



# Conceptualising a Curriculum for the Future

BRONWYN WOOD

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON, TE HERENGA WAKA,

NEW ZEALAND

[BRONWYN.WOOD@VUW.AC.NZ](mailto:BRONWYN.WOOD@VUW.AC.NZ)

CATE Conference  
Wellington,  
Dec 1-3, 2025

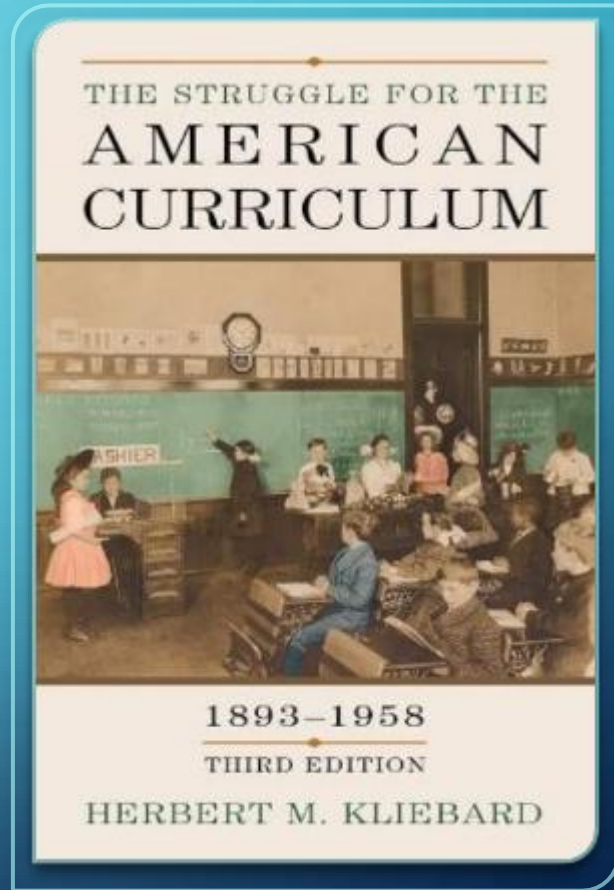


### Key questions:

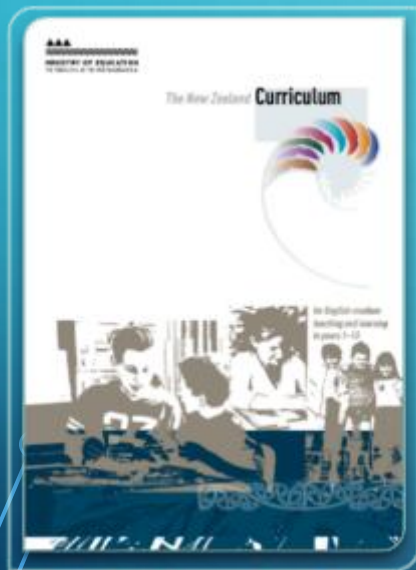
1. What's been happening in NZ curricular reform?
2. What drove these reforms?
3. How has knowledge been perceived within curricula?
4. What could a future curriculum look like?

“The school curriculum has been seen rightly, as a vital battlefield on which competing social and cultural ideals wage war” (Silver, 1980)

There is a deep-seated tendency in education to reduce complex educational debates into bipolar slogans cast in a state of permanent and irreconcilable opposition. (Alexander, 2008, pg, 72, paraphrased)



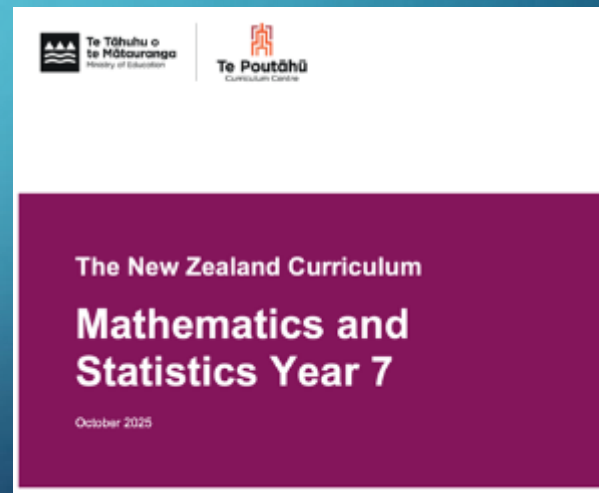
# A STORY OF 3 NZ CURRICULA 2007-2025



2007



2023



2025

A decorative graphic consisting of blue circuit-like lines with small circles at the ends, extending horizontally from the left and right sides of the central text box.

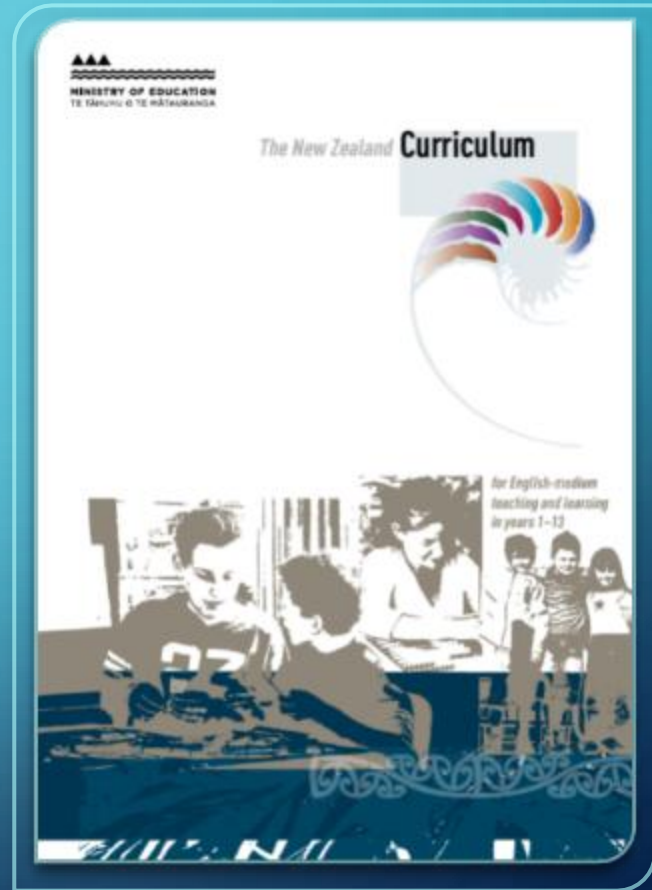
1. WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING  
IN NZ CURRICULAR REFORM?

2. WHAT DROVE THESE REFORMS?



# [1] NZ CURRICULUM 2007

- Over-crowding in previous curriculum – a key lever for reduced content prescription
- Strong emphasis on skills and competencies (front end of curriculum)
- Great emphasis on **local design** of curriculum (autonomy, creativity, responsiveness to learners).



# SHAPING CURRICULA AT THE MILLENNIUM



Knowledge based  
Economy (OECD, 1999)  
e.g. Key Competencies  
(OECD, 2005)



'Digital Natives' and  
21st C learners  
e.g. student-led  
learning; inquiry-based  
learning



'New curriculum'  
(Priestley & Sinnema,  
2014)  
e.g. less prescription  
Teachers as 'facilitators  
of learning' and  
curriculum makers

# INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION OF THE 'NEW' CURRICULUM...(TO VARYING EXTENTS...)

- England: 2008 *National Curriculum*
- Wales 2008 *The National Curriculum for Wales* [NCfW] + *Cwricwlwm Cymreig*
- Scotland 2010 *Curriculum for Excellence*
- Australia 2005 *Statements and Profiles for curriculum ; Essential Learnings and Capabilities* (across 6 states)
- South Africa *Curriculum 2005*

## Features of the 'new' curriculum

- constructivist teaching styles,
- higher curricular autonomy
- a priority on student agency
- teachers delegated as 'facilitators of learning' (Biesta & Priestley, 2013; Priestley & Sinnema, 2014).



# NARRATIVES THE '21ST CENTURY LEARNER':

- Learner agency and choice: “driving their own learning”
- Very strong adoption of digital technology
- Constructivist learning styles
- Teachers as ‘guides on the side’
- Knowledge not a feature – part of skills – priority on flexible agile skills for the global marketplace



# TEACHER ROLES IN CLASSROOM

- New Zealand students receive lower rates of teacher-directed instruction than the OECD average – and much lower than most English-speaking countries in the OECD (Ministry of Education, 2019)



# CURRICULA COMPARISON ENGLAND AND NZ

## NEW ZEALAND (NZC 2007)

### Social Studies Curriculum Level 3 (Y 4-6)

- “Students will gain knowledge, skills and experience to understand how:
- people remember and record the past in different ways
- Cultural practices vary but reflect similar purposes.

## ENGLAND (2013)

### Key stage 2 History (7-11 years old)

Students are required to learn about:

- Britain in the Stone Age to Iron Age
- Britain's settlement by Anglo-Saxons and Scots
- Achievement of early civilisations an in-depth study of one e.g. Indus Valley, Ancient Egypt/Greece).

# GROWING CRITIQUE OF 2007 CURRICULUM

- High curricular autonomy = high teacher workload
- ‘Dislodging’ of knowledge (Wood & Sheehan, 2012; 2020; Priestley & Sinnema, 2014; Hughson, 2020)

“Students are at the mercy of individual schools or teachers regarding the knowledge they encounter and equity is threatened” (Sinnema, 2008, p. 974)

- Growing inequalities of outcomes within and between schools (Wilson et al, 2017; PISA 2018)
- Declining literacy, numeracy, scientific and social science outcomes and over-reliance of digital technology and student-centred learning (PISA 2018, NMSSA 2018; Sutcliffe, 2020).

## Reading block: NZ's falling literacy crisis - why our kids can't read



By Dubby Henry

NZ Herald - 17 Aug, 2022 04:50 AM · 11 mins to read

252

Comments



Gift article



Save



Share



Holly Hancox spent thousands on private schooling and tuition trying to help her son with his reading difficulties. Photo / Brett Phibbs

NZ children used to lead the world in reading. Now our literacy rates have fallen

# HISTORY – THE CANARY IN THE COAL MINE?

- 2015 Petition by 2 Ōtorohanga College students calling for compulsory teaching of NZ land wars
- 2019 Petition by NZ History teachers Association for compulsory teaching of Aotearoa NZ histories
- Sept 2019 Announcement [NZ history to be taught in all schools](#) (PM Jacinda Arden, Labour)
- March 2022 Launch of Aotearoa NZ Histories Curriculum
- Full Curriculum 'Refresh': Draft English and Maths and Social Sciences (2023)
- Incomplete when Labour lost power October 2023.

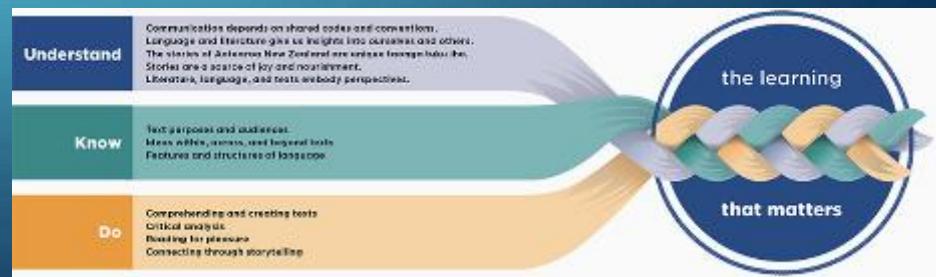


Otorohanga College students, from left, Rhiannon Magee, Tai Jones and Leah Bell were behind the petition, which nearly 13,000 people signed.



# TE MĀTAIAHO – THE REFRESHED NZ CURRICULUM 2021-2023

- “Curriculum Refresh for Clearer, More Relevant Learning”.
- Priority on “language, identities and culture” - Mātauranga Māori woven throughout the NZC (MoE, 2021)
- Shift from an outcomes-based curriculum to ‘a progression-focused curriculum’ (MoE, 2023)
- Framing of Understand – Know – Do



# Whakapapa of Te Mātaiaho

The design of the whakapapa encompasses seven curriculum components. The simple circular design is made up of whakarae (patterns) that breathe life into the whakapapa and reflect the ideas of observing, reading the signs, and navigating our way forward.

## MĀTAIRANGI | The guiding kaupapa

The overarching kaupapa, expressing the centrality of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its principles, and New Zealand's vision for education  
*Mātai ki te rangi, homai te kauhau wānanga ki uta, ka whiti he ora. | Look beyond the horizon, and draw near the bodies of knowledge that will take us into the future.*

The outer rings represent our guiding kaupapa.

## MĀTAIAHIKĀ | Connecting to place and community

Learning through local relationships with tangata whenua and the community

*Mātai kōrero ahiahi. | Keep the hearth occupied, maintain the stories by firelight.*

Poutama curves represent local relationships with tangata whenua and the community.

## MĀTAIOHO | School curriculum design and review

The process by which schools draw on the national curriculum to design their school curriculum

*Mātai oho, mātai ara, whītiki, whakatika. | Awaken, arise, and prepare for action.*

Unaunahi scales represent knowledge, wealth, purpose, and know-how.

## MĀTAIAHO | Weaving learning within and across learning areas

The purpose, big ideas, knowledge, and practices for each of the eight learning areas

*Mātai rangaranga te aho tū, te aho pae. | Weave the learning strands together.*

Tarata-a-kae niho notches represent diversity, resilience, and mana.

## MĀTAINUKU | Creating a foundation

The purpose of the curriculum, and its principles and their associated calls to action

*Mātai ki te whenua, ka tiritia, ka poupoua. | Ground and nurture the learnings.*

The centre rings represent purpose and calls to action.

## MĀTAITIPU | Vision for young people

The educational vision for young people, as conceived by young people

*Mātaipū hei papa whenuakura. | Grow and nourish a thriving community.*

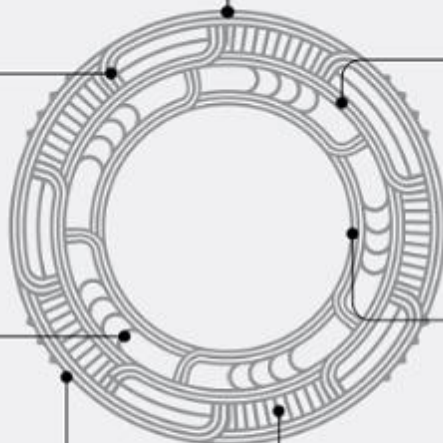
The inner rings and circle space represent the vision and ākonga at the centre.

## MĀTAIREA | Supporting progress

The whole schooling pathway, and the overarching focus and essential pedagogies for kaiako and kaimahi at each phase of learning

*Mātai ka rea, ka pihī hei māhuri. | Build and support progress.*

Niho kuri lines represent building and supporting the development of ākonga.



# [3] NZ CURRICULUM REFORM – NATIONAL COALITION GOVERNMENT 2023-NOW

- New ‘Refreshed’ curriculum that would be ‘knowledge-rich’ and based on ‘science of learning’ ‘rebalancing’ of history
- Compulsory structured literacy and structured maths in primary schools



2023 Draft

During the first year	During the second year
<i>Informed by prior learning, teach students to:</i>	<i>Informed by prior learning, teach students to:</i>
communicate in complete sentences, correctly using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- regular past-tense verbs (suffix -ed)</li><li>- comparative and superlative adjectives (suffixes -er and -est)</li><li>- coordinating conjunctions (e.g., and, but, for, so)</li><li>- sequencing connectives</li></ul>	communicate in complete sentences, correctly using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- common irregular plural nouns and past-tense verbs</li><li>- third-person singular present-tense verbs (suffix -s)</li><li>- adverbs (suffix -ly)</li><li>- subordinating conjunctions (e.g., because, until, when)</li><li>- time connectives</li></ul>

## Te Mātaiaho

THE REFRESHED  
NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM

The learning areas of Mātaiaho  
**Mathematics and statistics**

*Mātai aho tāhūnui,  
Mātai aho tāhūroa,  
Hei takepau wānanga  
E hore nei.  
Lay the kaupapa down  
And sustain it,  
The learning here*

# 3 MATHS CURRICULA IN 3 YEARS

2023

DRAFT

Te Mātaiaho

**The New Zealand  
Curriculum**

**MATHEMATICS AND  
STATISTICS YEARS 0-8**

2024

2025

The New Zealand Curriculum

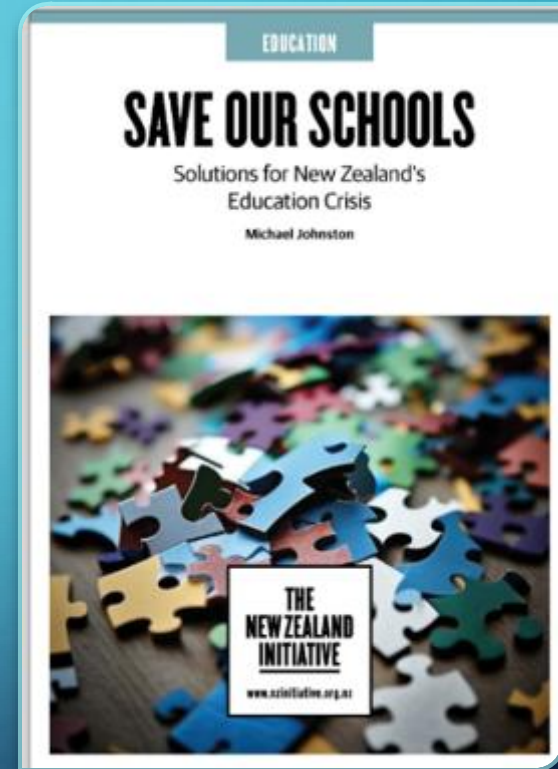
**Mathematics and  
Statistics Year 7**

October 2025



# REFLECTIONS: WHY 'KNOWLEDGE-RICH' AND WHY NOW?

- Faltering economies...(the 'global skills' narrative didn't work)? (note OECD Learning Compass 2030)
- Declining literacy and numeracy
- Evidence of growing inequalities despite progressive approaches?
- Dominant voices from England - claims of 'halting the decline'.
- Return to 'traditional' approaches to education







**Rt Hon Sir Nick Gibb** • 2nd  
Former MP for Bognor Regis & Littlehampton and former Minis...  
2mo •

+ Follow

Good morning Auckland! Here to support New Zealand Education Minister, **Hon Erica Stanford MP**'s brilliant reforms to the teaching of reading and maths, and the introduction of a knowledge-rich curriculum.



**Hon Erica Stanf...** • 2nd  
Member of Parliament for East ...  
1mo •

+ Connect

New Zealand was invited to share our world-leading education reforms on the international stage at the **Core Knowledge** conference in Florida. There is huge interest in how New Zealand is developing a knowledge-rich curriculum and implementing explicit teaching of structured literacy and maths.

I presented alongside **Paul Givan** Minister of Education for Northern Ireland, **The Rt Hon Sir Nick Gibb**, Minister of State for Education schools for England and **E.D. Hirsch, Jr.** the incredible US academic who penned the book, "The schools we need and why we don't have them". This book was read by all three Ministers on the panel at different times and has played an important role in education reforms in a ...more

192

26 comments · 10 reposts



Like



Comment



Repost



Send



Add a comment...



Most relevant ▾



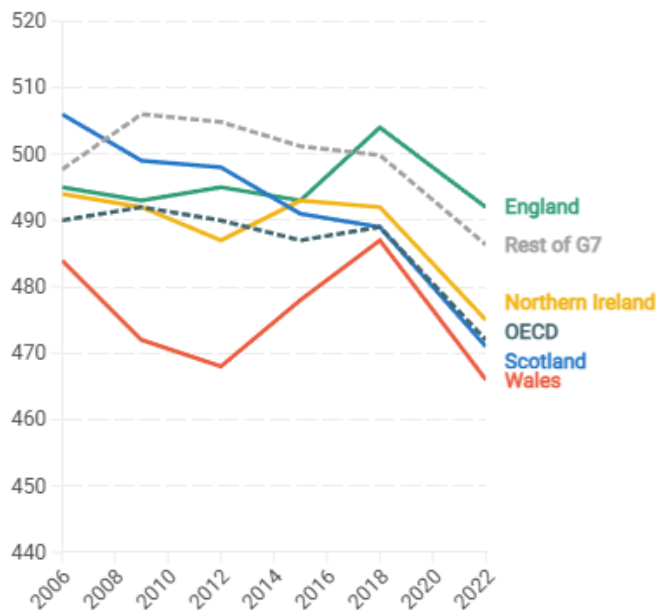
**Elaine Fleet** • 3rd+  
Tutor of English and Drama (Freelance)  
1mo •

How can it possibly be 'knowledge rich' if you are making Maori mythology a must in the curriculum? This isn't verifiable and is based on a belief system ie same as a religion. I have been a supporter of Erica as the Education Minister ...more

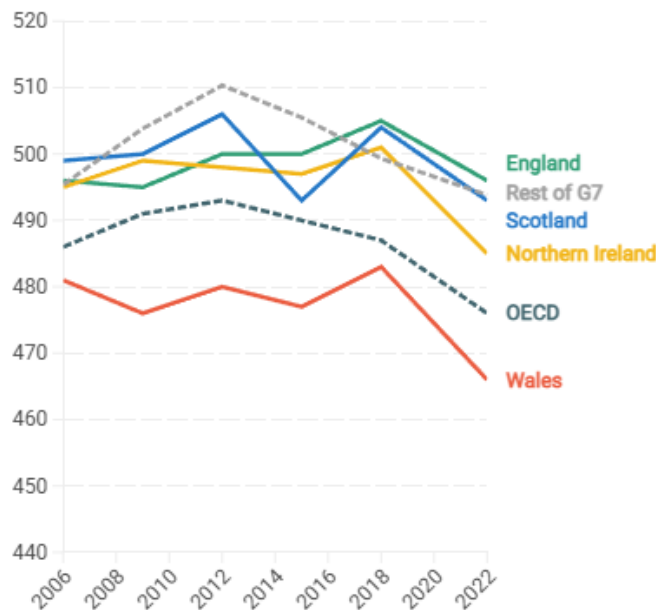
Like · 15 · Reply · 10 replies

Figure 1. Average maths and reading level for 15-year-olds

PISA maths scores



PISA reading scores



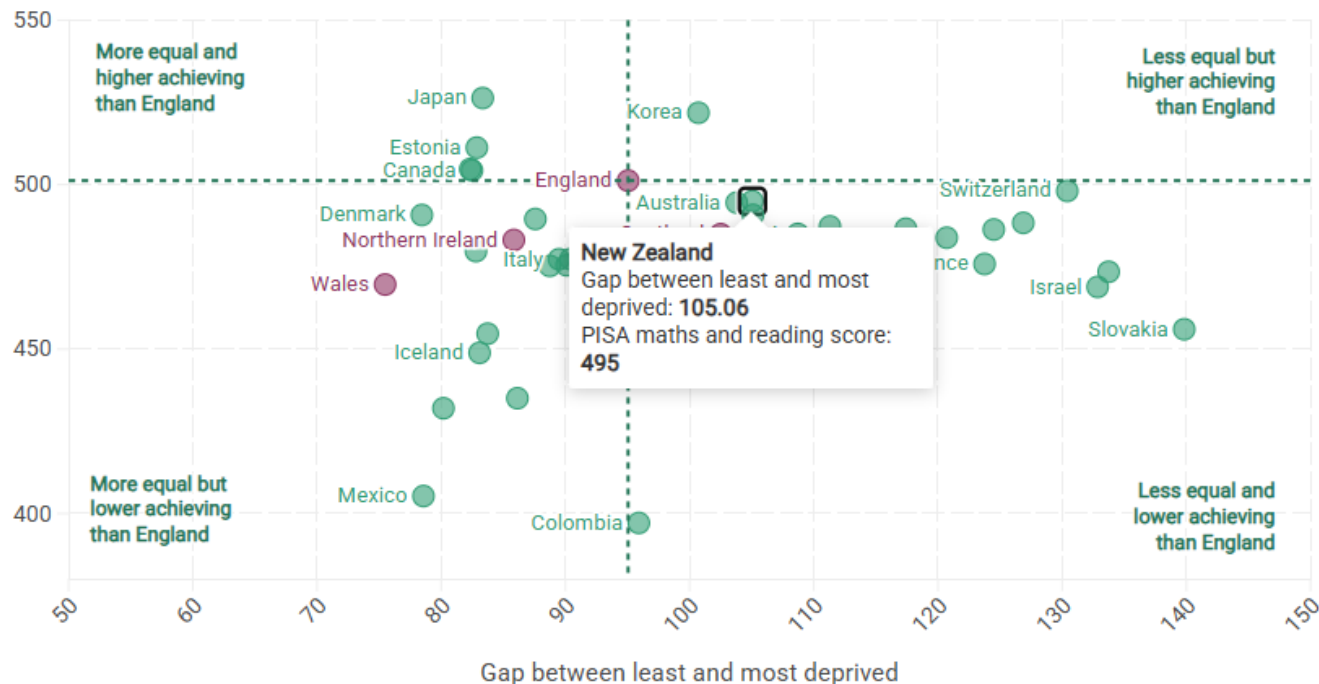
Source: Based on data from [Ingram et al. \(2023\)](#) and [OECD \(2007, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019, 2023\)](#). Note: PISA results are scaled to fit approximate normal distributions that have a mean of around 500 and a standard deviation of about 100. This means that only around 2% of students score above 700 or below 300 points. Note: England's maths and reading scores fell by 12 and 9 points respectively from 2018, representing falls of around 10% of a standard deviation. Scores are comparable across countries and across time. Tests are 'low-stakes' – they do not determine any future outcomes.

[Download the data](#)

Figure 2. The relationship between maths and reading level for 15-year-olds and socio-economic gaps in the OECD countries, 2022

● OECD countries ● UK nations

PISA maths and reading score



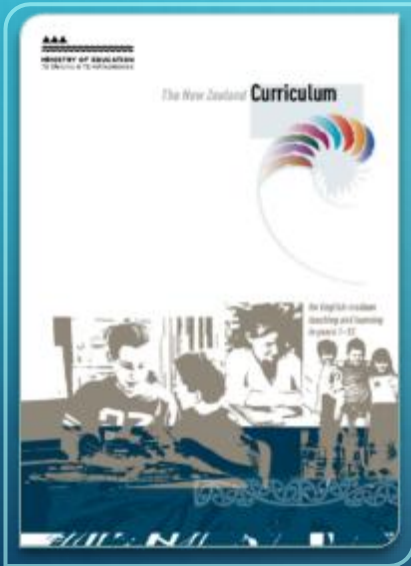
Source: [OECD, 2023](#) • Note: The horizontal axis measures the gap between the most and least disadvantaged quintiles in reading and maths (averaged). The vertical axis plots country-level averages of reading and maths scores. Green dashed lines indicate England's position. PISA results are scaled to fit approximate normal distributions that have a mean of around 500 and a standard deviation of about 100. This means that only around 2% of students score above 700 or below 300 points.

[Download the data](#)

The background is a blue gradient. In the corners, there are white line-art illustrations of circuit boards or neural networks, with lines and small circles representing nodes.

### 3. HOW HAS KNOWLEDGE BEEN PERCEIVED WITHIN CURRICULA?

# POSITION 1: KNOWLEDGE AS SKILLS



- Knowledge as 21<sup>st</sup>C skills and competencies
- Removal of disciplinary knowledge and expertise
- Prioritised efficiency and genericism
- Instrumental conceptions of knowledge
- Knowledge serves the needs of rapidly changing global economy.



## POSITION 2: KNOWLEDGE AS EPISTEMOLOGIES (FOR TRANSFORMATION)



- Epistemic decolonisation through inclusion of Maturanga (Māori) Knowledge
- Aotearoa New Zealand Histories curriculum as a chance to address ills of colonisation/past
- Some commitment to scholar academic ideology - disciplines valued but through multiple epistemic lens
- Knowledge as socially transformative – greater valuing of knowledge(s)

# POSITION 3: KNOWLEDGE AS FACTS



- Focus on ‘knowledge-rich’ curriculum
- Priority on literacy and numeracy and disciplinary knowledge
- Science of learning and focus on progression
- Remove Māori language and focus – leaving tokenistic remainders (e.g. logo)
- Strong focus on literacy/numeracy for labour market and future success



- What is the curriculum? It has to do with giving students what they didn't ask for [...] or weren't looking for. (Biesta 2025, p. 7).
- It is evident that content selection matters if teachers are to offer students “opportunities for widening their horizons, transforming their perspectives, and cultivating their moral sensitivity” (Deng, 2018, p. 377).

A  
CURRICULUM  
FOR THE  
FUTURE:  
CREATING  
INFORMED,  
CRITICAL  
ACTIVE,  
CITIZENS



Knowledge matters



Skills matter



Social justice  
matters



The beautiful 'risk'  
of education







# REFERENCES

- Biesta, G. (2014). Pragmatising the curriculum: Bringing knowledge back into the curriculum conversation, but via pragmatism. *The Curriculum Journal*, 25(1), 29-49. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2013.874954>
- Biesta, G. (2025). The future of education in the impulse society: Why schools and teachers matter. *PROSPECTS*. doi:10.1007/s11125-025-09723-1
- Biesta, G., & Priestley, M. (2013). A curriculum for the twenty-first century? In M. Priestley & G. Biesta (Eds.), *Reinventing the Curriculum : New trends in curriculum policy and practice* (pp. 229-236). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Deng, Z. (2018). Contemporary curriculum theorizing: crisis and resolution. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 1-20. doi:10.1080/00220272.2018.1537376
- Hughson, T. A. (2022). Disrupting Aotearoa New Zealand's curricular consensus: From 'world-leading' curriculum to curriculum refresh 2007–2021. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*. doi:10.1007/s40841-021-00238-9
- Hughson, T. A., & Wood, B. E. (2022). The OECD Learning Compass 2030 and the future of disciplinary learning: a Bernsteinian critique. *Journal of Education Policy*, 37(4), 634-654. doi:10.1080/02680939.2020.1865573
- Priestley, M., & Sinnema, C. (2014). Downgraded curriculum? An analysis of knowledge in new curricula in Scotland and New Zealand. *The Curriculum Journal*, 25(1), 50-75. doi:10.1080/09585176.2013.872047
- Wood, B. E., & Hughson, T. (2025). A framework for analysis of curriculum pendulum swings: Comparing curriculum reform in England, Wales, and New Zealand. *The Curriculum Journal*, 00, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.70008>