

# TEACHING THE BASICS BRILLIANTLY



## **Teaching the Basics Brilliantly**

Our education system is failing too many children. National will make sure schools are teaching the basics brilliantly, so every child has the opportunity to succeed.

Our plan will ensure kids have the foundation they need in reading, writing, maths and science to set them up for success.

Under National, parents will know if their kids are doing well or, more importantly, if they're falling behind. It's not acceptable to allow children to fall further and further behind without anyone noticing or taking action to help them catch up.

National will set every child in New Zealand up for success and restore excellence to the heart of the education system.

### **National's plan for Teaching the Basics Brilliantly**

- 1. An hour each on reading, writing and maths every day**
- 2. Minimum requirements for what schools must teach every year in reading, writing, maths and science**
- 3. Regular standardised assessment and clear reporting to parents**
- 4. Better training and more tools to support teachers**

#### **The current system is failing our kids**

Education is a critical tool for unlocking a better future for New Zealand and equipping the next generation with the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to succeed. A high-quality education system is essential for driving social mobility, helping break cycles of poverty, and building a future-ready workforce. Simply put, we cannot have world-class incomes and world-class living standards without a world-class education system.

But the current state of education in New Zealand is alarming. Achievement has been in decline for the last 30 years, across multiple governments. Far too many young people today leave school without having mastered the basics of reading, writing, maths and science. A recent NCEA pilot exposed just how far achievement has fallen, with a staggering two-thirds of secondary school students unable to meet the minimum standard in reading, writing and maths the OECD says is necessary for success in further learning, life, and work.

While many schools do a great job, it's clear many are not spending enough time emphasising the basics. Our education system is letting teachers down by not providing enough guidance about what they should actually be teaching their students each year.

Parents do not get enough information about their children's progress. Students are being let down by an education system that refuses to change, but instead continues to double down on the same failed approach. Teachers report they lack confidence in the classroom to teach the basics, with some even deliberately scheduling less class time as a result.

## National's approach to lifting achievement

National will turn our education system around and make sure every child has the opportunity to master the basics and set themselves up for success.

National will introduce minimum class time for the basics, along with clear minimum requirements for the reading, writing, maths and science content children must be taught in each year of school.

Regular assessment and crystal-clear reporting will ensure parents know how their child is progressing, where they might need help, and where they can be extended.

We'll make training on reading, writing, maths and science a requirement for new and existing teachers to ensure they have the confidence and skills to teach the basics brilliantly.

And we'll provide teachers with high-quality resources like lesson plans to free them up to focus on teaching, not just planning.

## Policy highlights

### National will

- Require an hour of maths and two hours of reading and writing on average each day in primary and intermediate schools.
- Rewrite the curriculum to outline the knowledge and skills that primary and intermediate schools must cover each year in reading, writing, maths and science.
- Require standardised, robust assessment of student progress in reading, writing and maths at least twice a year every year from Year 3 to Year 8, with clear reporting to parents.
- Introduce an exit exam for primary and intermediate teaching graduates to demonstrate expertise in reading, writing, maths and science instruction, and require existing teachers to undertake professional development in teaching the basics.
- Develop a free online resource bank with lesson plans and materials aligned with the new curriculum to reduce teacher workload.

## Aiming high

National understands the importance of clear, specific and measurable targets to drive accountability across the public sector. To hold ourselves and the entire education sector accountable for delivering better education outcomes, National will commit to two ambitious but achievable education targets.

### Target 1: 80% at curriculum by 2030

Under National, the education sector will target 80 per cent of Year 8 students being at or above the expected curriculum level for their age in reading, writing, maths and science by 2030, as measured by the University of Otago's National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA).

#### Baseline

Proportion of Year 8 students achieving at or above curriculum according to NMSSA data.

Subject	Year assessed	Proportion	Required improvement (percentage points)
Science	2017	20%	+ 60
Maths	2018	45%	+ 35
Reading	2019	56%	+ 24
Writing	2019	35%	+ 45

### Target 2: Top 10 in PISA by 2033

Under National, the education sector will target a return for New Zealand students to the top 10 in maths, reading and science in the international PISA rankings by 2033.

#### Baseline

Subject	2000 rank	2018 rank	Required improvement (places)
Maths	4	27	+17
Reading	3	11	+1
Science	7	12	+2



## Why our education system needs change

The state of education in New Zealand has been in decline for the last 30 years, with study after study showing achievement going backwards.

A recent pilot of NCEA literacy and numeracy standards revealed that a staggering two-thirds of secondary school students failed to reach the minimum level the OECD says is necessary to succeed in further learning, life and work.

The education system's ineffectiveness is most pronounced in low-income areas, with just two per cent of students attending decile one schools able to pass a basic writing test, and just a quarter up to standard for reading. The results for Māori and Pacific students are also particularly concerning.

### Pass rates for 2022 NCEA literacy and numeracy evaluation pilot

	Reading	Writing	Maths
All students	64%	34%	56%
Māori	50%	24%	38%
Pacific	34%	20%	26%
Low-income (Decile 1)	24%	2%	10%

Source: Ministry of Education

In the year 2000, New Zealand students scored in the top 10 in the world for maths, science and reading in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study. They have now fallen out of the top 10 in all three categories, and New Zealand is one of only seven countries going backwards in every subject compared to our historical scores.



According to the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which assesses student achievement in maths and science around the world, the average Year 9 student in New Zealand performed better in both maths and science in 1995 than in the most recent assessment in 2019. New Zealand also performs poorly against other countries we typically compare ourselves to.



New Zealand's own National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA) run by the University of Otago has found that just 20 per cent of Year 8 students are meeting curriculum expectations for science, 35 per cent for writing, and 45 per cent for maths.

These results paint a bleak picture of the future of the New Zealand economy, with large numbers of students simply lacking the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate an increasingly complex and competitive workforce.

Education is an essential tool for social mobility. A world-class education system should be judged by how well it lifts up children from underprivileged backgrounds and provides them with the opportunity to succeed in life. It should also ensure every child is challenged and extended so they can fulfil their potential. On both measures, New Zealand's education system is clearly failing. This is not just a social problem but a future economic crisis.

We must take urgent action to fix our education system and ensure every child in New Zealand has access to a high-quality education that sets them up for success.

## Teaching the Basics Brilliantly

National will make sure every child has the opportunity to master the basics, keep parents informed and engaged, and give teachers the training and tools they need to teach the basics brilliantly.

### 1. An hour each on reading, writing and maths every day

National wants every child to have sufficiently focussed classroom teaching time, with explicit and direct teaching in reading, writing and maths, so students get at least a year of progress for a year of learning.

There is currently too much variation between how much time different schools spend teaching the basics. This inconsistency embeds inequalities that disadvantage the most vulnerable children.

Reading, writing and maths are fundamental skills that unlock the rest of the curriculum. Without the ability to read a textbook, students can't be expected to understand history or social studies, while economics and business studies require a strong grasp of maths.

Many schools across New Zealand have recognised this, and routinely schedule minimum class time each day for the basics. But this is not always the case.

In a report into the teaching of maths in New Zealand schools, the Royal Society found significant variation among schools in terms of the amount of time devoted to teaching maths, with some teachers scheduling maths for as much as seven hours a week, while others teach it for fewer than three.

The Education Review Office (ERO) has reported that: "In some schools, leaders set the expectation that guided, shared and independent reading and writing will happen every day without exception. However, in many schools, instructional reading and writing happens less often."

The 2018 NMSSA study asked teachers how much time they spent teaching maths each week and found that students in some schools received almost double the amount of maths instruction time as others.

This inconsistency inevitably leads to a disparity in achievement. It can have serious implications for already disadvantaged students, many of whom don't have the opportunities outside school to acquire the foundational knowledge they need to experience educational success.

National firmly believes all children should have an equal opportunity to learn, achieve and excel at school.

#### **National will:**

- Require all primary and intermediate schools to spend an average of at least two hours a day on reading and writing, and one hour a day on maths.
- Share best-practice guidance with schools on timetabling to support them to meet the minimum class time requirements.

## 2. Minimum curriculum requirements for the basics

National believes the New Zealand Curriculum should serve as a comprehensive guide for teachers and parents, outlining what learning should be taking place in our classrooms each year. It should be evidence-based, knowledge-rich, and internationally comparable.

The current New Zealand Curriculum, however, falls far short of these expectations.

Rather than operating as a guide for teachers and parents, the New Zealand Curriculum prioritises “key competencies” which are vague, hard to measure, and impractical to report. It lacks guidance on what children should be learning and when they should be progressing to new concepts. This leads to significant variation in what is being taught.

In New Zealand, one curriculum level can span several school years, creating a built-in excuse not to act when children fall behind. Without annual progress outcomes, it is too easy for students who are not making progress to become lost in the system. Students can easily fall several years behind in their learning before schools or parents realise and put in place additional support.

If we want to turn around declining achievement, we need a curriculum that provides clear and detailed guidance to teachers and parents. The curriculum should clearly set out the non-negotiable knowledge and skills all children need to learn at each year level, so this is no longer left to chance. It should challenge and empower learners, support teachers, and ensure every child makes consistent progress.

That means a clear scope and sequence, documenting what knowledge and skills students need to learn – and in what order – to develop mastery in each subject over time. It also means clear indicators of the progression students should make for each year of learning to ensure they are on track to meet curriculum expectations.

A more detailed curriculum, alongside a clear scope and sequence for learning, will also make life easier for teachers, who will have clear guidance on what to teach and when.

### **National will:**

- Rewrite the curriculum to include clear requirements about the specific knowledge and skills primary and intermediate schools will need to cover for each school year in reading, writing, maths and science.



### 3. Regular standardised assessment and clear reporting to parents

National believes that to lift achievement, we must regularly and consistently assess student progress through the curriculum and provide crystal-clear, detailed reporting to parents.

Assessment is a powerful tool for ensuring progress. It allows teachers to better understand their students' strengths and weaknesses and provides parents with crucial information about their child's education progress.

But the current approach to assessment in New Zealand is inconsistent, which creates significant disadvantages for some students. In 2017, ERO found that while use of assessment had improved in some areas, almost half of primary maths teachers still weren't collecting or using assessment data to support student achievement.

Students deserve equal opportunities to benefit from assessment, regardless of their location, school or teacher. No student should fall behind without notice or support, and high-achieving students should not be held back by a lack of ambition in the education system.

Parents deserve to understand their child's progress and know they're getting the support and extension needed to reach their full potential. Assessment is key for communicating student progress to parents and ensuring their trust in the school system is not misplaced.

Teachers require a nationally consistent assessment tool that maps to the curriculum and accurately measures the progress of their students. Assessment information should document student learning over time, even if a child has changed schools or classes multiple times.

Assessment data is also essential to guide government decision-making, direct resources, and determine if policy changes are lifting achievement. New Zealand needs to stop embedding inequality through low expectations and inconsistent practice.

National will standardise the approach to assessment in reading, writing and maths across schools, to ensure that every child's progress is being monitored against the curriculum at least twice a year. National will also require regular reporting in a consistent format, so parents receive a clear and detailed understanding of their child's education progress.

#### **National will:**

- Require schools to assess student progress in reading, writing and maths at least twice a year every year from Year 3 to Year 8, using the e-asTTle assessment tool.
- Introduce a common reporting template, so every parent receives a detailed report on their child's progress in reading, writing, and maths at least twice a year.
- Introduce an age-appropriate skills check-in towards the end of Year 2 to assess basic skills such as counting, phonics, and letter formation.
- Expand the NMSSA study to sample all year groups for reading, writing, maths and science annually, to monitor progress towards the target of 80% of Year 8 students being at curriculum by 2030.

## 4. Better training and more tools to support teachers

Teachers are the backbone of our education system. If we want to see a positive shift in student outcomes, we must invest in our teaching workforce. Education is a key driver of social mobility, and we owe it to every student to provide teachers with the training and tools they need to succeed. For the past three decades, however, teachers have been let down by our education system.

Training programmes for new teachers don't focus enough on the basics like reading, writing, maths and science. Some degree pathways spend as little as 15 hours on maths. As a result, many new teachers graduate without the subject knowledge or teaching skills required for the role. There are no requirements for existing teachers to undertake professional development in reading, writing, maths and science.

A report by the Royal Society found nearly half of Year 4 teachers were only "moderately confident" teaching maths and "a majority of primary teacher candidates cannot answer mathematics questions appropriate for curriculum Level 4". Some teachers even reported scheduling maths less frequently because they lack the confidence to teach it. The TIMSS 2019 study revealed over half of all teachers felt that in maths "their professional support was fair, poor, or very poor". Education Hub found New Zealand teachers "are not regularly teaching literacy in an effective manner".

For decades, reviews of the New Zealand education system have called for greater focus on ensuring teachers understand how to use assessment to better support learner progression.

In addition to a lack of training, a common complaint from teachers is the lack of clarity in the curriculum, which forces them to spend hours of their own time lesson planning and searching for teaching resources. National believes teachers should be able to focus on their students, rather than spending excessive time searching for resources.

National wants every teacher to be confident and capable teaching children to their full potential, with the ability to extend and support learners. All teachers must have the skills and confidence they need to teach the basics brilliantly. With the right training and tools, teachers can help drive social mobility and ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed.

### **National will:**

- Improve new teacher training by requiring primary and intermediate teaching graduates to pass an exit exam demonstrating expertise in reading, writing, maths and science teaching in order to register as a teacher.
- Reprioritise professional development funding towards upskilling existing teachers in reading, writing, maths and science instruction, and the use of assessment, and make this a requirement for teaching certification.
- Scrap teacher registration fees, which teachers currently have to pay every three years to renew their practicing certificate.
- Reduce teacher workload by developing a high-quality, free, online resource bank that includes a variety of teaching materials such as lesson plans aligned with the new curriculum.

## Key issues

### Is there enough time for an hour each of reading, writing and maths?

Absolutely. Many great schools already achieve this and deliver excellent outcomes for their students. National will ensure timetabling practices from the best schools are shared across the system, so every child is given that opportunity.

### How will the new curriculum be different?

The current curriculum focusses too much on soft skills and not enough on defining the necessary subject-knowledge students should acquire after each year of schooling. National's Teaching the Basics Brilliantly plan will create new minimum requirements for the content that must be covered to ensure the curriculum is evidence-based, knowledge-rich, internationally comparable, and broken down into yearly learning outcomes. It will provide detailed guidance about what learning should take place and when, easing teacher workload and providing parents with confidence their children are making progress.

### How will this make teaching easier?

National's Teaching the Basics Brilliantly plan will ease the burden on teachers by taking the guesswork out of the curriculum, upskilling them through professional development, and supporting them with high-quality teaching resources and lesson plans mapped to the curriculum. This will free teachers up to teach, not just plan.

### How will schools measure progress against the new curriculum requirements?

National will require all schools to do at least two progression monitoring assessments per year in reading writing and maths using an updated version of the e-asTTle assessment tool from Year 3 to Year 8. This tool allows teachers to individually adjust the assessment level to match each child's level of attainment to gain a reliable indication of where they are against the curriculum and how much progress they are making. For the year-end assessment, key parameters such as content, length and question type would be standardised for each year level to provide robust and comparable data across the education system.

### What will the information from these assessments be used for?

These twice-yearly assessments will give parents and teachers a reliable indication of how much progress each child is making over the course of a year and inform decisions about the next steps in each child's education. This approach will also provide a national picture of how students are progressing against the curriculum, so the Government will know where to direct resource to ensure kids are on track to be at curriculum by the time they start high school.

### Why isn't science also being assessed?

National will make it a requirement to use the e-asTTle assessment tool at least twice a year. This tool, which many teachers are already familiar with, does not assess science. National will update the e-asTTle tool over time to add new content and align it with the new curriculum requirements. We will also investigate methods of assessment for science to provide teachers and parents with progress information on this critical subject.

### What information will be included in the twice-a-year progress reports?

The progress reports will provide parents with a detailed overview of their child's progress in reading, writing and maths, based on the new curriculum requirements. Parents will receive a rich and detailed report on each aspect of each subject, so they have a clear idea of their child's strengths and where they need more practice in individual areas. The reports will indicate clearly to parents how their child is progressing through the curriculum in each of these core areas compared with the previous year and over the current school year.

### **What will the Year 2 skills check-in look like?**

In Year 2, teachers will be required to evaluate whether students have acquired critical foundational skills and achieved key learning milestones. This will involve the use of simple, teacher-led assessments, such as a phonics check, which teachers can conduct in the classroom. This approach has proven effective both nationally and internationally in enhancing outcomes in fundamental areas such as reading, writing and maths.

### **How will initial teacher training change?**

Trainee teachers don't get enough opportunities to master the subject-knowledge, skills, and pedagogy they need to succeed in their role. By introducing an exit exam for new teachers, National's Teaching the Basics Brilliantly plan will increase the focus on reading, writing, maths and science in initial teacher training programmes, so every teacher feels empowered to teach the basics brilliantly once they arrive in the classroom.

### **How will professional development change?**

National will change the Government's Professional Learning and Development (PLD) priorities to align with the new curriculum requirements. This will mean a greater focus in PLD for upskilling teachers in reading, writing, maths and science instruction, and the use of assessment to lift outcomes. These changes will ensure teachers are provided with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively teach the basics and help their students progress through the curriculum.

### **How will teacher certification change?**

National will require evidence of professional learning and development in reading, writing, maths and science instruction in order to re-certify. This will ensure that all teachers have the necessary skills and knowledge to teach the basics brilliantly, and to use assessment to lift achievement. National will also scrap teacher registration and certification fees, which teachers currently have to pay every three years in order to continue teaching.

### **How will teaching resources and lesson plans benefit teachers?**

Instead of expecting teachers to constantly search for their own teaching material and start lesson planning from scratch, National will develop a high-quality, online digital resource bank that is mapped against the curriculum. This centralised bank of lesson plans and resources will support the development of teacher expertise, reflect evidence-based practice and reduce teacher workload. This will ease the burden on teachers and free them up to focus on teaching, not just planning.

## **Cost and funding**

Scrapping teacher registration will cost \$10 million per annum, to be funded from the operating allowance through the annual Budget process. Any other policy costs will be met from within Vote Education baselines. In the latest financial year, Vote Education received \$16.2 billion, up from \$11.1 billion in 2016-17 (an increase of \$5.1 billion or 46%).