

NATIONAL STANDARDS RESEARCH

Research Findings

1. Substantial research evidence shows that early ability in core skills is strongly correlated with a range of future outcomes, e.g. UK test scores in literacy and numeracy at age 7 are significant determinants of earnings at age 37, even after controlling for socioeconomic background (McKinsey)
2. NZ education is comparatively good. The average performance of NZ students in literacy, mathematics and science is up with the best.(PISA)
3. While the NZ average performance is good the variation in NZ student achievement is comparatively wide e.g. on the combined reading literacy scale, the variation in the performance of New Zealand 15-year-olds was 26.1 percent higher than the average for all OECD countries. (PISA)
4. A comparatively small proportion of the New Zealand variation results from differences between schools (16.2 percent compared to the OECD average of 35.2 percent) despite large differences in the socioeconomic factors affecting NZ schools such as income levels and ethnic makeup. (PISA)
5. Most of New Zealand's variation in student performance occurs within schools (83.8 percent compared to the OECD average proportion of 64.8 percent). (PISA)
6. Only a little over 10 percent of the variation in performance amongst students at the same NZ school can be explained by student and school socio-economic status. (PISA)
7. The experiences of top school systems suggest that three things matter most
 - Getting the right people to become teachers
 - Developing them into effective instructors and
 - Ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child (McKinsey)
8. Nothing matters more than the teacher in front of the class (McKinsey, Hattie, Best Evidence Synthesis, others)
9. 30 percent of NZ teachers of yrs 1 and 2 children had little or no sense of how critical it was for children to develop confidence and independence in early reading and writing. These teachers had minimal understanding of effective reading and writing teaching, set inappropriately low expectations and did not seek opportunities to extend their own confidence in using a wider range of teaching practices. In these classrooms learning opportunities to motivate, engage or extend children were limited. (ERO)
10. All of the top performing and rapidly improving school systems have curriculum standards which set clear and high expectations for what students should achieve. (McKinsey)
11. Of a group of 10 countries that had large increases in real expenditure on education between 1970 and 1994, NZ had the 2nd highest increase in expenditure per student (223% in real terms) but had the greatest decrease in student achievement (-10%). (McKinsey)
12. A great deal of anecdotal evidence shows performance reporting transparency (i.e. publishing results against expectations or standards) disadvantages poorer performing schools and students. Note – I expect there is research evidence supporting this view, it is just that in the reading I have done I have seen many comments on this but haven't been able to track down research support, e.g. McKinsey is equivocal when it states "the evidence from the systems which publish performance reports shows that though many good schools improve further under the pressure resulting from the transparency of the system, failing schools seldom improve for this reason alone" The major comment McKinsey prints on this is not a research finding but a personal comment from a Finnish interviewee. If you can provide me with research references I will update this point.

Inferences drawn from the above

Note these are personal conclusions, some of which may need further research findings to substantiate or disprove.

Some of the research findings above are of different time periods, e.g. school funding (1970-94) is a different time scale to ERO findings (2010) so joining the dots between research findings may be problematic. However, in my view, some clear messages come through.

1. Despite NZ education performing well on average, the wide variations in performance means NZ cannot afford to be complacent and do nothing e.g. that 70 percent of yr 1 and 2 teachers are performing well does not mean that things are OK. The long term effects of early ability in core skills are such that we cannot continue to accept that 30 percent of yr 1 and 2 teachers are not performing at a sufficiently high level.
2. The overwhelming message is that it is teachers that count; their quality, their performance and how to it is improved.
3. The current debate is almost exclusively about league tables i.e. comparisons between schools, when the issues that need to be addressed are within schools.
4. The massive increase in education funding from 1970 to 1994 was captured by the education providers with no benefits gained by those being educated, in fact benefits declined. Note - these figures are old but I think it would be reasonable to assume that since 1994 NZ funding has continued to increase in real terms and that student achievement may have reversed its decline but that improvement has not matched the increase in funding. Some research would be welcome.
5. Given the massive NZ investment in education and the results achieved, or lack of them in the past, it is reasonable to expect that the funders (the taxpayers) should have some expectation of educational outputs from the system as a whole and some accountability against them.
6. Accountability processes need to mitigate against detrimental effects on poorer performers.
7. Boards of Trustees, Principals and lead teachers have not been effective in addressing the identified differences of performance within schools. These groups are therefore unlikely to change their performance without substantial reform, resources or retraining.
8. The debate about National Standards has been driven most vigorously by the teacher unions whose main issues have been league tables (i.e. comparisons between schools) and student performance. The issue needs to be teacher performance, how it is monitored and how it is improved. The unions and particularly the NZPF, whose members are primarily responsible for addressing this, appear to have been diverting the debate away from this.

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