise became a reality on 30 September 1937.⁶³

EDUCATION AFTER PROFICIENCY

The abolition of the Proficiency Examination was applauded by education boards, the inspectorate and the nation's primary school teachers. The Chairman of the Otago Education Board, James Wallace, for example, viewed the change as offering a 'unique opportunity' for teachers to experiment with broader curricular programmes.⁶⁴ Similarly, the Otago Inspectors declared unanimously that the removal of the Proficiency Examination had had an 'electrifying effect' upon New Zealand teachers because it 'removed the last barrier to the full development of the liberal cultural curriculum adaptable to the various capacities of individual pupils'.⁶⁵ As was to be expected, the NZEI concluded that 'there will be few tears shed' over the passing of the Proficiency Examination which had 'hung like a pall over the primary schools for far too long'.⁶⁶ Its removal, they confidently predicted, would give 'new vigour and life to teachers and taught'.⁶⁷

With the shadow of Proficiency now removed, the Department of Education, in line with modern thinking on curriculum development, embarked on a process of 'rolling revision' from 1943 wherein each of the primary school subjects was revised in consultation with the teachers rather than the former practice of periodically overhauling the entire primary school curriculum, as was the case in 1904, 1919 and 1929.⁶⁸

Predictably, the new emphasis on a broader, non-examination-oriented primary school curriculum in the immediate post-Proficiency years was not always welcomed by those teachers who had grown accustomed to working with the definitive 'standards' prescriptions and the constraints of internal (Standards 1 to 5) and external (Proficiency) examinations. But teachers were not the only critics. Some parents began to complain publicly about the 'low efficiency' of the primary schools, and many of the nation's newspapers were quick to publish employers' allegations of 'declining academic standards in reading, writing and arithmetic' among primary school leavers.⁶⁹

The Minister of Education, H.G.R. Mason, decided to confront these criticisms head on at a national education conference held in Christchurch in October 1944. Despite his well-argued and vigorous defence of modern education methods, his audience remained sceptical.⁷⁰ One representative of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, for example, summed up the mood of fellow critics when he claimed that 'a substantial and regrettable decline in the quality of the average school product' had occurred, due in large part to the 'increasing emphasis on a wide range of loosely-defined subjects'.⁷¹ Although the NZEI President disagreed with this assessment, the general consensus of opinion amongst conference delegates was that the Department of Education had failed to overturn the criticism that 'school standards' were dropping.⁷² The more moderate critics, however, did acknowledge that the work of the schools had undoubtedly been affected by the wartime conditions which had resulted in a higher than usual staff turnover, significant staffing shortages, and disrupted family life.⁷³

SURVEYING 'STANDARDS': THE (CURRIE) COMMISSION ON EDUCATION, 1962

After the war, the stock complaint concerning lowered standards of school achievement persisted to such an extent that it could no longer be ignored.⁷⁴ Fortunately for the Department, Fieldhouse's work in the mid 1950s, using standardised tests in reading and arithmetic prepared by the Australian Council for Educational Research, had demonstrated that New Zealand children's attainments were comparable with all the Australian states except Queensland, whose results were consistently superior.⁷⁵ Still, critics remained unconvinced by these findings and with public feeling running so high the Minister, Philip Skoglund, resigned himself to the inevitability of appointing an independent Commission on Education to 'take stock of the educational situation'.⁷⁶

Formally constituted in February 1960 the 11-person commission, chaired by Sir George Currie, was asked to survey the existing education system and to recommend guidelines for its future development.⁷⁷ In exploring the contentious issue of 'modern education methods', the Commissioners declared that there was no longer a place in New Zealand primary schools for those teachers who rejected the 'cardinal ideas of variation in ability and attainment' and who 'narrowed all achievements to success in the three Rs' by deliberately withholding children from progressing through the system 'until they had reached each year some fixed level or standard of attainment'.⁷⁸ The real cause for complaint, the Commissioners concluded, was the Department of Education's failure to inform both the primary school teachers and the public about the overall direction of primary education in general and modern school methods in particular.⁷⁹

In answering the criticism that 'standards had declined' in the nation's primary school classrooms, the Commissioners recommended that the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) be contracted to prepare and administer national standardised tests in the form of 'checkpoints of attainment' in the basic subjects at five-yearly intervals, 'to allow valid comparisons of achievement to be made at particular points [Standards 1, 4 and Form 2] in the primary school curriculum'.⁸⁰ The Commissioners also emphasised that these 'checkpoints' should *supplement* the estimates of class teachers who were uniquely placed to take account of various factors affecting the ability and performance of pupils.⁸¹

ASSESSMENT POST-CURRIE

Following the publication of the Currie Commission's report, the Minister of Education, Arthur Kinsella, in 1965 invited the NZCER to undertake the construction of 'standardised group tests of attainment in basic school subjects', based on the New Zealand syllabuses for all classes.⁸² Four years later, the first of these standardised tests were published by the NZCER and distributed to all primary schools.⁸³

In the years that followed, a number of committees of inquiry and working parties explored ways in which to measure the achievement levels of New Zealand primary school children. Three of these – *Learning and Teaching* (1974), the *Royal Commission on Social Policy* (1988), and the *Reports of the Ministerial Working Party on Assessment for Better Learning* (1989-1990) – had specifically investigated national monitoring of educational attainment. To some extent, national monitoring of different areas of the New Zealand primary school curriculum was

already occurring owing to our participation in some of the comparative surveys of educational achievement undertaken by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. These surveys compared and evaluated the achievements of New Zealand school children alongside learners from other countries, and provided some indication of the performance of pupils in the New Zealand school system. Further information on educational achievement, albeit covering selected areas of the New Zealand primary school curriculum, has become available by way of the standardised Progressive Achievement Tests, developed (and periodically re-normed) by the NZCER.

By 1997, the then coalition government was convinced that primary schools' current assessment practices were somehow outdated, if not seriously deficient, and that important 'information gaps' existed in terms of the absence of clear 'performance outcomes'. Their 'solution' was simple: introduce a system of national tests for all primary school children to provide data relating to the achievement levels of all pupils and groups of pupils at both the local and national levels. For its part, the Labour Party – a party that had long stood for the abolition of traditional examinations – caught many off guard when its spokesperson on Education, Trevor Mallard, a former teacher, declared that externally referenced mandatory national testing would significantly improve the achievement levels of New Zealand primary school children.⁸⁴ Noting the mediocre performance of a sample of 9-year-old (Standard 2-3/Year 4-5) New Zealand school children who had participated alongside other 9-year-olds from 26 countries in the 1994 TIMSS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study), Mallard proposed that all Standard 2, 4 and Form 2 children should be tested annually in English or Reading, Mathematics and Science in order to identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of individual teachers.⁸⁵ Such data, he claimed, would then be used not only to censure poorly performing schools but also to remove underperforming or 'incompetent' teachers.⁸⁶ Mallard apparently saw no difficulty in allowing parents access to schools' test scores (essentially 'league tables') to enable them to choose the 'best' school for their children. Primary school teachers and principals, however, viewed the matter very differently and in the face of overwhelming criticism regarding the validity of such tests, Labour withdrew its support for compulsory national testing.

THE GREEN PAPER ON PRIMARY SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Within hours of Labour announcing its opposition to national testing the Minister of Education, Wyatt Creech, informed the press of his government's intention to shortly make public its own green paper on primary school assessment.⁸⁷ Released on 7 May 1998 with a three-month deadline for public submissions, the 38-page Green Paper on *Assessment for Success in Primary Schools* and the accompanying 'Brochure for Parents' outlined a number of proposals for assessing and monitoring the performance of primary school age children against national achievement objectives. Immediately the Labour Party criticised the Green Paper's national testing proposal, declaring it to be merely a blueprint of the Ministry of Education's earlier Briefing Papers on national assessment then being considered for inclusion in the 1997 Budget.⁸⁸

PROPOSALS

In evaluating the Green Paper's proposals, we have adopted the general principle that assessment *per se* cannot, and does not, lead to improved teaching and learning. Rather, it is the interdependence of the school curriculum, good teaching practices, ongoing staff development programmes, and appropriate assessment procedures that ensures the best possible quality of learning. Furthermore, any proposals designed to improve teaching and learning will succeed *only* to the extent that they are both understood and accepted by those responsible for delivering the National Curriculum – the teachers. Without such agreement, the Green Paper's proposals amounted to nothing more than an attempt to impose, by ministerial decree, a model of assessment that overrode the wealth of teacher experience in using school-based assessment and nationally available diagnostic tools to assist in the identification and reporting of specific learning outcomes as required under the National Education Guidelines.

SOME MERITS

Described by the then Minister of Education, Wyatt Creech, and former Associate Minister, Brian Donnelly, as the 'forerunner to a package of tools based on the school curriculum to provide teachers, parents, and schools with the information they need to make certain every child is on the right track',⁸⁹ the Green Paper proposed that all primary schools be supplied with a four-item assessment toolkit.⁹⁰

• Additional Diagnostic Tools

The Green Paper first proposed that additional diagnostic tools be made available for classroom use nationally. It began by acknowledging the variety of assessment tools already developed, and noted that teachers had access to several Ministry-sanctioned initiatives - for example, School Entry Assessment; Six Year Net; Assessment Resource Banks; Progressive Achievement Tests; and the National Education Monitoring Project - and utilised these to assist them in evaluating and 'monitoring' the learning needs and achievements of individual students. However, the Green Paper chose to downplay their importance and sophistication in order to push for the introduction of national, externally referenced tests whereby 'schools can compare their performance with others and identify both where they are doing well and not so well'.⁹¹ It also ignored the fundamental point that educational assessment practices only become meaningful when teachers are committed, well-educated, well-trained and critically reflective practitioners.

• National Exemplar Material

The Green Paper's second assessment proposal involved the nationwide introduction of well-designed exemplar material, clearly linked to the National Curriculum achievement objectives. These exemplars (of student work and associated assessment activities) were intended to provide teachers with a further means by which to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and learning programmes.

What was less clear, however, was the capacity of exemplars to provide information 'to help teachers to identify whether their judgements about students'

achievements are consistent with national standards'.⁹² Given the considerable classroom diversity in New Zealand primary schools – the predictable result of individual teachers devising innovative ways of meeting the learning needs of their particular groups of students – it is to be wondered whether valid, nationally consistent, performance criteria could in fact be developed across all primary schools.

Significantly, the Green Paper's authors not only failed to provide evidence of the educational benefits accruing to individual students by assessing them against 'nationally consistent standards' but they also ignored the reality that national exemplars of student work constituted a *de facto* compulsory curriculum because teachers would regard them as 'benchmark' indicators of student achievement. Consequently, there would be absolutely no incentive for teachers to risk being innovative in their work.

Those who doubt such an outcome need only to look to our educational past to discover the widespread use of exemplar material by teachers who prepared students for primary school examinations. Books of 'model answers' to examination questions were published annually from 1900, and, although widely condemned by the Department of Education and the nation's inspectorate, teachers could do little else but drill their pupils on these 'model answers' so as to leave nothing to chance on examination day.⁹³

- **Comprehensive National Summary Information**

The third component in the Green Paper's 'integrated national assessment package' involved modifying the internationally acclaimed National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP), using supplementary in-depth probe studies, to obtain data on the achievements of specific groups of students. Since its launch in 1995, the NEMP team have developed a variety of assessment tasks to monitor and report on student achievements across the seven Essential Learning Areas of the National Curriculum. Different areas and skills are assessed each year, over a four-year timeframe, by surveying nationally representative samples (about 3 per cent) annually at Years 4 (ages 8-9) and 8 (ages 12-13).⁹⁴

What was also absent from the Green Paper was any discussion of the consequences of employing in-depth probe studies to identify poor educational performance. To be valuable, the information so gained must be directed towards securing real improvements in the educational achievements of the groups being targetted. Simply reporting what is already well documented – the existence of an 'achievement gap' between Maori and non-Maori – and declaring that 'we aim to reduce, and eventually eliminate, disparities in educational outcomes between different groups in society',⁹⁵ does not in itself guarantee improved educational outcomes.

- **New Externally-Referenced Tests**

Of the four assessment proposals outlined in the Green Paper, compulsory externally referenced and administered testing remained the most troublesome. The Green Paper proposed that initially every Year 6 (Standard 4) and 8 (Form 2) student – about 110,000 students – would sit national externally set and marked pencil-and-paper tests, based on the achievement objectives in two areas of the national curriculum - literacy (or English) and numeracy (or Mathematics) – and that at a later stage, Year 4 (Standard 2) children would be tested.⁹⁶ It anticipated

an external agency being contracted to administer the tests; to set the test papers; to mark, analyse and report on the test results; and to return the papers, making schedules, school and national reports to individual schools.⁹⁷

The Green Paper suggested that three types of report be made available: a report to the government on national and group levels of achievement, a report to each individual school comparing the achievement of its students with national levels of achievement and those of similar student groups nationwide, and a report for schools to distribute to parents.⁹⁸ The information gleaned from these reports was intended to 'help teachers to identify which programmes are most effective for specific groups of students . . . which factors may contribute to that success . . . [and] which programmes need most improvement for particular groups of students'.⁹⁹

The case for national testing, however, was made all the more problematic from the outset owing to the Green Paper's confusion regarding the *purpose* of the national tests they advocated. On the one hand, readers were told that 'teachers need information to help them to identify whether their judgements about achievements are consistent with national standards', and on the other hand that externally referenced tests would 'help' [teachers] to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and learning programmes'.¹⁰⁰ The first purpose clearly involved assessment being used for reasons of *accountability* whereas the second involved assessment to *improve teaching and learning*. Similar tensions with respect to the teachers' role in assessing their pupils also emerged in the Green Paper's *Conclusion*, where readers learned that whilst important aspects of decision making would be devolved to the school level to 'give the teaching profession . . . the greatest possible freedom to provide the programmes that are best suited to their children', the Green Paper's proposals were 'designed to reduce teacher workloads by providing [assessment] tools and examples that all teachers should be able to use with only a little modification'.¹⁰¹

It should also be noted that the claims made to support the introduction of national, externally referenced tests were *identical* (the same wording even appears) to those used earlier to argue the case for the introduction of more exemplar material and the modification of the NEMP to provide more comprehensive national summary information.¹⁰² Given that the objectives were identical, it was unclear why national testing should therefore be necessary because information on student achievement could be gained more easily and economically by modifying existing data-gathering strategies. In failing to acknowledge this reality, the Green Paper's authors implied that national testing somehow added an extra dimension that was not met by the other three proposals. This was simply not true.

LIMITATIONS OF NATIONAL TESTING

On the credit side, some of the practical limitations surrounding national testing were explored in the Green Paper. Declaring that no single assessment system could provide the last (or definitive) word on children's achievements, it warned that the range of objectives able to be tested (i.e. numeracy and literacy) would necessarily be 'limited' to those assessable by paper-and-pencil tests.¹⁰³ The authors also appreciated that the results from schools with small rolls would need to be reviewed 'with caution';¹⁰⁴ that students should not be 'labelled' on the basis of a 'one off snapshot' of their achievements in two curriculum areas;¹⁰⁵ that 'valid comparisons between schools . . . need to be based on valid measures of the

overall achievements of its students';¹⁰⁶ that written tests might be culturally inappropriate for Maori who emphasise oral traditions;¹⁰⁷ that low school scores compared with national norms did not necessarily mean that the school was not effective;¹⁰⁸ and that the publication of test results for particular groups of students could reinforce low expectations for students who were not achieving highly.¹⁰⁹ They further acknowledged the complex relationship between educational achievement, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, and noted that 'simply to compare schools serving certain communities . . . with national norms is to misuse the information'.¹¹⁰

'LEAGUE TABLES'

Having outlined several limitations of national testing, the Green Paper then ignored these when its authors concluded that only *mandatory* testing could 'generate a comprehensive range of reliable comparative data'.¹¹¹ This data was supposed to help parents to 'identify the effectiveness of their school's programmes compared with similar schools and national achievement trends',¹¹² and 'to provide information to schools that will enable teachers, principals, and boards to evaluate the achievement of their children in comparison to national and group levels of achievement . . . [via] externally set and marked tests . . . in a standardised way to maximise . . . validity [and] comparisons'.¹¹³ However, it is clear from the overseas literature that when the relative performance of neighbouring schools becomes more widely known, the publication of national 'league tables' invariably follows.

Despite the Green Paper reiterating Creech and Donnelly's earlier undertaking not to publish 'crude and misleading league tables' of schools' test scores in the (mistaken) belief that this would avoid the phenomenon of 'high stakes testing',¹¹⁴ such an assurance was totally meaningless because the Ministry of Education remains powerless to prevent local and national newspapers from compiling data themselves. Equally, it cannot stop politicians from announcing schools' results in parliament. Those who doubt the likely publication of primary school 'league tables' need only to look to the nation's newspapers wherein lists of the relative performance of individual secondary schools, using students' external examination (School Certificate and University Bursary) results, have been compiled and published annually since the 1970s.

The Green Paper also needed to acknowledge the consequences of reporting the range of relative school performance in graphic form.¹¹⁵ Overseas research (in Canada, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, for example) demonstrates that such a format not only makes the construction of league tables a simple and straightforward task but also allows schools with 'good' results - albeit based on a single test - to advertise their achievements widely in their promotional material.¹¹⁶ In today's highly competitive compulsory schooling environment, New Zealand primary schools would quickly seize upon league tables as providing supposedly 'objective evidence' of their effectiveness. Only those individuals and groups with an understanding of educational assessment would read the New Zealand tables for what they really were: a list of misleading (if not invalid) scores on a poorly designed national test of only two curriculum areas.

'HIGH STAKES TESTING'

Curiously absent from the Green Paper's analysis of national testing was any mention of the consequences of 'high stakes testing'. Our earlier discussion of the standards examinations has revealed that in a high stakes environment teachers boosted their annual class percentage pass rates by 'teaching to the tests' and excluding 'slow learners' from the examinations. The resultant 'backwash effect' of universal testing also meant that only the types of tasks (and content) assessable in the national tests were taught while areas not formally assessed were ignored. Such homogeneity of instruction today would directly contradict the National Curriculum Framework's philosophy of breadth and balance in curriculum coverage.

Also missing from the Green Paper was any consideration of the *cost* of implementing its national testing proposal. In a climate of scarce educational resources the expenditure associated with test design, development and production, the contracting of an external agency to administer such tests, and documentation, postage, marking, and results collation and dissemination to individual schools would be considerable. It is to be wondered then if the same money might better be invested in revising existing standardised achievement tests (e.g., the Progressive Achievement Tests), extending the NEMP, and developing new diagnostic instruments and exemplar material in cooperation with practising teachers and assessment specialists.

Finally, the Green Paper presents the reader with two contradictory models of teachers as professional educators. On the one hand, teachers were viewed as professionals whose educational effectiveness would further be enhanced by the data obtained from national testing because only then could they 'establish expectations and identify where improvements are needed'.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, we were reminded that the government viewed national assessment as being 'part of a much larger suite of policies' that were necessary to ensure that 'young people learn the basic skills they will need to achieve their lifetime objectives'.¹¹⁸ By insisting that the scheme 'apply to all' students,¹¹⁹ the clear intention was to exert further control over the work of teachers.

GREEN PAPER SUBMISSIONS

Following the Green Paper's release, a three-month consultation period was provided during which time Ministry staff met with individuals and groups before public submissions closed. The 1584 written submissions, representing the views of approximately 2869 individuals and groups, were analysed by an independent research team led by Alison Gilmore, and a final report was released in November 1998.¹²⁰

Prior to the Gilmore report being released the Minister of Education sensed the public's growing opposition to national testing, and announced that the timeframe for the introduction of such tests would now be extended to the year 2000 to allow further consultation.¹²¹ However, this did nothing to dissuade the School Trustees' Association and some 1400 primary school principals from overwhelmingly rejecting national testing.¹²² The Gilmore report revealed a similar trend: three of the Green Paper's proposals had attracted strong support (additional diagnostic tests, national exemplar materials, and the modification of the NEMP) whereas the fourth - national testing - was opposed by 72.8 per cent of respondents on the grounds that such tests had a negative effect on children, teachers and schools,

were of limited validity, and fostered misleading comparisons and competition between schools.¹²³

Thirteen months later, the new Minister of Education, Nick Smith, reiterated the National government's unswerving commitment to national testing in a speech to the NZEI Annual Conference on 22 September 1999.¹²⁴ Claiming that 'we are behind the pace [because] every State in Australia has National Assessment. So too do England and the vast majority of states in Canada and America', and that opponents of national testing are 'swimming against the tide of education internationally', the Minister launched his government's 'robust and comprehensive' *Information for Better Learning* assessment policy.¹²⁵ Predictably, the assessment proposals mirrored those in the earlier Green Paper, although the national literacy and numeracy tests were now to apply to Year 5 and 7 students.¹²⁶ The Executive Director of the Independent Schools' Council, Jan Kerr, welcomed the decision to persist with compulsory national testing in the belief that 'it led to the raising of standards'.¹²⁷

The Labour Party, however, affirmed its opposition to the compulsory national testing of primary school children and, upon becoming the government in late November 1999, announced the abandonment of tests for 9 and 11 year olds.¹²⁸ Eight months later, Trevor Mallard, Minister of Education, announced that the University of Auckland had won the contract to develop new tools for assessing literacy and numeracy for pupils in Years 5 to 7.¹²⁹ Unlike the last government's compulsory testing proposal, the new assessment initiative will be voluntary: schools will be sent a CD-ROM containing hundreds of closed-and-open-ended items that are indexed to the National Curriculum documents and from which they can compile items to assess specific skills, concepts, and knowledge.¹³⁰ The voluntary and open-ended nature of these test items prevents both the ranking of individual schools and the compilation of league tables as is commonplace in England and Wales today.¹³¹

REINVENTING THE 'STANDARDS'? SOME OBSERVATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

As a blueprint for educational assessment in the twenty-first century, both the Green Paper and *Information for Better Learning* are deeply worrying. Far from being visionary policy documents they blatantly disregarded most, if not all, of the important lessons that have emerged from the United Kingdom's decade of experience with a national curriculum and assessment system. But even more troubling was their ignorance of a substantial body of literature outlining the history of primary school assessment in New Zealand. With nearly 60 years of national testing experience behind us, we could have confidently predicted that under the system of compulsory externally referenced testing then being proposed, most if not all of what was educationally worthwhile would be driven out by that which was to be tested.

Sixty-four years ago the decision was made to abandon national standards examinations in New Zealand primary schools owing to their undesirable 'backwash' effect on the school curriculum and the lack of any evidence that a 'one size fits all' national test actually enhanced children's learning. To suggest as the former Minister of Education, Nick Smith, does that such tests should now be reintroduced into the primary school classrooms¹³² is, we believe, educationally reprehensible. In short, New Zealand primary schools have historically 'been there' and 'done that'.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ *Canterbury Gazette*, 21 June 1876, p. 33. Report of Inspectors H.W. Hammond and J.P. Restall.

² *New Zealand Gazette* (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 1309-1312 (24 September).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30. Although Bowen introduced the Bill into the House on 24 July 1877, John Hislop, Secretary of the Otago Education Board and an Inspector of Schools, was its author.

⁵ *New Zealand Gazette* (1878), Vol. 2, p. 1312, Section 13 (24 September).

⁶ *Ibid.* See also A.G. Butchers (1930), *Education in New Zealand*, Dunedin: Coulls Somerville Wilkie, p. 53.

⁷ Department of Education, *The Standards*, Wellington: Government Printer, 1881, pp. 2-3, Note 6(1).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18, Note 14(1).

⁹ Primary school enrolments increased from 65,366 (1878) to 82,401 (1880), an increase of 26.1 per cent. See Butchers (1930), *op. cit.*, p. 590.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* (1880), H-1A, p. 12 (authors' emphasis).

¹¹ J.D.S. McKenzie (1976), 'The Changing Role of the Teacher in New Zealand Schools', in C.J. Wright (Ed.), *Aspects of School Organisation*, Wellington: NZEI, p. 34; J.L. Ewing (1970), *The Development of the New Zealand Primary School Curriculum: 1877-1970*, Wellington: NZCER, pp. 140-141.

¹² *New Zealand Schoolmaster*, July 1882, pp. 190-191.

¹³ Ewing, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹⁴ *AJHR* (1882), E-1B, p. 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* (1880), H-11, p. 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* (1882), E-1B, p. 16

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Otago Daily Times*, 11 January 1890; 9 August 1890; 21 February 1893; 2 February 1894; 2 April 1895.

¹⁹ Otago Education Board, *Letter Book* (1890), Vol. 35, p. 860 (17 July); 1890-91, Vol. 36, p. 524 (19 February 1891).

²⁰ *Ibid.* (1890), Vol. 35, p. 498. Letter from P.G. Pryde, Secretary, Otago Education Board, to the Secretary, Southland Education Board, 22 April 1890.

²¹ *Otago Daily Times*, 17 February 1893.

²² *Ibid.*, 21 April 1893.

²³ *AJHR* (1891), E-1, p. v.

²⁴ Ewing (1970), p. 61.

²⁵ *AJHR* (1883), E-1B, p. 22. Report of Inspectors W.L. Edge and J. Cumming.

²⁶ In 1899 regulations were gazetted, stipulating that 'a pupil shall be expected to pass through one class in each subject in a year. The reason for more or less rapid promotion in each case shall be noted in the column for remarks for the information of the Inspector, who may approve or not of the sufficiency of the reason given. The Inspector may require from the head teacher a written explanation in the case of any pupil whose age is much above the average age of the pupils in that class for that school or that education district' (*New Zealand Gazette* (1899), Vol. 2, p. 2301, Clause 11 [18 December]). Thus, from 1899 onwards, checks could be made on those teachers who deliberately retarded their pupils so as to 'make a good show' in the Inspectors' annual examination.

²⁷ *AJHR* (1894), E-1c, pp. 19-20 (Minutes of the Conference of School Inspectors), 1-7 February 1894.

²⁸ *Ibid.* The Otago Education Board strongly supported the idea of holding periodic Conferences of Inspectors. Such conferences, the Board claimed, would lead to 'greater uniformity in regard to the valuation of the work of the schools throughout the colony and the interpretation of the various details of the standards regulations' (Otago Education Board, *Letter Book* (1893), pp. 647-648. Letter from P.G. Pryde, Secretary, Otago Education Board, to W.J. Habens, Inspector-General, 26 April 1893).

²⁹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 1894, Vol. 1, p. 945 (19 June), Clause 3. Ewing argues that the decision in 1894 to give head teachers responsibility for determining passes in Standards 1 and 2 was the most important change in school administration since 1878, for it recognised that the teachers themselves were best able to decide the progress that pupils had made in their schools (J.L. Ewing, *op. cit.*, p. 43). In January 1895, the Chairman of the Otago Education Board, Mark Cohen, criticised the Board's Inspectors for failing to press for the abolition of *all* the standards examinations at the 1894 Conference (*Otago Daily Times*, 18 January 1895). Three months later, the Board resolved by a majority of seven to two 'that in the opinion of the Board, the system of individual examination for passes is mischievous and should be abolished' (Otago Education Board, *Letter Book* (1895), p. 142. Letter from P.G. Pryde, Secretary, Otago Education Board, to W.J. Habens, Inspector-General, 23 April 1895). The two dissenting Board members argued that the public had a right to know whether or not the work being done in the schools was up to standard; examinations, they claimed, preserved standards.

³⁰ *Ibid.* (1899), Vol. 2, p. 2314, Clause 31 (18 December). By 1899, the Otago Inspectors now agreed that 'the standard pass might with great advantage to real education be abolished' (*Report of the Education Board of the District of Otago*, Dunedin: Coulls Somerville Wilkie Ltd, 1898, p. 58, Appendix E). In May 1899, the Otago Education Board considered the resolution, '(1) That in the opinion of the Board the system of individual passes should be abolished. (2) That this Board is of opinion that the system of standards be abolished' (*Otago Daily Times*, 19 May 1899). In June, the Board gave its approval for the resolution to be sent to the Department of Education (Otago Education Board, *Letter Book*, 1899. Letter from P.G. Pryde, Secretary, Otago Education Board, to the Minister of Education, 28 June 1899). At the July Conference of Education Boards, unanimous approval for the Otago Education Board's resolution was given.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2303, Clauses 14 and 15.

³² J.L. Ewing, *op. cit.*, p. 60. In September 1892, the Board announced that no longer was it prepared to tolerate the practice of 'keeping children at school from 9.30 a.m. until 5.00 p.m.' (*Otago Daily Times*, 23 September 1892). Accordingly, in February 1893 the Board resolved that the teachers be informed that the Board disapproved of 'keeping in', and that 'the inspectors be requested to discourage special preparations for annual examinations in every possible way and report to the Board whether the Board's instructions on this point are duly attended to' (Otago Education Board, *Circular Book*, Circular 9/93, 19 June 1893). But the position did not improve. In March 1895, the Board circularised all teachers informing them that the practice of 'detaining children in school after school hours' had not ceased, and that if the situation did not improve, the Board would be required to take 'more stringent measures to enforce its resolution' (Otago Education Board, *Circular Book*, Circular 10/95, 27 March 1895). However, even this threat was largely ignored; in December 1895 the Board issued yet another warning to its teachers (*Otago Daily Times*, 13 December 1895). By 1899, the

situation was such that numerous complaints were still forthcoming that 'pupils were kept at their lessons until four o'clock in the afternoon as a matter of course' (*Ibid.*, 22 September 1899). The difficulty that the Board faced was how to minimise (or eliminate) 'keeping in' when parents encouraged such a strategy in order that their children could be prepared to pass examinations.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-61; *AJHR* (1883), E-1, p. xvii. Report of Inspector R.J. O'Sullivan (Auckland); E-1, p. xviii, E-1B, pp. 19-20. Report of Inspector W.C. Hodgson (Marlborough and Nelson); E-1, pp. xviii, 38. Report of Inspector P. Goyen (Otago); *NZPD* (1906), Vol. 138, pp. 229-230 (11 October), James Allen (Bruce), Josiah Hanan (Invercargill), and John Stallworthy (Kaipara). Until 1893, the Otago Education Board Secretary, P.G. Pryde, was reluctant to interfere with respect to complaints about excessive homework (Otago Education Board, *Letter Book* (1890), Vol. 35, pp. 880-887. Letter from P.G. Pryde to Secretary, Westland Education Board, 28 July 1890; *Letter Book* (1893), Vol. 39, p. 832. Letter from P.G. Pryde to Oamaru South School Committee, 27 September 1893). In October 1893, the Board circularised all teachers and school committees calling for a reduction in 'the system of excessive home lessons'. Teachers were instructed to provide as little homework as possible, particularly in Arithmetic and Writing (Otago Education Board, *Circular-Book*, Circular 12/93, 23 October 1893).

³⁴ *AJHR* (1902), E-1B, p. 42. Report of Otago Inspectors P. Goyen, W.S. Fitzgerald, C.R. Richardson, and C.R. Bossence.

³⁵ *Ibid.* (1901), E-1c, pp. 2, 4 (Recommendations I and V). The Conference of Inspectors met in Wellington from 29 January to 1 February 1901.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6. Dr Anderson's motion was lost by 17 votes to 7.

³⁸ J.L. Ewing, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

³⁹ *AJHR* (1911), E-2, p. ii. Report of Inspectors J. Hendry, and A. Wyllie.

⁴⁰ *Otago Daily Times*, 18 September 1920 (authors' emphasis).

⁴¹ *Evening Star*, 24 September 1920.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *AJHR* (1910), E-10, p. 19 (Report of General Education Conference, Wellington, 10-12 February 1910).

⁴⁴ The transference of the inspectorate from Education Board to Departmental control came about as a result of the 1914 *Education Act* [see the *Education Act*, 1914, Section 131(3)].

⁴⁵ *AJHR* (1916), E-1, p. 10; (1918), E-1, pp. 23-24; H. Lee (1991), 'The Credentialed Society', PhD thesis, University of Otago, Table 2, p. 32; Table 3, p. 39; Table 5, p. 55; Table 9, p. 74; and Table 12, p. 83.

⁴⁶ *NZPD* (1916), Vol. 197, pp. 114-115 (16 May); *Evening Star*, 25 September 1916; *AJHR* (1918), E-1, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁷ *AJHR* (1919), E-2, Appendix B, p. xviii. Report of Inspectors T.R. Fleming, C.R. Bossence, J.R. Don, M.J. Lynskey.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* (1920), E-2, p. vi. Report of Inspectors A.J. Morton, and W.A. Ballantyne (Taranaki).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* (1921), E-1, p. 10. Christopher James Parr was Minister of Education in the Massey Government from 3 April 1920 to 14 May 1925.

⁵⁰ *National Education* (1928), Vol. 10, No. 103, p. 220 (1 June).

⁵¹ *Education Gazette* (1926), Vol. 5, No. 10, pp. 155-157 (1 October).

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157 (authors' emphasis).

⁵³ *AJHR* (1928), E-2, p. 24.

⁵⁴ *National Education* (1931), Vol. 13, No. 136, p. 228 (1 June) (authors' emphasis).

⁵⁵ *AJHR* (1925), E-2, Appendix C, p. 39; *National Education* (1930), Vol. 12, No. 123, p. 122 (1 April); Vol. 12, No. 125, p. 295 (1 June); 1931, Vol. 13, No. 136, p. 419 (1 September); *Evening Post*, 15 May 1930.

⁵⁶ *NZPD* (1936), Vol. 247, p. 974 (23 October).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1039 (28 October 1936). Fagan was adamant also that teachers resented their professional reputations being assessed on the basis of the percentage of Proficiency passes they gained. Employers, Fagan claimed, had demanded the certificate, newspapers had published the results, and the aim of the schools became 'the securing of high percentages rather than the training of the pupils along the best possible lines'.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 987 (authors' emphasis).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1042-1043.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1041.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Report of the Education Board of the District of Otago*, Dunedin: Coulls Somerville Wilkie Ltd, 1925, p. 8; 1926, p. 7, Appendix D, p. 32; 1927, p. 7, Appendix D, p. 30; 1928, p. 7, Appendix D, p. 31; 1929, p. 7, Appendix D, p. 31; 1930, p. 5, Appendix D, p. 15; 1931, Appendix B, p. 14; 1932, Appendix B, p. 16; K. O'Reilly, 'Roman Catholic Reactions to the Thomas Committee Report', *NZJES*, 1977, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 119-132 (November).

⁶³ See *Education Amendment Act*, 1936, Section 9(1). *New Zealand Statutes*, 1936, p. 440.

⁶⁴ *Report of the Education Board of the District of Otago*, 1936, p. 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Appendix B, p. 17, Appendix G, p. 26.

⁶⁶ *National Education* (1936), Vol. 18, No. 196, p. 349 (2 November); Vol. 18, No. 195, p. 301 (1 October).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Ewing, (1970), *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165; C.E. Beeby (1992), *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Ewing, (1970), *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165, 259-260; C.E. Beeby (1992), *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, Wellington: NZCER, pp. 152-153.

⁷⁰ A report of the conference proceedings is published in the December 1944 issue of *National Education*. The conference was attended by 120 people representing 70 different organisations that were concerned, directly or indirectly, with education.

⁷¹ *National Education* (1944), Vol. 26, No. 285, p. 351 (December).

⁷² Beeby, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

⁷³ *Ibid.*; Ewing, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

⁷⁴ *National Education* (1950), Vol. 32, No. 341, p. 4 (February).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* (1955), Vol. 37, No. 397, pp. 41-43 (March); 1956, Vol. 38, No. 416, pp. 373-375 (November). It should be noted that there were methodological problems with Fieldhouse's survey: there were difficulties in comparing standards in the 1955 and 1956 tests with those in the earlier years, and the composition of school classes had changed owing to the narrowing of the age range of each class as a result of 'social promotion'.

⁷⁶ *Report of the Commission on Education in New Zealand* (Currie Commission), July 1962, Wellington: Government Printer, p. 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 27; Ewing, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-267; I. A. McLaren (1974), *Education in a Small Democracy: New Zealand*, London: RKP, pp. 44-45.

⁷⁸ *Report of the Commission on Education in New Zealand*, *ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 35-37.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 372 (Recommendations 11-13).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 258-263, 372.

⁸² W.B. Elley (1967), 'Standardised Test Development in New Zealand: Problems, Procedures and Proposals', *NZJES*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 63-77 (May).

⁸³ Ewing, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

⁸⁴ 'Labour hardens school policy. (1998, March 23). *The New Zealand Herald*, p. A1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Otago Daily Times*, 24 March 1998; *New Zealand Education Review*, 25 March 1998, p.1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* Labour had obtained details of the Ministry's scheme under the Official Information Act.

⁸⁹ W. Creech and B. Donnelly, *Media Release*, 7 May 1998, p. 2.

⁹⁰ Ministry of Education (1998), *Assessment for Success in Primary Schools* (Green Paper), Wellington: Ministry of Education, May, pp. 6, 20.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ H. Lee (1991), *op. cit.*, Chapters 1 and 2.

⁹⁴ The first 4-year cycle of assessments took place between 1995 and 1998. The second 4-year cycle runs from 1999-2002. All seven Essential Learning Areas, eight Essential Skills, and a variety of attitudes and values are monitored and evaluated over each 4-year cycle (i.e. 1995-1998, 1999-2002).

⁹⁵ Ministry of Education (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 28.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹⁶ P. Broadfoot, B. Dockrell, C. Gipps, W. Harlen and D. Nuttall (Eds.). (1993), *Policy Issues in National Assessment*, UK: Multilingual Matters; H. Goldstein and T. Lewis (Eds.). (1996), *Assessment: Problems, Developments and Statistical Issues*, New York: John Wiley and Sons; J.D. Willms (1992), *Monitoring School Performance: A Guide for Educators*, Washington: Falmer Press.

¹¹⁷ Ministry of Education (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 2, Foreword.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹²⁰ A. Gilmore, *Assessment for Success in Primary Schools: Report of the Submissions to the Green Paper*, Wellington: Ministry of Education Research Division, November 1998.

¹²¹ *Otago Daily Times*, 22 July 1998; *New Zealand Education Review*, 22 July 1998, p. 5.

¹²² *New Zealand Education Review*, 5 August 1998, p.3; 24 September 1998, p. 1; New Zealand Principals' Federation, *Federation Flyer*, October 1998, p. 1.

¹²³ Gilmore Report, *op.cit.*, pp. 25-68.

¹²⁴ Minister of Education, *Speech Notes*, 22 September 1999, pp. 8-10.

¹²⁵ *Information for Better Learning. National Assessment in Primary Schools: Policies and Proposals*, Wellington: Ministry of Education, September 1999. (Available on www.minedu.govt.nz); *Otago Daily Times*, 23 September 1999, p. 2; *Education Gazette*, 4 October 1999, p. 14.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Eduvac*, 8 November 1999, p. 6.

¹²⁸ Trevor Mallard, Minister of Education, *Press Release*, 10 December 1999; *New Zealand Education Review*, 10 December 1999, p. 1; *Otago Daily Times* 11 December 1999, p. 6.

¹²⁹ Ministry of Education, *Curriculum Update*, Number 42, July 2000, p. 4; *New Zealand Education Review*, 4 August 2000, p. 4; *Otago Daily Times*, 5 August 2000, p. 36; *Eduvac*, 21 August 2000, pp. 1, 3.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ In Britain, children have formally been tested at ages 7, 11, 14, 16 and 18 since 1989. National testing in the three key subjects (English, Mathematics, and Science) occurs at ages 7, 11 and 14.

¹³² *Otago Daily Times*, 15 April 2000, p. 2 (Speech to the National Party's Clutha/Southland Electorate Annual Meeting in Gore); *New Zealand Education Review*, 2 June 2000, p. 2.