



The New Zealand Psychological Society

*Te Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa*

## Media Release

13 March, 2014

For immediate release

Attention: Health, Education and Social Issues Reporters

### Government proposal for education needs to be based on evidence

The New Zealand Psychological Society (NZPS) is pleased that the Government has aspirations to lift student achievement. We are concerned however that a decision has been taken to spend \$359m in a way which is not supported by the evidence on how best to raise student achievement.

We support the development of a respected, valued and well-resourced teaching profession. We agree that maintaining strong and committed groups of professionals within our schools is desirable and that effective leadership can assist with this goal. However, we question if creating additional management and incentivised pay structures within our schools will be effective in assisting the tail of underachievement; indeed we are concerned that it may create unhealthy comparisons, competition and divisions within schools. Research by Berry and Eckert does not support the proposed approach-

Sound data and tools to measure effectiveness are critical elements in a system of identifying and utilizing the best teachers—and financial inducements may be useful in more comprehensive efforts to ensure more equitable teacher distribution. They are, however, insufficient. Our review of existing evidence finds little support for a simplistic system of measuring value-added growth, evaluating teachers more “rigorously,” and granting bonuses.<sup>1</sup>

We urge the government to make use of research data generated in relation to the psychology of leadership and change within organisations, particularly the processes that enhance group performance.<sup>2</sup> We are not aware that the Ministry of Education, schools or teacher organisations have been widely consulted on these proposals. Sustainable change will not be effective if it is imposed externally. Those proposing such far reaching reforms will need to work closely with those who are required to implement such measures.

We believe that underachievement in schools needs to be addressed by a comprehensive package of measures that acknowledge the socioeconomic factors which impact on the ability of children and young people to achieve at school. These factors include poverty, housing, income inequality, access to health services and a living wage.<sup>3</sup> In a recent OECD report Aotearoa/New Zealand was identified as one of a group of countries where students perform as well as can be expected despite large economic disparities. The report

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<sup>1</sup>Berry, B., & Eckert, J. (2012). Creating Teacher Incentives For School Excellence And Equity. Retrieved from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/creating-teacher-incentives>. p.2

<sup>2</sup>Van Vugt, M., Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. (2008). Leadership, followership, and evolution: Some lessons from the past. *American Psychologist*, 63(3), 182-196. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.63.3.182>

<sup>3</sup>Davies, E., Crothers, C., & Hanna, K. (2010). Preventing Child Poverty: Barriers and Solutions. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 39(2), 20-28.

recommends that such countries focus on performance and policies which target disadvantage. The OECD report notes

When performance differences across the socio-economic spectrum are large and students perform as would be expected given their socio-economic status, one of the main policy goals is to reduce performance differences and improve performance particularly among disadvantaged students. A combination of policies targeting low performance and socio-economic disadvantage tend to be most effective in these cases, since universal policies may be less effective in improving both equity and performance simultaneously.<sup>4</sup>

The Government has recognised that it must prioritise the educational needs of Māori and Pasifika<sup>5</sup>. Research by Professor Angus Macfarlane and others will be a rich resource for policy development as they identify the factors which contribute to the successful learning of Māori students.<sup>6</sup>

In summary, we commend the additional funding provided for the education of young people but we would like to see the Government use this funding in ways that are likely to be effective based on the available evidence.<sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> We believe that the Government should acknowledge and respond to the fact that educational underachievement in New Zealand children and young people is not solely about schools and teachers but also about unequal access to the resources, opportunities and life chances which are denied to many who experience poverty and disadvantage in our society.

The New Zealand Psychological Society and its members look forward to supporting the Government to develop robust and evidence based solutions to help school communities raise the achievement and well-being of young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

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## **Background to the New Zealand Psychological Society**

The New Zealand Psychological Society is the largest professional association for psychologists in New Zealand. It has over 1300 members and subscribers and aims to improve individual and community wellbeing by representing, promoting and advancing the scientific discipline and practice of psychology.

## **Contacts**

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<sup>4</sup>OECD. (2013). PISA 2012 Results Excellence Through Equity Giving Every Student the Chance to Succeed (Volume II) Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201132-en> p110

<sup>5</sup>Ministry of Education. (2013). Ka Hikitia Steps Up. *Tukutuku Korero/NZ Education Gazette*. Retrieved from <http://www.edgazette.govt.nz/Articles/Article.aspx?ArticleId=8842>

<sup>6</sup>Macfarlane, A., Webber, M., McRae, H., & Cox, C. C. (2014).Ka Awatea: A tribal-based study of high-achieving rangatahi. Retrieved from <http://www.maramatanga.ac.nz/project/ka-awatea-iwi-case-study-maori-students-experiencing-success>

<sup>7</sup> Alton-Lee, A. (2003). Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/7705/BES-quality-teaching-diverse-students.pdf](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/7705/BES-quality-teaching-diverse-students.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Hattie, J. (2012). Visible learning for teachers maximizing impact on learning. Abingdon: Routledge.