



NATIONAL

Rewards for quality teachers

JOHN HARTEVELT Last updated 05:00 24/03/2012

Performance pay for teachers will be developed by the Government, with secondary principals told by Education Minister Hekia Parata to start "sorting the wheat from the chaff".

Figures obtained by The Dominion Post show millions of dollars are already being paid to scores of secondary principals partly on a performance basis, but Ms Parata has revealed she is "very keen" to develop performance measures for teachers and start rewarding them accordingly.

The choice of rewards for quality teachers were "pretty obvious," she said.

"Whether it's promotion, pay, opportunities to attend conferences or representative roles, or whatever – there are a mix of rewards that I think would be reasonably easy to settle on."

The Government was in the early stages of devising an evaluation system that would have "integrity and regard" to capture all of the different dimensions of quality teaching.

"Typically, you get a response that it's not possible to design something like that, because this is so difficult. Well, I don't agree," Ms Parata said.

"The precursor to being able to reward monetarily or in leadership opportunities is to have a really reliable evaluation system and one that has real integrity and regard for it.

"We're at the very early stages of developing that kind of system. But that would be essential to be able to get to a point where you could make discriminatory choices."

At present, there was an "annual progression" for teacher salaries approved by principals.

"By and large, the evidence is pretty clear, they all move up every year," she said.

In a speech to the Secondary Principals Association (Spanz) this week, Ms Parata said principals would "really make the difference".

"You are the ones who sort the wheat from the chaff ... I don't think there's much wheat and chaff sorting that goes these days. You are the ones who will be able to distinguish what will make the most difference for the students in your learning community."

The plan is set to spark a fierce debate with teacher unions, which adamantly oppose any kind of performance pay. But the idea has support from Spanz president Patrick Walsh and Ms Parata is pledging not to be cowed by the unions.

"Unions do what they properly should do, which is make arguments for the terms and conditions of their members," Ms Parata said. "But let's not confuse that with being exactly the same as excellent education outcomes or achievement for all students."

Mr Walsh said the current system of teacher pay was "inflexible".

"It does not give enough discretion to principals and boards to reward high performing teachers," he said.

Careful thought would need to be given to how performance was measured, however.

"If a teacher can make a difference and raise the achievement levels regardless of where they sit academically, then they ought to be rewarded for it."

New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) president Ian Leckie said performance pay had been shown international

to make no positive difference to academic achievement.

"Rewarding teachers differently creates too much high stakes stuff that actually stops collaboration, stops people working together and that is counter-productive to trying to make a better education system doing more for more kids," he said. He suggested the measure would be tough to implement without the support of unions.

"The involvement of unions in education reform is essential. The requirement to have an alliance and a close work relationship between policy and implementation is probably the key."

Teachers Council director Peter Lind said there was a "tension" between building a collegial team and recognising success. "I don't think we've had enough conversations around building the right kinds of pathways for teachers," I said.

"I think we also want to maintain motivation and ability for expert practitioners to maintain their role as expert practitioners without having them move in to other areas that increasingly become just management."

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