

Office of Hon Erica Stanford

Minister of Education
Minister of Immigration
Lead Coordination Minister for the Government's Response
to the Royal Commission's Report into Historical Abuse in
State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions



21 JUL 2026

ESOIA994

Laydan Mortensen
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Tēnā koe Laydan,

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request, received on 17 June 2026, in which you requested the following information:

Under the Official Information Act 1982, I request copies of any reports, research, surveys, polling, focus group findings, briefing papers, aide-memoires, Cabinet papers, communications advice, talking points, draft media lines, or other advice relating to parental understanding of NCEA grading terminology.

In particular, I request any information used to support the statement made by Minister for Education Erica Stanford on 4 August 2025 that:

"Parents can't help their children improve their grades when they don't know what they mean."

This request specifically concerns evidence relating to understanding of the grading labels "Not Achieved", "Achieved", "Merit" and "Excellence", rather than broader understanding of the NCEA system, qualification structure, endorsements, credits, literacy/numeracy requirements, or university entrance requirements.

If any research or advice distinguished between:

- (a) parental understanding of NCEA grading terminology, and*
- (b) parental understanding of the wider NCEA system, I request copies of that distinction.*

I also request any comparative analysis, modelling, polling, or advice regarding whether the proposed A+ to E grading scale would be easier for parents to understand than the current NCEA grading terminology.

If no evidence, research, or advice exists specifically supporting the claim that parents do not understand the current grading terminology, I request confirmation of this.

I have considered your request under the Act.

It is not possible to isolate the names of the grades as the reason for parents not understanding NCEA. The grading system is linked to the credit based system and causes confusion for parents.

My statements were based on the many conversations I have with parents and also the reporting of the Education Review Office (ERO) which has made very explicit findings that parents struggle to understand NCEA.

In [Set up to succeed: How well is NCEA Level 1 working for our schools and students?](#), ERO used the heading:

“Parents and whānau still find NCEA Level 1 difficult to understand.”

ERO found that almost half of parents did not know what their child was required to do to gain NCEA Level 1, and almost half did not feel informed enough to help their child make the right subject choices.

ERO said earlier research had also found that parents struggled to understand how NCEA could work for their child, leaving students to manage their own NCEA journey.

ERO recorded several specific problems:

- The language used to explain NCEA was too complicated.
- There was too much information, and it was often too broad rather than focused on what parents needed to know.
- Even highly educated and highly engaged parents found Level 1 difficult to understand and explain.
- Parents wanted clearer explanations of marking criteria, internal and external assessments, co-requisites, and the consequences of subject choices.

ERO's 2023 report, [Education For All Our Children: Embracing Diverse Ethnicities](#), found:

- 51 percent of whānau from ethnic communities said they found NCEA confusing.
- 59 percent of secondary students from ethnic communities were confused about how NCEA worked.

ERO's broader conclusion was that both learners and whānau from ethnic communities found NCEA confusing, even though many of those families had high educational aspirations and their children often achieved strongly.

Thank you again for your email. You have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision. You can do this by writing to info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Kind regards



Hon Erica Stanford
Minister of Education