

School delays introduction of standards

A Christchurch primary school is refusing to implement the new national standards until staff receive the necessary training.

Somerfield School's board of trustees has decided to delay introducing the standards until at least term three, defying a Government directive that schools bring in the standards at the start of the school year.

Board chairman Geordie Hooft said the decision had not been made lightly, but the board did not see how teachers could implement the standards if they had not received any training on how to do so.

"It's a little bit like having to use something without being given the instruction booklet," he said.

"What is the point of setting something up that is not ready to use yet?"

The board was not boycotting national standards because that would be illegal, Hooft said.

It was just deferring their implementation until staff received sufficient training to understand them.

The standards measure every child aged five to 12 at, above, below or well-below national standards in literacy and numeracy.

Hooft said the board's decision was based on advice from the school's principal, Denise Torrey, who is also the Canterbury Primary Principals' Association president.

Torrey said the school would still be reporting data to the board, and parents would still be fully informed about their children's progress and achievement. However, the pupils' performance would be measured against the school's own benchmarks and not the national standards.

"Until we know about the national standards, it could all be a bit confusing. We might get it wrong," Torrey said.

Hooft said he had had children at Somerfield School for the past 10 years and as a parent had always understood how well his children were performing.

Torrey said the Government was putting boards under terrible pressure to do something they could not actually do yet. "Everyone will run around trying to reinvent the wheel and then they'll tell us how to do it anyway."

Training workshops were starting next week but it would take more than one session to learn how to implement the standards. The Government was ignoring international best practice when it came to professional development surrounding the standards, she said.

Staff should receive training this year and the standards should be implemented in 2011 or 2012, when staff had confidence they could do it properly.

The School Trustees Association (STA) sent a letter to boards last week reminding them they were legally bound to implement the standards.

STA president Lorraine Kerr could not be reached for comment.

Education Minister Anne Tolley said schools were not required to report to parents in terms one and two, but they were required to report against the standards at least twice a year.

"Parents want this information and they deserve it."