

## THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM NATIONAL STANDARDS

### Standards-Referenced, Criterion-Referenced, Norm-Referenced: Explaining the difference.

#### INTRODUCTION

*The New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) National Standards are being implemented as one component of a wider strategy aimed at raising student achievement across the learning areas of the curriculum. Another component of this wider strategy, and closely linked with the implementation of the standards, is the requirement for plain language reporting to students and their parents about achievement and progress so that parents are better able to support their child's learning.

The implementation of National Standards in New Zealand, unlike standards-based reform in other jurisdictions, emphasises the importance of teacher professional judgments, assessment for learning principles and practice, and the importance of information sharing to support student learning. *This does not require additional assessment. There is no National test.*

In order to explain achievement and progress in the NZC National Standards context, it is important to understand the distinction between *standards-referenced* assessment, *criterion-referenced* assessment and *norm-referenced* assessment.

#### STANDARDS-REFERENCED – CRITERION-REFERENCED - NORM-REFERENCED

##### The NZC National Standards

The standards describe the literacy and numeracy knowledge, skills and understanding needed by year 1-8 students if they are to fully access, and meet the demands of, *The New Zealand Curriculum* across all learning areas. Like the NZC achievement objectives, the standards are broad descriptions of expected achievement. They provide a nationally consistent guide to illustrate what students should be aiming for, or beyond, as they move through years 1-8 of their schooling. However, the standards are more specifically and definitively linked to a period of time (after one / two / or three years at school) or year level (end of year 4 / 5 / 6 / 7 / or 8), than the achievement objectives. As such, the NZC National Standards, provide a more time-specific guide yet remain very broad indicators like the achievement objectives from which they are derived.

The standards are deliberately broad. They are not intended to be used as a test or a check-list. Each standard encompasses a number of skill and knowledge components. No one tool, task, activity, learning conversation or observation will be able to fully provide the information needed across all dimensions of each standard. Also, no one assessment can ever unequivocally provide a complete and accurate picture about a student's achievement. For this reason, evidence of achievement and progress should be drawn from a range of sources including: observation of students, learning conversations with students and their parents as well as more formal assessment tools and activities. Furthermore, as the NZC National Standards are concerned with reading, writing and mathematics skills needed across the curriculum, it is appropriate that evidence be collected across all learning areas.

Assessment in relation to National Standards is *standards-referenced*. Overall teacher judgments, and the consequent reporting to students and their parents about achievement and progress in relation to the National Standards, reflect 'on balance' *standards-referenced* judgments.

##### Standards-Referenced Assessment

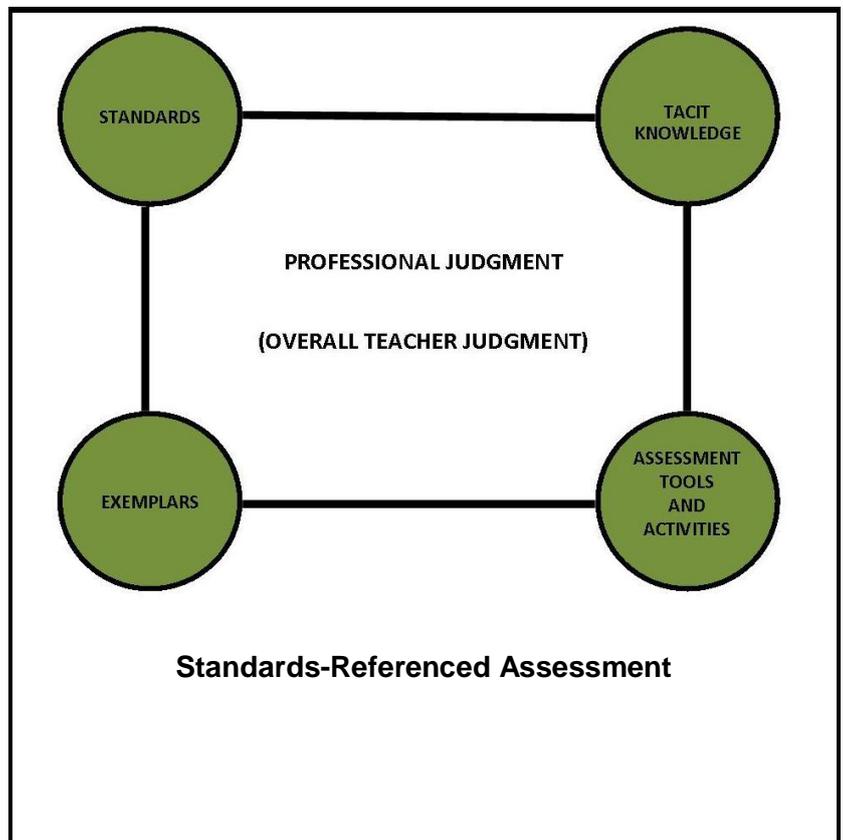
Standards-referenced assessment utilises broad descriptors of expected achievement as reference points in relation to which professional judgments about progress and achievement are made. These broad descriptions are supported by annotated examples to guide professional judgment. Evidence is drawn from a range of sources, formal and informal, and a professional judgment made.

Because the NZC National Standards are broad descriptors of expectation, it is likely that there will be some variation in level of achievement across the range of skills, knowledge and understanding expected by any given standard. The professional judgements teachers make about progress and achievement in relation to a standard are, therefore, overall teacher judgments about whether the student is 'on balance' achieving 'at' the standard or somewhere above or below the standard. This 'on-balance' judgment takes into account a range of information both tacit and explicit:

- *tacit knowledge* - internalised information embedded in personal experience (personal knowledge and insight) accumulated in the context of every day activity, observation, conversation, interaction and association with others (students, parents, colleagues ...)
- *assessment tools/tasks/activities* – evidence produced from the appropriate and purposeful (sensitive and tailored to context) use of resources, including specifically structures observations and conversations, to inquire into specific aspects of learning,

and considers this in relation to:

- *standards* – broad descriptors of where student achievement needs to be at specific stages of schooling in order to fully access and meet the demands of the National Curriculum,



guided by:

- *exemplars* – examples, criteria or illustrations to show in a concrete way what different levels of achievement look like

### Criterion-Referenced and Norm-Referenced Assessments

Assessment resources which contribute information to an overall teacher judgment may include *criterion-referenced* or *norm-referenced* tools, tasks, and activities. These will have been designed and used to purposefully, and appropriately, inquire into specific aspects of learning and, therefore, have a narrower focus than the broader National Standard in relation to which they are contributing information.

A *criterion-based assessment* is designed to judge the quality of a student's work against benchmarks of expected performance in relation to a specific competency or body of knowledge appropriate to the student, without the need to compare students. That is, an individual student either has the skills, knowledge and understandings being assessed or not.

A *norm-referenced assessment* is one that has been designed to determine the position of an individual relative to others in a population, with respect to the skills, knowledge and understanding being measured. The assessment is based on what the average student of a given age can do. It allows teachers to compare a student with others in the class or with others in the country.

### EXPLAINING THE OVERALL TEACHER JUDGMENT AND THE INFORMATION WHICH INFORMS IT

In the course of learning conversations with, and reporting to, students and their parents it is likely that teacher-student-parent discussion or written reports will discuss the various components of information and evidence that have contributed to the overall teacher judgment in relation to the National Standards.

In order to discuss this, it is important to understand the distinction between the broader *standard-referenced* assessment represented by the overall teacher judgment and the more specific *criterion-referenced*, and/or *norm-referenced* assessments which have contributed to that judgment. For example, a student may appear to be doing well in relation to a specific aspect of learning as illustrated by a norm-referenced assessment which places them as at the average in relation to their peers (e.g. stanine 5) yet 'on balance' the overall teacher judgment may indicate the student is below their expected standard.

In broad terms, this type of situation can occur for two reasons:

- Standards are broad descriptors but each component of the range of evidence which contributes to the overall teacher judgment will have a more specific focus. An overall teacher judgment does not represent a sum of all the parts, it represents an 'on balance' judgment across all the parts.

- Standards are intended to raise achievement and promote the best possible progress for all students. Therefore, in some cases they establish an expectation that is higher than the average.

In order to engage in learning conversations with, and report to, students and parents in a way that will support student learning, teachers will need to have considered, and be able to talk about, achievement and progress in a number of contexts:

- *How is the student doing compared to themselves?*

That is: what progress is being made - is the rate of progress reasonable given the student's unique context – is the student achieving their personal best ... ?

- *How is the student doing compared to peers?*

That is: given the standards-related achievement and progress of others in the student's cohort (other students for whom the same standard of reference is appropriate), how is the student doing?

- *What are the student's strengths and weaknesses?*

That is: what is the student particularly good at, what does the student particularly need help and support with?

- *What evidence has shaped the professional judgment made?*

That is: what evidence has been taken into account in making the overall teacher judgment and how does it support the conclusions reached?

- *What next?*

That is: what needs to happen next to support improved learning – what will the teacher do - what should the student do - how can the parent help?

It is important, when making an overall teacher judgment, that the standard of reference appropriate to the student be used to guide that judgment. However, it should also be noted, that schools and teachers have considerable flexibility in terms of the terminology they use when reporting to students and parents and discussing achievement and progress in relation to National Standards.

See: <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Reporting-to-parents-families-and-whanau> and <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/FAQ/Section-C-Reporting-to-parents-families-and-whanau>