



Inquiry into the identification and support for students with the significant challenges of dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorders in primary and secondary schools

Report of the Education and Science Committee

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Executive summary

Our inquiry examines the delivery of education for students with three particular learning support needs: dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Through analysis of submissions and advice, we aim to determine how well the education system supports students with these learning needs in primary and secondary schools.

The **terms of reference** for this inquiry were to:

- identify best educational practice for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students
- investigate current screening for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students in primary and secondary schools
- investigate support to, and in, schools for the transition through education for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorders, and the adaptations for their learning, including special assessment conditions
- investigate whether teacher training and professional development prepare teachers to identify and support education of dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students
- review the implementation of the 2008 New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline recommendations specific to education, to assess the level of progress.

Introduction

We examine provisions within the current education system that support students who need additional learning support. The **Teaching as Inquiry** process aims to identify a student's strengths and needs, and determines the level of support or intervention required for that student to progress. We investigate the adequacy of **current funding models**. We discuss strengthening schools' promotion of **inclusive education**, which affirms that students with special educational needs have the same legal rights to enrol and receive education at State schools as other students.

We were advised of work the Ministry of Education is doing to strengthen education for students with additional learning support needs, including the **Learning Support Update** and the **Professional Learning and Development Review**.

We found that submissions to our inquiry highlighted several key themes:

- Parents need more information about what support is available, and assistance with accessing that support.
- Schools are inconsistent and variable in their approach to supporting students with learning support needs.
- The capability and capacity of teachers, teacher aides, and other specialist support providers varies widely between schools.

- Submitters helped us determine whether the current provision of support services adequately meets the needs of students with learning differences.
- Submitters suggested a range of ways to improve the transitioning of students with learning support needs from early childhood education through to tertiary education.

Best educational practice for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students

Submitters suggested several **best-practice learning adaptations** to support the education of students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. These included reader/writer support, assistive technology, extra time for learning and responding, special assessment conditions, and a variety of programmes supporting neuroplasticity, motor-control, and phonological awareness programmes.

We note that submitters suggested a diverse range of approaches and adaptations that they considered to be best practice, but we were advised that some of these approaches have varying scientific merit. The ministry has published and hosts several best-practice resources on dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD on its **Literacy Online** and **Inclusive Education** websites.

We identify areas that warrant further research, including analysis of **international best practice**, strengthening **learning support for Māori, Pasifika, refugees, and migrants**, and the effect of **innovative learning environments** on students with learning differences. Our recommendations centre on strengthening and disseminating resources for parents and educators about dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD.

Current screening for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students

We discuss the importance of strengthening the **early identification** of additional learning needs, because delayed progress cumulatively affects academic achievement, self-worth, and personal aspirations. We discuss the adequacy of early screening tools, including the **B4 school check** that helps identify whether a child needs more support before school, and the **Special Education Early Intervention Service** that provides specialist support for children in early childhood.

Challenges to the early identification of learning support needs include the cost and accessibility of screening services, and the age and context in which such learning needs become apparent. However, a critical feature of education in New Zealand is that support does not depend on diagnosis. Schools have the data and resources required to screen and respond to students' learning differences. We make recommendations on how schools could better identify and meet the need for additional learning support in their students.

Support available for the transition through schooling for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students, and adaptations for their learning, including special assessment conditions

We examine how **transitions** through schooling for students with additional learning needs could be strengthened, including establishing the role of a person responsible for managing transitions, and better communication within Communities of Learning.

We discuss strengthening several adaptations currently provided to students with additional learning needs. We discuss the effectiveness of **Reading Recovery** for students with dyslexia, and investigate increasing the provision of **speech language therapy** to meet demand. We examine the roles of **Special Education Needs Coordinators** and **Resource Teachers**, and how these roles can be strengthened and better used within

Communities of Learning. We discuss the provision of **assistive technology** and **special assessment conditions**.

Investigate how teacher training and professional development prepares teachers to identify and support the education of dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students

We discuss strengthening the professional practice of teachers to meet the additional learning needs of students, and make recommendations about **Initial Teacher Education** and the **professional development** of teachers. We examine the training of specialist teachers, and how **best practice and expertise can be better shared within Communities of Learning**.

Review the implementation of the 2008 New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline recommendations specific to education, to assess the level of progress

The **New Zealand ASD Guideline** was jointly produced by the Ministries of Health and Education in 2008, and has recently been updated. We investigate how the Ministry of Education is implementing and using the education recommendations in the guideline.

Although many resources are available to support students with ASD, we recommend a review of the ministry's ASD action plan, in consultation with parents, specialists, and educators.

Minority view of Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, New Zealand First, and the New Zealand Labour Party

The concerns raised by submitters helped the committee analyse the adequacy of New Zealand's educational system in supporting students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD in primary and secondary schools. The recommendations in this report were developed after significant cross-party discussion and collaboration, and in consultation with advisers, and are endorsed by each committee member. Where parties have disagreed with policy direction, or sought to further the recommendations of the report, they have included a minority view.

Summary of recommendations

The Education and Science Committee makes the following recommendations to the Government.

Introduction

- 1 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to consider collecting the school-entry data from schools and Communities of Learning to better identify responses to possible need.
- 2 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to consider increasing the funding of Intensive Wraparound Services to meet student needs.
- 3 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to extend its promotion of inclusive education information and resources to support teachers, including those who may be teaching students with needs arising from dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder.

- 4 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to develop policy on learning support needs to explicitly explain what best practice for inclusion is, and how monitoring and professional development will support this policy in all schools.
- 5 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to investigate the equity of access to publically funded services for Māori and Pasifika.
- 6 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to review and, as necessary, update advice about, and resources for, students with additional learning support needs.
- 7 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to develop and disseminate consistent intervention guidelines and support pathways for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder.
- 8 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to work with Dyslexia NZ to develop a specific pathway guide for families of students with dyslexia.
- 9 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to work with Dyspraxia NZ to develop a specific pathway guide for families of students with dyspraxia.
- 10 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to develop specific pathway guides for families of students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, and foetal alcohol syndrome.
- 11 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to develop more formal links to a range of national and international experts to ensure that its policies, approaches, and supports on specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder, are easily accessible, coherent, and consistent with research evidence and best practice.
- 12 That the Government ensure that the Ministry of Education makes evidence regarding best practice and advice about dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder available to parents and schools so they can make fully informed decisions when contemplating programmes.
- 13 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to investigate the provision of one-stop-shop access to specialist help, which schools can offer families once students have had learning support needs identified.
- 14 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to encourage schools to develop a plan for individual learning needs for all students identified with learning support needs.
- 15 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to continue to investigate working with bodies, such as the Children's Commissioner, to create a mediation and dispute-resolution model for parents and schools, which uses arbitration as a last resort.

Best educational practice for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students

- 16 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to initiate research on the effect of innovative learning environments on students with additional learning support needs.
- 17 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to research what is needed to strengthen learning support policy, and include culturally appropriate researchers who can identify Māori, Pasifika, and refugee and migrant learning support needs.

18 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to research what is working, and what is failing, for students with learning support needs (nationally and internationally).

19 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to conduct research with a Māori research organisation to look at barriers to Te Tiriti o Waitangi issues, equity issues from a Māori perspective, and recommendations for change.

20 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to convene a process with learning support research communities to identify what research gaps exist.

Current screening for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students

21 That the Government encourage the Ministry of Education to explore options for earlier identification, assessment, and resources for the literacy, language, and learning needs typically associated with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder.

22 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to investigate lessons from the B4 school check modelled in the State of Victoria, Australia, for learning differences such as dyslexia, which is universally applied to all schools in the state.

23 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to work with the Ministry of Health, as part of the Learning Support Update, on strengthening transition support for all students receiving Early Intervention services, and strengthening referral pathways for students with autism spectrum disorder and dyspraxia.

24 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to investigate, as part of the Learning Support Update, creating targets for the timely identification of the need for, and provision of, additional support for students with learning differences.

Support available for the transition through schooling for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students and adaptations for their learning, including special assessment conditions

25 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to work with schools and Communities of Learning on opportunities to strengthen teaching for all students, and improve access to, and coordination of, resources and services so they travel with students throughout their education pathway.

26 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to develop further advice on the effectiveness of Reading Recovery for students identified as having dyslexia, and subsequent interventions for students who may need it.

27 That the Government require the Ministry of Education, as part of the Learning Support Update, to conduct an analysis of the demand for communication services for students with speech, language, and communication needs associated with dyslexia, dyspraxia, or autism spectrum disorder, and to make recommendations for workforce planning, and that policy is changed to meet the needs identified.

28 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to continue to work with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, and the cluster managers of Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour, to develop resources to promote good practice for access to special assessment conditions.

29 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to continue to work to provide more equitable access to special assessment conditions—in particular, for low-decile schools.

- 30 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to support building capability for special assessment conditions staff.
- 31 That the Government ensure that the Ministry of Education investigates current research on assistive technology for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder, and updates its policies on effective teaching and assessment accordingly.
- 32 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to investigate the feasibility of a recognised qualification for Special Education Needs Coordinators.
- 33 That the Government task the Ministry of Education with assessing the feasibility of funding full-time, trained Special Education Needs Coordinators for schools with more than 200 students.
- 34 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to develop an information and support package for Special Education Needs Coordinators.

Investigate how teacher training and professional development prepares teachers to identify and support the education of dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students

- 35 That the Government ensure that the Ministry of Education works with the Education Council to strengthen initial and ongoing teacher education to identify and respond to students' additional learning needs, particularly those associated with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder.
- 36 That the Government ensure that the Ministry of Education asks the Education Council to consider amending the Practising Teacher Criteria Key Indicators list to include "ability to create an inclusive classroom, meet the needs of students who need learning support, and access additional help where needed", as well as "(ii) select teaching approaches, resources, technologies and learning and assessment activities that are inclusive and effective for diverse ākonga".
- 37 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to strengthen professional development and support for teachers to identify and respond to learners with additional needs, such as dyslexia, and to engage with the parents of these children.
- 38 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to incorporate its work into strengthening professional development and support for teachers, to identify and respond to learners with additional needs, into its existing Professional Learning and Development programme.
- 39 That the Government ensure that the Ministry of Education makes available professional development for specialist teachers (such as Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour and Resource Teachers: Literacy) and teacher aides to strengthen working relationships, improve role clarity, and build knowledge of inclusive practice.
- 40 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to review the alignment of specialist services, such as Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour, and Resource Teachers Literacy, and other specialist services, within Communities of Learning.
- 41 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to investigate and lift the capability of the specialist teacher workforce, including the current capacity and capability of the specialist teacher workforce to support students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder in schools and Communities of Learning.

42 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to ensure that Special Education Needs Coordinators' training and professional development focus on creating a school culture of inclusion, and providing advice about access to additional services, including assisting with Ongoing Resourcing Scheme applications alongside families.

43 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to work with Communities of Learning on opportunities to use expertise in multiple schools.

Review the implementation of the 2008 New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline recommendations specific to education, to assess the level of progress

44 That the Government require the Ministry of Education to continue to build sector capability that includes autism spectrum disorder-specific content, inclusive practice, and curriculum planning.

45 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to review its autism spectrum disorder action plan in response to the updated New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline.

46 That the Government task the Ministry of Education to work with parents, the Ministry of Health, and Autism NZ to review information resources for parents.

1 Introduction

Supporting students with learning support needs

The delivery of education for students with learning support needs has been the subject of review in recent years. In 2010, the public were invited to participate in a Review of Special Education led by the Ministry of Education. Canvassing opinions from throughout the sector, including those of parents and whānau, the review signalled improvements that needed to be made to the delivery of education for students with learning support needs.

In response to the review, the Government launched the Success for All – Every School, Every Child four-year plan in 2010.¹ The policy set out changes to be made over four years and included increasing the number of children eligible for Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) funding, introducing performance targets for schools to demonstrate inclusive practice, changes to the provision of specialist services, and a commitment to better coordination between the Ministries of Education, Health, and Social Development to meet the needs of students with learning support needs.

Currently, most students with learning support needs are enrolled in local schools rather than special schools. Although schools are demonstrating an increasing commitment to inclusive education, reports of the effectiveness of the current system for students with learning support needs are mixed. In a 2015 report, the Education Review Office (ERO) reported that more than three-quarters of schools in their sample were mostly inclusive but that only half of schools were effective in promoting achievement and outcomes for students with learning support needs.²

Our inquiry examines the delivery of education for students with three particular learning support needs: dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Through analysis of submissions and advice, it weighs the effectiveness of current teaching methodologies, school practices, policy settings, and the provision of support to students with these learning support needs. It builds on the work done by prior reviews on inclusive education (formerly special education) and aims to inform the work of future reviews and policy.

Our inquiry seeks to determine what works to contribute to the best outcomes for students with these learning support needs. It recognises that the factors that contribute to successful outcomes are varied and interrelated, and can be measured in learning and achievement, as well as in well-being and engagement.

We note that a person's experiences at school affect their resilience, self-efficacy, confidence, and ability to try new challenges. The chart below details how submitters to our inquiry described the effects of dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD on student well-being.

¹ Ministry of Education (October 2010), *Success for All – Every School, Every Child*, retrieved September 2016 from https://www.parliament.nz/resource/mi-nz/49SCES_EVI_00DBSCH_INQ_9975_1_A147433/8a9fb77778f8192ba495fa74edd5b1beba57b0

² Education Review Office (March 2015), *Inclusive practices for students with special needs in schools*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/inclusive-practices-for-students-with-special-education-needs-in-schools/>.

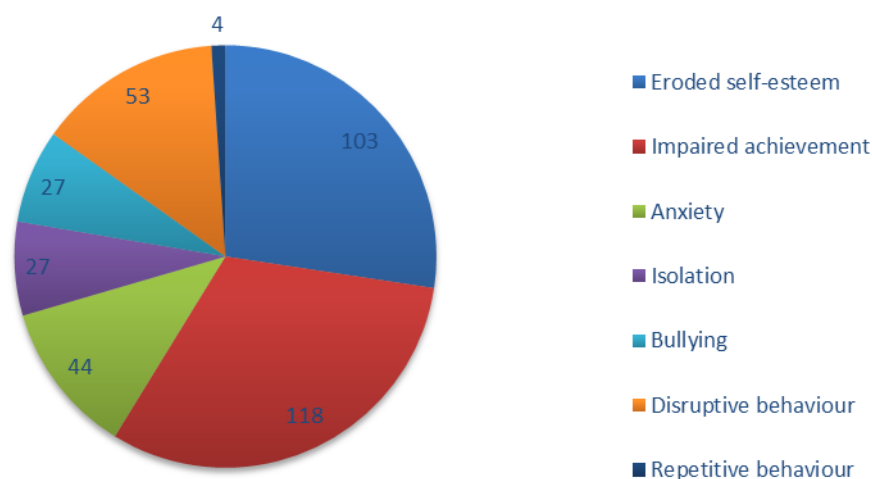


Diagram 1: Number of submitters who described each effect on student well-being.

These school experiences may form patterns of behaviour that continue into adulthood and shape success in later life. Our inquiry recognises that students with learning support needs have a right to expect the best support that we can provide to achieve success for them, not just in education or while they are at school, but in society and throughout their lives.

Our inquiry

On 19 August 2015, the Education and Science Committee began an inquiry into the identification and support for students with the significant challenges of dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder in primary and secondary schools.

We initiated the inquiry after receiving a briefing on the identification and support for students with the significant challenges of dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder in primary and secondary schools from the Ministry of Education.³

The terms of reference for this inquiry were to:

- identify best educational practice for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students
- investigate current screening for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students in primary and secondary schools
- investigate support to, and in, schools for the transition through education for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorders, and the adaptations for their learning, including special assessment conditions

³ Education and Science Select Committee (February 2015), *Briefing on the identification and support for students with the significant challenges of dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorders in primary and secondary schools*, retrieved September 2016 from https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/business-before-committees/document/00DBSCH_INQ_62227_1/briefing-on-the-identification-and-support-for-students.

- investigate whether teacher training and professional development prepare teachers to identify and support education of dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students
- review the implementation of the 2008 New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline recommendations specific to education, to assess the level of progress.

Submissions received

We received written submissions from 445 organisations and individuals.

Organisations included schools, tertiary education providers, community groups, charities, and Crown entities. Individual submitters included children and adults with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD, and their whānau and friends. We also heard from individuals working in the sector, such as teachers (including Resource Teachers) and principals, teacher aides, occupational therapists, speech language therapists, and tutors.

We heard oral evidence from 194 submitters from a wide range of the organisations and individuals mentioned above in Wellington, Auckland, and Christchurch.

Of the written submissions, 110 focused on dyslexia, 33 on dyspraxia, and 80 on ASD. A further 136 submissions commented on a mix of the three learning disabilities. Eighty-six were about other issues, such as other learning disabilities or health issues.

We are grateful for the time and effort of those who submitted to the committee. We are particularly grateful to those who shared their very personal stories of living with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. We are aware that it was difficult for many to share their experiences.

In hearing and reading the submissions of parents and whānau, students, and teachers, we acknowledge their at-times distressing and difficult experiences, where services, support, and understanding for learning differences were varied and often gained through perseverance and difficulty, or not at all. These contributions have been valuable to our inquiry.

We would also like to acknowledge the submissions that reported examples of effective teaching and support for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. We are grateful for the many teachers and teacher aides who are caring and passionate about creating the best learning outcomes for all their students. We acknowledge school leaders who recognise and value diversity, who create inclusive learning environments, and who support their staff in teaching all students.

We noted a lack of cultural diversity in the submissions. We received very few or no submissions from submitters who identified as Māori, Pasifika, or Asian, or from other ethnic communities.

Submissions about learning differences not included in the inquiry

This inquiry focused on the three prevalent learning differences of dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. Some of the submissions we received were about learning differences outside the inquiry's scope, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyscalculia, foetal alcohol syndrome, Irlen syndrome, and global developmental delay (see page 64 for definitions of these learning differences).

Although these learning differences were outside of the scope of our inquiry, many of the themes raised by these submitters were consistent with the themes and issues raised by

other submitters. We consider that this inquiry's recommendations apply to the support of a variety of learning differences.

Submissions about early childhood and tertiary education

The inquiry focused on students with learning differences in primary and secondary schools. However, some of the submissions we received were about identifying and supporting these students in early childhood and tertiary education.

We considered that, although these submissions fell outside of the scope of our inquiry, they added value to our inquiry. We found these submissions particularly helpful where they commented on the provision of support and services for children with learning differences as they transitioned from early childhood through to tertiary education.

Again, many of the themes and issues raised by these submitters were consistent with what we heard from other submitters, and we consider that many of this inquiry's recommendations would be applicable to early childhood and tertiary education contexts.

Definitions

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia involves an unexpected or persistent difficulty in learning to read, write, and spell that cannot be explained by other factors. Specifically, a person with dyslexia has difficulty decoding and encoding print. This difficulty does not usually affect a person's ability to understand what is read to them or to formulate text that others can write down for them (unless the person does not have enough vocabulary or grammatical knowledge to understand spoken language). Dyslexia is widely recognised as crossing ethnic, and socio-economic lines.

Although there is currently no globally accepted definition of dyslexia, in 2007 the Ministry of Education formally recognised dyslexia to describe a range of persistent difficulties with aspects of reading, writing, and spelling. In 2008, the ministry produced a range of resources to assist students with dyslexia, including screening tools and strategies for teachers, and information for parents.⁴

What is dyspraxia?

Developmental dyspraxia describes a difficulty in learning, planning, and carrying out coordinated movements in sequence to achieve an objective. (Developmental dyspraxia is also called Developmental Coordination Disorder.) For example, students may have difficulty dressing themselves, organising their time and materials, or making themselves understood.

Dyspraxia often affects motor skills, coordination, language, social interactions, and the ability to organise. Participation in many school-related activities is challenging for children with coordination difficulties. Disruptions in the classroom are common because these children may knock things over, drop objects, or bump into other children's desks. This can make school stressful for them, their teachers, and other students.

⁴ Ministry of Education (December 2008), *About Dyslexia*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/assets/Uploads/About+Dyslexia.pdf>.

Difficulties with activities involving fine-motor skills, such as written work, can result in avoidance behaviours, such as needing to sharpen a pencil multiple times, talking and asking questions, attention-seeking, and interference with other children. Such students can experience lower self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.

Developmental verbal dyspraxia, or Childhood Apraxia of Speech (CAS), is a complex speech disorder that affects control of the movement required for the accurate articulation of speech sounds and intonation. Children with CAS can have speech that is extremely difficult to understand, even for familiar listeners. In comparison to other speech-sound disorder, CAS is a persistent speech-sound impairment. Oral language and literacy development may be affected because of difficulties with speech production.

What is autism spectrum disorder?

ASD is a developmental disorder. It can affect one person completely differently from another, and is life-long. Skill development can be uneven. A person with ASD may be extremely gifted in some academic areas and yet show reduced ability in others. Another may have poor social and self-management skills. Every student with ASD will have a unique range of abilities and needs.

The current system

The Teaching as Inquiry process

Teachers design effective teaching and learning programmes by using the Teaching as Inquiry process. This begins with identifying student strengths and needs relevant to the learning area, and using evidence-based strategies that are most likely to assist students to learn.

Three levels of support

Most students should progress through their schooling in a learning environment where the teacher uses effective strategies and their adaptive expertise to meet students' needs (Support Level 1).

Some students who do not make the expected progress within their classroom programme (Level 1) may need additional support to accelerate their learning at Support Level 2 or intensive support at Support Level 3.

Support Level 2 includes short and intensive school-based interventions inside and/or outside the classroom. These interventions might include Reading Recovery, Speech Language Therapy, and support from Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs), and Resource Teachers: Literacy (RTLits).

Level 3 includes longer-term specialist interventions intended for a small number of students. This may involve specialists working one-to-one with the student in collaboration with the classroom teacher, parents and whānau, and other agencies. These specialists are also expected to help strengthen, influence, and inform support at Support Levels 1 and 2.

The diagram below illustrates the three levels of support.

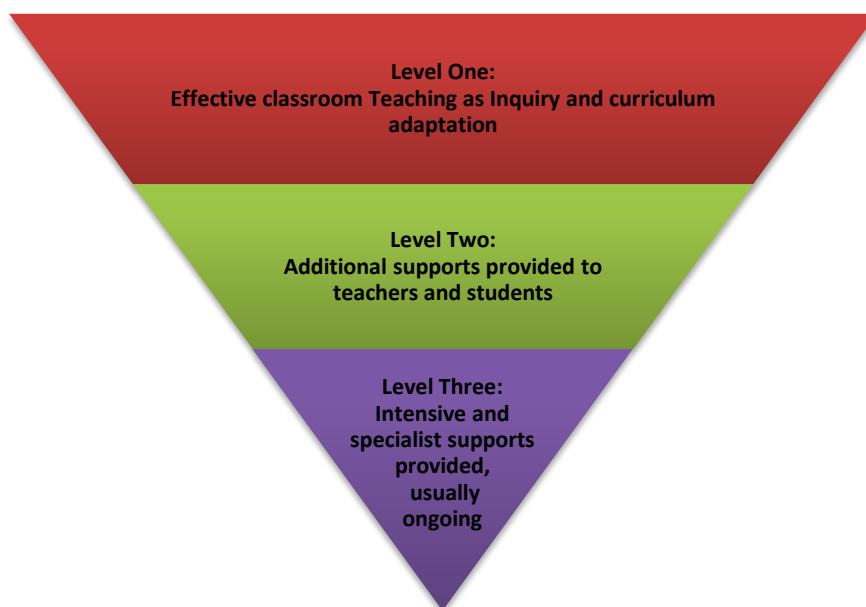


Diagram 2: The three levels of support available to students with learning support needs.

Current funding support for students with learning support needs

The Government allocates more than \$600 million each year for direct and indirect support for students with learning support needs. Funding and services are provided through a mixed-funding framework and are distributed in several ways, including the following.

- The Special Education Grant provides funding for students with learning support needs. Schools receive this grant as part of their operational funding. The grant is paid on a per capita basis according to the total roll of the school and varies according to the decile rating of the school.
- ORS provides resources for students with high and very high needs that are likely to be ongoing during their school years. Students who meet the criteria can receive funding for specialist support, specialist teacher time, teacher aides, and equipment.
- The ministry provides specialist services in Communication, Behaviour, and Early Intervention.
- Staffing and funding are allocated to clusters and groups of schools, and children identified for additional support are prioritised within the cluster. These include RTLb and RTLit services.
- The Intensive Wraparound Service is provided to students with highly complex, challenging behaviour at school, in the community, and with family. The challenging behaviour could be social, emotional, and/or educational, and its cause may involve a learning difficulty.
- Some students attend specialist schools (such as schools for deaf students), regional health schools (which provide teachers for students who are unwell and cannot attend their usual school), day special schools, and residential special schools (for students with vision, hearing, behavioural, and learning needs).

Concerns with current funding models

Some submitters argued that ORS funding is too competitive and limited, and that the eligibility criteria are too restrictive. They told us about students who they felt were unable to function in a classroom context without longer-term specialist intervention but who had been denied or deemed ineligible for ORS funding, and who were left with very little support. These submitters believe that more funding should be made available and that the criteria for eligibility should be broadened to include students with a wider spectrum of learning support needs.

The ministry told us that, when ORS was introduced, it catered to about 1 percent of the student population. Since then, it has been funded according to demand. The proportion of the school population receiving ORS has risen to about 1.08 percent, and ORS received an additional \$16.496 million in Budget 2016 to meet this demand.

Some of us felt that ORS funding should be increased to meet the needs of a greater number of students, or about 3 percent of the student population. We note that this would mean an increase in funding allocation of at least an additional \$300 million per year. The ministry told us that ORS is intended for students with high and very high needs. Eligibility is determined against nine criteria and assessed by a team of independent national verifiers. The ministry said that all students who meet the criteria currently receive funding.

Some submitters suggested that the Special Education Grant funding model be reviewed, and that it should be allocated according to the number of students with learning support needs, rather than by the roll and decile rating of the school. Some submitters observed that schools' Special Education Grant funding is not adequate to meet the needs of their students, and that those schools are allocating money from their operational funding and other fundraising.

Many submitters also commented that there seems to be no accountability for how schools spend the grant to meet the needs of their students with learning differences. These submitters argued that schools should be compelled to report against performance measures that determine the effectiveness of the support and services provided to students with learning support needs, such as through the Special Education Grant.

Although some of us argued for introducing accountability measures for how schools use the Special Education Grant, most of us felt that schools need discretion in how they use the grant. Allowing flexibility in how they spend the grant means that schools can target the grant to maximise its effectiveness for more students in a variety of contexts.

Having considered the current funding settings for ORS, the Special Education Grant, and Intensive Wraparound Services, and the concerns of submitters to our inquiry about the accessibility of funding, we felt that more work could be done on identifying the level of potential need for additional learning support.

Although some of us suggested creating a register of students with learning support needs, we note that the New Zealand education system does not depend on diagnoses to meet the needs of the students. Rather, it is expected that the Teaching as Inquiry process will identify student's learning support needs. Establishing and maintaining a register would also incur significant compliance and administrative costs.

However, we acknowledge that schools already gather data that could be used to better determine the levels of learning support needs for which appropriate responses could be developed.

Recommendation

1 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to consider collecting the school-entry data from schools and Communities of Learning to better identify responses to possible need.

Some of us argued that Intensive Wraparound Services funding be uncapped to meet students' learning support needs. We note that this service delivers intensive support for students with the highest and most complex behavioural and learning needs. However, we also consider that this funding model could be reviewed to meet a greater proportion of students' learning support needs.

Recommendation

2 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to consider increasing the funding of Intensive Wraparound Services to meet student needs.

Inclusive education

Inclusive education is founded in Part 8 of the Education Act 1989, which states that “people who have special educational needs (whether because of disability or otherwise) have the same rights to enrol and receive education at State schools as people who do not”.

Students with learning support needs also have rights under international law. New Zealand is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. These conventions affirm the rights of persons with disabilities to effective access to inclusive education, and that persons with disabilities are not to be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability.

At fully inclusive schools, diversity is respected and upheld. All students are able to take part in all aspects of school life; students' identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed; and their learning needs are addressed.

Strengthening inclusive education forms a critical part of one of the ministry's six strategic intentions: “Targeting resources to address disparity in achievement”.⁵ By strengthening inclusive education, the ministry hopes to improve educational outcomes for children with learning support needs, and provide whānau and students with confidence that all children will succeed.

Parents and whānau who made submissions to our inquiry held differing views about whether mainstream inclusive education could adequately cater to their child's educational needs.

Submissions supporting inclusive education

Some submitters argued that inclusive education could provide for all children, as long as:

- teachers were adequately trained

⁵ Ministry of Education (August 2014), *Statement of Intent: 2014-2018*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Publications/Statements-of-intent/2014SOI.pdf>.

- schools had funding and could draw on expertise for additional and intensive support where needed
- schools created learning environments that recognised, valued, and responded to learning diversity.

Additionally, some submitters argued that current assessment methods need to be changed to better facilitate inclusive education. For example, some parents and whānau of children with dyslexia submitted that the National Standards assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics discriminate against children who are challenged in these areas by their learning differences. These parents and whānau felt that, from an early age, children with dyslexia are being labelled as “failures”, which discourages engagement, confidence, participation in learning, and positive social behaviour.

Some submitters also suggested that schools are disincentivised to include students with learning differences such as dyslexia, because these students’ National Standards judgements negatively affect the schools’ reporting.

Submitters who support inclusive education also support a broader model of assessment that recognises the strengths and gifts of students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. Other submitters suggested that these students should have their National Standards judgements reported “off register”.

Some of us consider that the National Standards help teachers, parents, and whānau to make clear judgements about whether students’ competence in reading, writing, and mathematics enables their learning for the full curriculum, and whether they are making the expected progress. It is not intended as a means of sorting and labelling, but as a means of informing improvement.

However, we also acknowledge that New Zealand National Standards is not derived from a single source of information, such as a national test result, as is the case in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, because this cannot accurately summarise a student’s achievement. We expect that teachers will compile a range of evidence from a variety of sources to communicate a comprehensive picture of a child’s progress and achievement to parents and whānau.

Submissions supporting specialised education

Other submitters supported inclusive education, supplemented with specialist and expert support for students with learning difficulties. Some submitters, for example, observed that their child learned social and verbal skills in mainstream contexts but needed a specialised environment for academic learning. Others saw mainstream education as a reachable goal but felt that their child needed specialist support or tutoring to achieve that.

Some submitting parents and whānau were satisfied with the mix of mainstream and specialist classes being offered to their child. However, most submitters reported that achieving that balance had been hampered by the school’s ability to provide adequate specialist support, or to allow students to participate in specialist programmes during school hours.

Some submitters argued that inclusive education could not adequately provide for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and, particularly, ASD. For example, some parents noted that their child suffered anxiety in mainstream contexts or struggled to cope because of sensory sensitivity. Some submitters specifically mentioned the challenges of modern, or

innovative, learning environments to their child's particular learning support need. We discuss this further in Chapter 2.

Some parents felt that their child could be better supported by classes or schools that cater for a particular learning difference. Students with dyslexia from Kāpiti College, for example, felt that they benefited more from being in specialised classes for dyslexic students where they could take more time to process information and ask questions, without feeling like they “stuck out” in a mainstream class.

Some teachers also argued that teachers and schools are not always trained or resourced to cater for students with high learning needs and associated behaviours. Many parents agreed, observing that their child had been sent home or excluded from school activities when schools could not accommodate them. Some submitters, especially parents of students with ASD, reported that their child was excluded from activities, such as school trips or special assemblies, because schools felt unequipped to manage the behaviours associated with their learning difference. One submitter reported being told by a school that it “was not set up for a child like ours”.

Submitters to our inquiry argued that not all schools champion the principles of inclusive education. Some submitters felt that they had no choice but to home-school their child, and have incurred significant cost and stress as they try to manage their child's education independently.

We acknowledge that magnet schools provide inclusive environments, support, and services to students with particular learning differences. However, we recognise that the existence of magnet schools demonstrates that there is more work to be done to build inclusion throughout the system.

Strengthening inclusive education

The ministry told us that, in 2015, it delivered workshops to 1,520 RTLBs, Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), learning support staff, principals, deputy principals, and ministry special education staff. These workshops introduced inclusive education concepts and the resources available to support inclusive practices in schools.

The ministry said that the workshops were well received. Participants reported that the workshops had a focus on effective, flexible teaching practices for all students, including those with needs arising from dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. Participants reported that the workshops led them to think about inclusive practices in a different way, and to see the opportunities for planning for all students.

The ministry told us that it plans to continue the workshops and to complete coverage of the country in the first half of 2016. The ministry is also examining how it can use the workshops as the basis for more in-depth work with teachers and school leaders. We acknowledge the ministry's work in promoting the principles of inclusive education. However, based on the experiences of submitters to our inquiry, we feel that these principles could further be strengthened and communicated to schools.

We consider that schools need to be provided with clarity on the legislative framework for inclusive education, and have explicit guidance on what best practice for inclusion is.

Recommendations

3 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to extend its promotion of inclusive education information and resources to support teachers, including

those who may be teaching students with needs arising from dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder.

4 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to develop policy on learning support needs to explicitly explain what best practice for inclusion is, and how monitoring and professional development will support this policy in all schools.

Current Ministry of Education reviews and updates

The Learning Support Update (formerly the Special Education Update)

Our inquiry coincides with a broader programme of work the ministry is pursuing called the Learning Support Update.⁶ The ministry informed us that it is working to improve the education system for children and young people who need additional learning support.

In 2015, the ministry engaged widely about proposed improvements through the Learning Support Update consultation process. It said that 156 engagement forums were held with more than 3,650 people throughout New Zealand. It noted that many of the matters raised by parents, students, whānau, teachers, and others during our inquiry are consistent with what the ministry heard in the consultation process on the Learning Support Update.

Learning Support Update action plan

The ministry said that, from 2016, it will lead a programme of work that will significantly redesign the system of additional support for students with additional learning needs. It stated that the programme will:

- design a recognisable, simple system of additional learning support
- redesign the service delivery model to remove fragmentation, inflexibility, and other barriers to effective service delivery
- implement the revised service delivery model
- carry out an ongoing programme of work to ensure the best use of funds, and examine the return on investment for all system components.

We have been told that the feedback from our inquiry will support and strengthen this programme of work. We expect that many of the recommendations in our inquiry will be incorporated into the ministry's action plan.

The Professional Learning and Development Review

Our inquiry also coincides with the ministry's Professional Learning and Development (PLD) Review, which is based on the findings of an advisory group from 2013.⁷

The review aims to make centrally funded PLD more effective, make more of a difference to student outcomes in priority areas, support school leadership to lead and sustain improvement, and strengthen professional networks as a complementary source of support

⁶ Ministry of Education, *Learning Support (previously Special Education) Update*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/specific-initiatives/special-education-update/>.

⁷ Ministry of Education, *Professional Learning and Development*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://services.education.govt.nz/pld>.

for teachers and leaders. The ministry is currently implementing changes to PLD that will be operational from 2017.

Many of the issues raised during the inquiry about the professional needs of teachers and schools have also been raised as part of the work of the advisory group. We note the ministry's assurance that this existing work programme will incorporate recommendations from our inquiry about professional development.

Themes raised by submitters to our inquiry

The submissions we received underpin several key themes.

Parents need more information about what support is available, and assistance with accessing that support

Many submitters reported feeling relief when their child was diagnosed with a learning difference, expecting that predetermined tailored support could now be delivered to meet the identified challenges associated with that particular learning need. However, submitters reported that there did not seem to be a clearly defined pathway of support, either for parents or for schools, to cater to a particular learning need.

Submitters reported a range of problems arising from a lack of information or a pathway of support.

Submitters struggled to know what services and support the school should provide, and what parents and whānau needed to find, and pay for, themselves. Many parents and whānau reported having to “fight” for the school to provide more support or specialist services.

Some submitters also suggested that the level of parental involvement necessary in seeking and accessing services from the school raised fundamental equity issues, because some cultural and socio-economic groups are more easily able to advocate for themselves and their whānau.

Additionally, submitters noted that some parents and whānau who had been unsuccessful in securing more support from the school felt that they needed to pay for additional support for their child. Many submitters reported investing thousands of additional dollars into their child's education. This included before- and after-school programmes and tuition, digital and technical equipment, occupational therapy, and funding for schools to employ teacher-aide assistance for their child. This raises further equity issues, because many other parents cannot afford these services and must trust that the education system will adequately provide for their child.

The ministry told us that it gathers data on the ethnicity of service users to monitor potential disparities in access. Equity of access to learning support services is an area of concern for the ministry. Although the ministry advised that the Learning Support Update will introduce an approach that is more responsive to learners' diverse needs and local circumstances, we consider that equity of access issues warrant further investigation.

Recommendation

5 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to investigate the equity of access to publically funded services for Māori and Pasifika.

When trying to find support for their child, many parents reported turning to a variety of educational, psychological, and medical services for help. Submitters reported that the quality and consistency of the support they received could depend on where they had sought help. For example, parents who had sought help for their child from an educational psychologist often found that they received support more quickly, and which was better suited to a classroom context, than those parents who had sought help from their child's doctor.

Some submitters argued that, because of a lack of accessibility to up-to-date information, schools and parents appear to be vulnerable to the market-driven industry of commercial products and programmes that claim to address dyslexia and other learning needs, but that can lack scientific evidence to show their effectiveness. For example, where some submitters supported a particular programme, others reported that it had not benefited their child. Some submitters reported trying a range of different programmes until they found one that helped their child.

The ministry advised that it has several portals of information available to parents, whānau, and schools about various learning support needs. In the last 12 months, it has launched the Inclusive Education website.⁸ The website provides schools, parents, and students with information, resources, and curriculum materials to enhance teaching and learning, raise student achievement, and advance professional development.

The website includes information on dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. As a result of this inquiry, the ministry has reviewed the website and found it generally fit for purpose. However, the ministry has resolved to update its resources on ASD to reflect current research and thinking, and to improve the awareness of, and access to, the website's resources for teachers and parents.

The ministry also observed that several inclusive education resource materials are located on The New Zealand Curriculum Online website.⁹ Although the Inclusive Education and The New Zealand Curriculum Online websites have related information and shared hyperlinks, the potential exists to cause confusion for the sector, and the ministry is investigating ways to mitigate this. It is reviewing the relationship between the two websites.

We acknowledge the ministry's work in developing a range of resources for parents and educators of students with additional learning support needs. However, we agree with some submitters that improvements could be made to the development and dissemination of these resources.

Recommendations

6 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to review and, as necessary, update advice about, and resources for, students with additional learning support needs.

7 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to develop and disseminate consistent intervention guidelines and support pathways for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder.

⁸ Ministry of Education. *Inclusive Education*. Retrieved September 2016, <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/>

⁹ Ministry of Education. *The New Zealand Curriculum Online*. Retrieved September 2016, <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/>

8 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to work with Dyslexia NZ to develop a specific pathway guide for families of students with dyslexia.

9 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to work with Dyspraxia NZ to develop a specific pathway guide for families of students with dyspraxia.

10 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to develop specific pathway guides for families of students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, and foetal alcohol syndrome.

11 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to develop more formal links to a range of national and international experts to ensure that its policies, approaches, and supports on specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder, are easily accessible, coherent, and consistent with research evidence and best practice.

12 We recommend that the Government ensure that the Ministry of Education makes evidence regarding best practice and advice about dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder available to parents and schools so they can make fully informed decisions when contemplating programmes.

13 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to investigate the provision of one-stop-shop access to specialist help for schools to offer families, once a student has had learning support needs identified.

Schools are inconsistent and variable in their approach to supporting students with learning support needs

The environments, teaching methods, programmes, support, and services that schools provide to students with learning differences are inconsistent. Some parents and caregivers of students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD reported moving their child from one school to another to find a “better fit,” or more support, for their child’s learning needs.

Submitters argued that several variables determine how much support a student with learning support needs receives. The attitude of teachers and school leaders, the level of staff training, the intensity of parental involvement, the school decile, available funding, and the behaviour of the student are all factors in determining the level of support a student with learning differences may receive.

We observe that not all schools employ SENCOs, noting that employment of a SENCO will often depend on the size of the school roll. Some submitters reported that schools were inconsistent in implementing individual education plans (IEPs) for their students with learning support needs.

We recognise that IEPs are a comprehensive resource appropriate for students with a high level of learning support needs requiring specialised strategies, supports, resources, and equipment within the classroom setting. Enforcing IEPs for all students with learning support needs could place an undue burden on schools, and subsequently decrease the value of the IEP. However, we consider that all students with identified learning support needs would benefit from an intentional teaching and learning plan to guide their progress.

Recommendation

14 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to encourage schools to develop a plan for individual learning needs for all students identified with learning support needs.

Submitters also believe that there are inadequate specialist services and expertise available to assist schools. They argued for more training and provision of specialist support to schools.

Some submitters argued that families and schools in rural areas also have less access to support and services for children with learning differences.

Some submitters argued that some ministry policy settings and schools' best practice teaching methodologies were outdated. They felt that greater consistency of practice between schools could be achieved if policies and methodologies were updated with current research and evidence.

Some submitters felt that greater consistency of practice between schools could also be achieved if schools were held more accountable for how they supported students with learning support needs. Submitters suggested a range of accountability mechanisms that could be used to strengthen the consistency of practice between schools.

Some parents advocated for a regulatory body to promote the interests of parents, or for the return to something like the Parents Advocacy Council, which was established under the 1989 education reforms but subsequently abolished. These submitters reported that, when they felt that the school was treating their child unfairly or not providing adequate support, their only recourse, as advised by the ministry, was a complaint to the school's Board of Trustees.

Not only did some submitters find this ineffective as a means of resolution but they also argued that sometimes their concerns were systemic and should be addressed by the ministry as a means of informing future policy and change for all students with learning support needs.

The ministry told us that it has been working in partnership with the New Zealand School Trustees Association, and with the Centre for Dispute Resolution based in the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, to develop a dispute-resolution process when challenges for schools and families with individual students cannot be resolved at a local level.

We were pleased to hear that the project has been steered by a group comprising representatives of school and parent groups, and has been supported by cross-sector stakeholder workshops.

Recommendation

15 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to continue to investigate working with bodies, such as the Children's Commissioner, to create a mediation and dispute-resolution model for parents and schools, which uses arbitration as a last resort.

Other submitters suggested that a range of performance measures be introduced to demonstrate how adequately schools were providing for the success of students with learning support needs.

The ministry advised us that it is working with the New Zealand Council for Educational Research to develop an approach to reporting on the progress and achievement of children who are learning long-term within one level of the curriculum. This will enable schools to report to their boards consistently on the performance of all students.

The capability and capacity of teachers, teacher aides, and other specialist support providers varies widely between schools

Submitters expressed concern that there are not enough specialist support providers to meet the needs of students with learning support needs. For example, parents reported having to pay for a teacher aide for their child when the school could not afford to.

Other submitters described the difficulties they had encountered in trying to access RTLB and RTLit services. Submitters reported that many specialist services, such as speech therapy, have long waiting lists. We discuss these issues further in Chapter 4.

Submitters also reported experiencing a wide range of teaching capabilities in teachers and teacher aides of students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. A consistent theme in submissions was the suggestion that teachers are not being adequately trained and developed to teach students with learning differences. Submitters were also conflicted as to whether teachers should be trained to diagnose learning differences such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. We discuss these issues further in Chapter 5.

Submitters helped us determine whether the current provision of support services adequately meets the needs of students with learning differences

Submitters observed that students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD can present with a spectrum of different cognitive, physical, and behavioural needs. Submitters recognise that there is no “one size fits all” approach but that students with a particular learning need may require a range of different interventions and supports.

These submitters urged the ministry to develop comprehensive “tool kits,” which include a range of resources and support that could be tailored to the diverse needs of individual students. Others felt that students with a wide variety of learning support needs could be catered for if schools improved the adaptability of their teaching methods within the framework of inclusive education.

Many submitters believed that schools were simply not funded adequately to meet the needs of all students with learning differences, recognising that resources were being prioritised to where they were most critically needed. These submitters argued that schools and parents had different ideas about what needs should be prioritised, with schools choosing to target resources and support to students with behavioural challenges or academic underperformance, rather than providing support to meet the actual learning need.

Some submitters argued that qualifying for support was “a race to the bottom”. These submitters argued that support addresses only the most severe behavioural and academic

challenges, while other students with learning differences who did not demonstrate these challenges were not supported in achieving their potential. Some submitters described this approach as “symptomatic” and “reactive”, with students needing a “history of failures” before they were seen as eligible for support and intervention.

Submitters suggested that neglecting a student’s learning difference often resulted in challenging behaviours. Some submitters felt that schools sought to address these challenges through targeted behavioural intervention or punitive measures, when a more effective intervention would be to meet and address the learning difference itself. Parents and whānau of ASD students, in particular, expressed frustration that their child was often targeted with behavioural interventions, when ASD is widely recognised as a neurological disorder.

Some submitters suggested that students who were academically under-performing were also a priority for targeted interventions. These submitters expressed frustration that students with moderate needs were not being catered to, and that the student’s academic performance, rather than the learning difference, determined the level of support provided. Some submitters, particularly parents of students with ASD, felt that, because their children were often academically gifted and meeting assessment standards, their other needs were neglected.

To provide further evidence that interventions are determined by academic performance and behaviour rather than learning needs, some submitters reported instances where a student was given teacher-aide support until a particular behavioural or academic need was addressed. The teacher-aide support was then withdrawn until the student declined to the point where they needed the support again.

Submitters also argued that it was difficult to determine whether the current provisioning of support services was adequately meeting the number of students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. Since a fundamental feature of inclusive education is that it does not depend on diagnosis, it is difficult to determine how many students might have these learning support needs. For example, the ministry told us that it does not collect or hold information on the number of students with dyslexia in New Zealand. However, international research estimates that between 3 and 20 percent of the world’s population may have dyslexia. This wide range reflects the diversity of views in this area.

Many submitters suggested that some students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, or ASD were going unrecognised. They felt they were “flying under the radar” in the classroom, lacked funding and support for diagnosis or assessment, were not being appropriately advocated for, or had found limited ways of coping with their learning difference in a classroom context. For example, some submitters argued that high-decile schools have a greater proportion of students with diagnosed learning differences because parents of children at these schools can afford to pay for diagnostic services. These submitters suggested that a significant group of students are not reaching their potential because their learning needs are not being recognised and addressed.

Many submitting parents and whānau whose children’s learning needs had been identified argued that the provision of support was still insufficient to meet their children’s needs. As discussed previously, these submitters reported having to “fight” for services, having to pay for supplementary services, or having been deemed ineligible for services. They perceived that the reason was that the criteria for funding was set too high. Many submitters argued

for more funding to increase the provision of RTLb and RTlit support, teacher aides, speech therapists, diagnostic services, and other specialist support services.

Submitters suggested a range of ways to improve the transitioning of students with learning support needs from early childhood education through to tertiary education

Many submitters reported that they had secured services and support for their child at a particular point in their schooling but had lost these services when their child transitioned to another school or to the next level of schooling. Parents and whānau were frustrated at having to work to secure these services again.

Submitters argued that transitions could be improved if schools committed time and resources to transitioning, shared information and coordinated with other schools, and involved families and students more in the transition process.

We discuss these issues further in Chapter 4.

2 Best educational practice for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students

We were interested to find out more about the best educational practices for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. We were interested in the suggestions of global academics, teachers, and specialists, and in the experience of parents, students, and whānau.

Submitters identified a range of approaches that they considered to be best practice in enabling inclusion and education for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD.

Best practice for students with dyslexia

International research notes that defining dyslexia is a complex and contested process, and that there is no agreed remedial intervention or specific approach or programme to address dyslexia. Because every student with dyslexia will have a unique range of abilities, it is recommended that teachers and educational practitioners be resourced with a variety of different strategies.

The ministry advised that academic literature suggests that the dominant cognitive explanation for dyslexia is the “phonological deficit hypothesis”, which is defined as a difficulty in connecting the sounds of language to letters because of a structural deficit in the part of the brain associated with processing the sounds of language.

Many submitters supported a greater emphasis on phonological awareness development for students with dyslexia in early childhood and primary education, and believed that the explicit teaching of phonics should be mandatory in every primary school classroom. Some submitters were concerned by the curriculum’s “whole language” emphasis, which encourages students to recognise words as whole pieces of language, and to focus on language meaning rather than the phonetic approach of decoding language.

Submitters suggested several adaptations to teaching practice to improve the educational outcomes for students with dyslexia. Submitters suggested that giving students extra time to process learning, ask questions, and complete assessments was beneficial. Submitters also recommended reader/writer support and assistive technologies, such as laptops and software.

Submitters found special assessment conditions helpful. These include reader/writer support during assessments, extra time to complete assessments, using a computer, and rest breaks. For students with dyslexia, reducing writing requirements and reliance on text, and a greater use of visual and pictorial aids in learning, was also considered beneficial.

Submitters suggested a wide range of programmes to assist students with dyslexia. These include:

- Specific Learning Disabilities (SPELD) tutoring
- Braingym
- Morningside Academy teaching methods

- Lexia Learning Programme
- Orton-Gillingham Approach
- Multisensory Structured Language
- Nessy Learning Programme
- Davis Dyslexia
- Irlen's Intervention
- Fast Forward system
- Listening Programme
- Lumosity Programme
- Perceptual Motor Programme.

Several submissions focused on students with visual perception problems who seem to have responded to Irlen lenses and overlays. The ministry told us that this is an example of the diversity of views on what works. Although this may help some students, the ministry told us that research demonstrates that approaches such as visual training activities, tinted lenses, and visual-motor activities have questionable validity and empirical support.

The ministry has provided every school with a resource booklet called “About Dyslexia”.¹⁰ This booklet provides in-depth information on how to recognise dyslexia and how to support children with this learning difference. In addition, two ministry websites—Literacy Online¹¹ and Inclusive Education¹²—have sections on dyslexia that are based on best evidence.

We note that these resources were not specifically mentioned in submissions, which indicates that many schools and parents are unaware of them and that more promotion of these websites is needed.

Best practice for students with dyspraxia

Dyspraxia often affects motor skills, coordination, language, social interactions, and the ability to organise. Disruptions in the classroom are common for students who have coordination difficulties, because they may accidentally knock things over, drop objects, or bump into other students' desks. Participating in school-related activities can be challenging and stressful, and may result in avoidance behaviours, or lead to feelings of low self-esteem and anxiety. Submissions emphasised the importance of teachers understanding the nature of the challenges students with dyspraxia face at school.

Submitters suggested several specific adaptations to improve the educational outcomes for students with dyspraxia. Special assessment conditions, extra time for processing and

¹⁰ Ministry of Education (December 2008), *About Dyslexia*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/assets/Uploads/About+Dyslexia.pdf>.

¹¹ Ministry of Education (February 2016), *Literacy and students with special education needs: Dyslexia*, retrieved September 2016 from http://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/Literacy-Online/Learning-about-my-students-needs/Knowledge-of-the-learner/Literacy-and-students-with-special-education-needs#dyslexia_definition.

¹² Ministry of Education, *Inclusive Education, Guides for schools: Dyslexia and learning*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/dyslexia-and-learning/>.

responding, and reader/writer assistance were among the most popular recommendations. Submitters also suggested several programmes that they had found beneficial, including SPELD tutoring and the Perceptual Motor Programme.

Some submitters said that the diagnosis pathways for children with dyspraxia were less developed than those for children with dyslexia or ASD. These submitters suggested that the Ministries of Health and Education work together to develop and disseminate guidelines to facilitate the diagnosis of dyspraxia.

The Ministry of Education has previously published support material on the Inclusive Education website to help teachers to understand dyspraxia, the learning needs associated with it, and options for responding to learners' needs.¹³ A booklet is also available titled "Developmental dyspraxia: A resource for educators".¹⁴

Best practice for students with autism spectrum disorder

Students with ASD have a wide range of needs and abilities, from being gifted through to being identified as having very high cognitive and behavioural needs. In response to these diverse needs, a wide range of whole-class strategies, supplementary supports, and specialist supports are needed.

The ministry's work on autism is outlined in its ASD Action Plan,¹⁵ which responds to the inter-agency work on the New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline. However, the action plan is due for review and updating. We discuss this further in Chapter 6.

Submitters wanted ASD-friendly classrooms and schools, where teachers welcome students and understand the specific nature of ASD. Aspects that were important included:

- the need for routine
- managed change and transition
- effectively managing sensory distractions, such as smells, sound, and light levels
- scaffolding social interactions
- understanding the effect of anxiety on behaviour
- creating quiet spaces in classrooms
- smaller class sizes.

Many submitters said that students with ASD had benefited from neuroplasticity programmes, such as Arrowsmith. Neuroplasticity programmes focus on strengthening and "rewiring" areas of the brain affected by learning differences.

Some submitters said that students with ASD suffered anxiety in modern, or innovative, learning environments because of sensory sensitivity. We note that the ministry has developed a guide for school leaders on planning innovative learning environments that consider the needs of all learners. The guide will assist schools in designing a learning space

¹³ Ministry of Education, *Inclusive Education, Guides for schools: Dyspraxia and learning*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/dyspraxia-and-learning/>.

¹⁴ Ministry of Education (January 2015), *Developmental dyspraxia: A resource for educators*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://www.inclusive.tki.org.nz/assets/inclusive-education/MOE-publications/MOES0043DevelopmentalDyspraxia-booklet.pdf>.

¹⁵ Ministry of Education (September 2010), *Autism Spectrum Disorder Action Plan*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://seonline.tki.org.nz/ASD/About/ASD-action-plan>.

that is responsive to individual learner preferences, needs, and values, and that encourages schools to consult with parents, teachers, and students. The ministry noted that this guide is available on the Inclusive Education website, and should be read in conjunction with specific information about ASD on the Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) website.¹⁶

Recommendation

16 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to initiate research on the effect of innovative learning environments on students with additional learning support needs.

Whole-of-class strategies

The ministry advised that it has published resources on its Inclusive Education website that demonstrate how making changes to classroom practice enable all students to be included and supported. These changes include:

- using predictable routines throughout the day
- curriculum differentiation
- scaffolding social relationships
- reducing reliance on writing
- increasing access to technology
- using visual supports to help students learn.

The ministry said that the whole-classroom approach has several important benefits. It supports students who may have an unrecognised learning need. It maximises the efficiency of teaching and preparation time, because teachers need to do less adaption focused on sub-groups of students. It also boosts the self-esteem of students with identified learning needs, because they do not feel singled out for extra support.

Identifying further research opportunities

We consider that our inquiry identifies the need for further research into the development and implementation of best practice to support students with learning differences in New Zealand.

Recommendations

17 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to research what is needed to strengthen learning support policy, and include culturally appropriate researchers who can identify Māori, Pasifika, refugee, and migrant learning support needs.

18 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to research what is working, and what is failing, for students with learning support needs (nationally and internationally).

¹⁶ Ministry of Education, *Inclusive Education, Guides for schools: ASD and learning*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/autism-spectrum-disorder-asd-and-learning/>.

19 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to conduct research with a Māori research organisation to look at barriers to Te Tiriti o Waitangi issues, equity issues from a Māori perspective, and recommendations for change.

20 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to convene a process with learning support research communities to identify what research gaps exist.

3 Current screening for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students

We wanted to investigate the current screening, assessment, and diagnosis of students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD.

The terms, “screening”, “assessment”, and “diagnosis” can mean different things to different people. The Ministry of Education uses the following definitions:

- “Screening” means identifying whether there is a potential need that requires a response.
- “Assessment” means determining the specific level and nature of need for individuals, and what and how much support is needed.
- “Diagnosis” means establishing a medical definition of the underlying cause of the need.

Early identification of dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder

The B4 School Check is a free voluntary health and development check for all children in New Zealand when they turn four years old.¹⁷ It is the last “Well Child” check before a child starts school, and is carried out by a registered nurse on behalf of the Ministry of Health.

The checks include assessing a child’s development and their social and emotional well-being. As part of this assessment, an early childhood educator will fill out a questionnaire about a child’s strengths and weaknesses. The questionnaire is a tool to identify where a child may need further help before they start school. It focuses on strengths that can support the child, as well as any challenges the child is experiencing, such as difficulties with concentration, behaviour, or getting along with others.

Some submitters argued that there needs to be a greater provision of screening for learning differences. They were concerned that learning differences were, in some instances, identified later than they could have been. Such late identification of needs can have a life-long effect because delayed progress cumulatively affects academic achievement, feelings of self-worth, and personal aspirations.

Submitters argued that people with learning differences who had a delayed or no assessment of their learning needs were over-represented in New Zealand’s benefit-dependent, mental-health, and prison demographics. These submitters argued that the cost of improving the diagnosis of, and provision of services to, children with learning differences far outweighed the cost of later-life problems, should the learning difference go undiagnosed.

¹⁷ Ministry of Health (June 2015), *B4 School Check*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/life-stages/child-health/b4-school-check>.

We agree that early identification of learning needs is important and should take place within the first school year or, if possible, before children start school. Every teacher should identify learning needs as part of their normal learner assessment processes at each year level.

However, we heard that initial teacher training and professional development did not always adequately support the capacity of teaching staff to identify the learning needs of students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD, and/or access available resources to support these.

Recommendations

21 We recommend that the Government encourage the Ministry of Education to explore options for earlier identification, assessment, and resources for the literacy, language, and learning needs typically associated with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder.

22 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to investigate lessons from the B4 school check modelled in the State of Victoria, Australia, for learning differences such as dyslexia, which is universally applied to all schools in the state.

Special Education Early Intervention Service

The Early Intervention Service¹⁸ provides specialist support for children who have a developmental or learning delay, a disability, a behaviour difficulty, or a communication difficulty that significantly affects their ability to participate and learn at home or in an early childhood education setting. The service can work with children from birth until they start school.

After an assessment, a child may be given specialist assistance, such as speech language therapy, special equipment, teaching and learning strategies, or support from a psychologist or other professional.

In 2014/15, early intervention services and support were provided to about 13,000 children under the age of five years. Demand for early intervention services is growing. We were unable to obtain any definitive evidence to indicate why there is a growing demand. Growing demand for early intervention services could provide some confidence that early childhood teachers, parents, health professionals, and others are identifying concerns early on and that children are accessing services and support.

Recommendation

23 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to work with the Ministry of Health, as part of the Learning Support Update, on strengthening transition support for all students receiving Early Intervention services and strengthening referral pathways for students with autism spectrum disorder and dyspraxia.

¹⁸ Ministry of Education (August 2016), *Special Education Early Intervention Service*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/learning-tools-and-resources/early-intervention/>.

Challenges with identifying and diagnosing dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder

Submitters identified several challenges to identifying and diagnosing children with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD.

Accessibility of services

Parents and whānau who suspected that their child might have a learning disorder or felt that “something wasn’t right” found it difficult to know where to go for an assessment or diagnosis of their child. Submitters reported seeking these services from teachers and schools, their doctor or local hospital, educational psychologists, professional organisations such as SPELD, and various other specialists.

Diagram 3 (below) shows who submitters reported had first identified that a child had dyslexia, dyspraxia, and/or ASD.

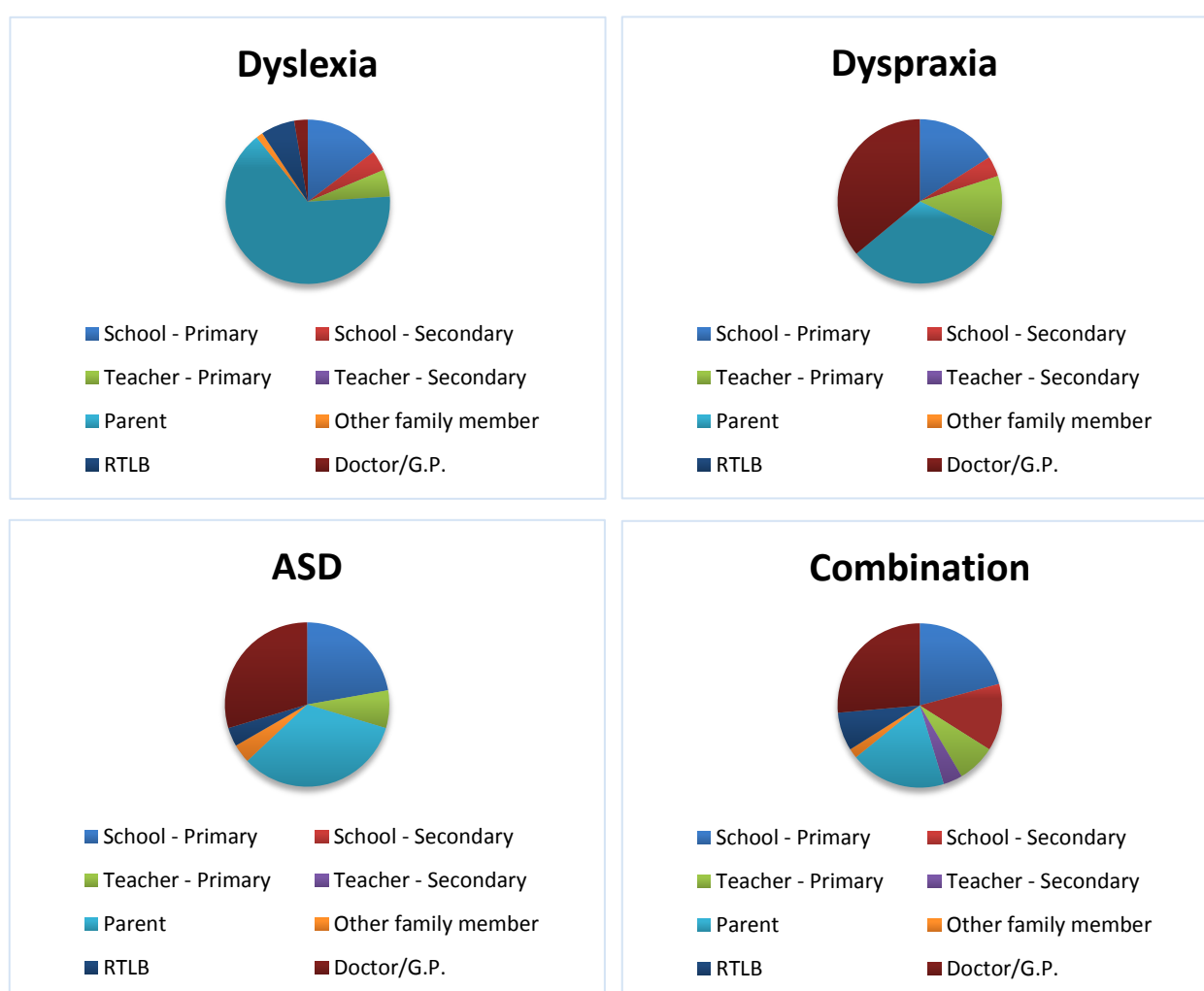


Diagram 3: Who first identified that a child had dyslexia, dyspraxia, and/or ASD.

Some submitters also felt that these services were “stretched,” and reported being on waitlists of several months for a diagnostic or assessment service.

Cost of services

Some submitters reported that their child's school had told them that the school would not be able to pay for an assessment or diagnosis of their child. Many submitters reported incurring substantial costs in having their child diagnosed. They noted the equity issues this raises, especially for parents and whānau in low decile areas, because many families are not able to afford these assessments. We recognise that this may be a contributor to the very low number of Māori and Pasifika submitters to our inquiry.

Many submitters argued that all primary schools or early childhood education centres should provide screening for dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. Submitters suggested that this would resolve affordability and equity issues, and also address the concern that some students are being diagnosed with learning difficulties too late, such as in secondary and even tertiary education.

Learning differences becoming apparent

Another challenge to obtaining an assessment or diagnosis of a learning difference is that, especially for students with moderate needs, these can take some time to become apparent. This could happen for several reasons.

Learning needs, such as dyslexia, can be difficult to identify in a classroom of diverse students, who may come from a range of cultures and language backgrounds, and who progress at different levels in English language and literacy. Students with dyslexia-related needs may be masked by this diversity, which can make it difficult to identify additional learning needs at an early stage.

Several submitters also argued that some learning needs are identified only over time. For example, some submitters reported that they were not able to obtain a diagnosis of dyslexia for their child until their child had progressed to a greater reliance on writing and text in later school years.

The ministry also considers that National Standards and literacy learning progressions are able to identify whether students are falling behind expectations. Results from these can serve as the trigger for teachers to investigate further, and identify potential factors inhibiting progress.

Is getting a diagnosis beneficial?

We were advised that a critical feature of education in New Zealand is that it does not depend on diagnosis. The ministry recognises that the cost of diagnoses can be a financial burden for parents when diagnoses are not funded. This can disproportionately affect those with the fewest resources and be a source of inequity.

The ministry said that the needs-based approach in the New Zealand education system means that a diagnosis or private assessment is not required to access any additional State-funded support, including, for example, ORS funding and special assessment conditions.

Some submitting parents disagreed, arguing that the school did not take their child's needs seriously or give their child support until they obtained a diagnosis proving that their child had a learning difference. For example, some parents reported that their child was declined RTLB support or special assessment conditions until they had been diagnosed.

Some submitters agreed that a diagnosis is not necessary and felt that a more worthwhile investment would be in strengthening teacher training and providing specialist services, rather than in diagnostic services. Some submitters argued that getting a “label” does not help a student get access to more funding or better teaching but that, if teachers were adequately trained and assisted with specialist services, all students’ learning support needs could be catered for.

Some parents also felt challenged to make schools believe that their child should be screened for a potential learning difference, noting that a child’s behaviour might be different at home than at school. These submitters argued for a consistent and comprehensive approach to screening.

Some submitters suggested that all teachers should be trained and equipped with a screening resource. Others submitted that teachers were not best placed or resourced to screen and felt that the focus should be on diagnosis through early intervention services and in early childhood education.

The ministry advised that schools do have the data and resources to screen students for learning differences that require additional support. As discussed previously in the report, these assessments can enable the school to develop appropriate responses and interventions, such as the provision of ORS funding or special assessment conditions.

However, in response to submitters’ concerns about the time it takes for schools to screen and develop interventions for students with learning differences, we consider that the ministry should consider setting targets for screening and providing timely support to students with learning differences. We consider that these targets could be investigated in line with the work the ministry is doing in the Learning Support Update.

Recommendation

24 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to consider, as part of the Learning Support Update, creating targets for the timely identification of the need for, and provision of, additional support for students with learning differences.

Diagnosis and student well-being

Some submitters, especially students in secondary school and parents of secondary students, felt that obtaining a diagnosis had been detrimental to their well-being. Conscious of their relationships with their peers, these students felt that their “label” further isolated them from their fellow students. Some students reported being reluctant to take up special assessment conditions because other students had commented that these were “an unfair advantage”.

Some of us consider that many negative effects on a student’s well-being of obtaining a diagnosis could be mitigated if schools nurtured welcoming and inclusive environments. We were pleased to hear the reports of some submitters about schools that had held special assemblies or invited experts to talk to all students about learning differences. We were encouraged to hear of teachers who incorporated adaptive teaching methodologies for diverse learners into their classroom practice as a matter of course.

The coordination of services to support the diagnosis of a learning difference

Many parents stated that, once a diagnosis or assessment had been obtained, they were better able to engage with schools about the learning needs of their child and how those needs could be addressed. Many submitters reported feeling relieved when their child received an “official” diagnosis, expecting that their child’s school could now deliver a predetermined pathway of support.

However, some submitters said that schools seemed unsure how to incorporate the diagnostic results into their teaching and classroom management. For example, they believed that it was difficult for teachers to inform their educational practice from a report that could be medical in nature. Some submitters reported that their feelings of relief turned to frustration when they felt that the reports were ignored or under-used by their child’s school.

Submitters told us that strong relationships between the ministry and Child Development Services in local district health boards were important in the context of early identification and referrals. We heard from some submitters that there were some inconsistencies throughout the country with regard to this relationship.

Submitters argued that there needs to be improved coordination and communication between health and education services to achieve a holistic picture of the child in various contexts, and to develop a coordinated response. Some submitters suggested that common guidelines and systems be developed for the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Development, and the Ministry of Education, to support students with learning support needs.

4 Support available for the transition through schooling for dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students, and adaptations for their learning, including special assessment conditions

Transitioning through the schooling system

Most submitters believed that students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD did not fare as well as they should have through transition points.

Many submitters reported that support for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD did not carry across transition points. This could be because of a lack of communication between schools about the learning needs of the student, or because resources and support were tied to a particular school or learning age. For example, some parents reported that support they had received for their pre-school child through the Special Education Early Intervention Service was discontinued when their child started school.

Some submitters felt that there was a general lack of time, commitment, and resources available for transitions. Many parents reported that they became the main source of passing on knowledge about their child to the next year's teacher and that, even if records and assessment data were available, they were often ignored.

For submitters who had found getting support challenging, this was especially frustrating, because they felt that they had to restart the process of getting support at the point of transition.

Submitters identified that students with ASD were also particularly vulnerable during transitions, because of their sensitivity to change in environment and routine.

Submitters suggested several improvements to support the transition of students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD from one school to the next, including:

- an ongoing pathway or individual education plan established from the beginning of the child's schooling that travelled with them, and was acted on and updated by every teacher at each different year level
- support from early childhood centres and early intervention providers for transition into primary school, for a period of up to six months
- team transition planning—involving parents, teachers, SENCOs, the student, and other support providers—for transitions between and within schools
- teacher-to-teacher information-sharing to support transitions.

The ministry's view is that schools in Communities of Learning can increase the opportunities to learn effective practices from each other about transitioning students. This could be particularly effective when students transition between schools in the same Community of Learning.

The ministry has also indicated that, as part of the Learning Support Update, it is looking at strengthening the provision of support across transitions for students with learning differences by establishing the role of a “responsible person” within the transition team of educators, specialist support staff, and whānau.

We are pleased that the ministry has indicated that it will continue to look at improving transitions for students with learning support needs.

Recommendation

25 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to work with schools and Communities of Learning on opportunities to strengthen teaching for all students, and improve access to, and coordination of, resources and services so they travel with students throughout their education pathway.

Adaptive learning currently provided to students

Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour, and Resource Teachers: Literacy

RTLBs are funded to work with schools, teachers, and Years 1–10 students with learning and behaviour difficulties. The RTLB service is organised on a “cluster” model. Nationally, all state, state-integrated, and partnership kura/schools are grouped into 40 clusters. One school in each cluster (the lead school) provides the service to, and on behalf of, all schools in the cluster.

In the 2015 school year, the RTLB workforce had 917 full-time equivalents, and a total of 15,379 individual students in 2,073 schools had received a service.

RTLit have specialist skills in teaching reading and writing, and work with students experiencing literacy difficulties and their teachers. There are 109 RTLits.

RTLBs and RTLits directly support classroom teachers to adapt the curriculum to support learners, such as students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD.

Many submitters felt that RTLB and RTLit resources, and other specialist services, were stretched to deal with the demand for their services. We further discuss the capacity and capability of RTLB and RTLit in Chapter 5.

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery (RR)¹⁹ is a Support Level 2 intervention for students who do not make expected progress in reading and writing after one year of good classroom teaching. Its primary function is to accelerate students’ literacy progress so that they catch up with their peers. We heard that it does this successfully for about 80 percent of children, after the standard 12–20 weeks of intensive support, depending on need.

Although some of us argued that RR was ineffective for students with dyslexia, the ministry said that RR identifies students who, despite the intervention, will need further and ongoing intervention. We heard that, for this 20 percent who do not respond to RR,

¹⁹ Ministry of Education (September 2016), *Reading Recovery*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD/Learner-initiated-supports/Reading-Recovery>.

some may have dyslexia or other long-term persistent difficulties. RR's second function is to identify these students so that they may be referred on to more specialised support.

The ministry said that support at Level 3 is presently not adequate to accommodate all of the students that need support in our system, and that planning is under way to address this.

We also heard that RR may be outdated and could be reassessed to ensure its relevancy, especially when technology has become more prevalent in helping those with learning differences such as dyslexia.

Recommendation

26 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to develop further advice on the effectiveness of Reading Recovery for students identified as having dyslexia, and subsequent interventions for students who may need it.

Speech language therapy

Students with speech, language, and communication needs may need support with understanding and using language, speaking clearly and fluently, and interacting with others. Speech language therapists employed by the ministry may provide this support, and the ministry currently funds this service for up to 6,600 students each year. This figure includes Language and Learning Intervention support for up to 1,000 students with significant language needs affecting their learning. This service is typically provided to support school-aged students between Years 1 and 3.

Submitters told us that sometimes there is a waiting period before students are able to access speech language therapy. The intensity and duration of services can also be an issue—in particular, for students with childhood apraxia of speech and ASD when communication issues persist beyond Year 3 but services do not. Some submitters identified funding as a factor that limits access to this service.

Some of us argued that funded services for speech language therapy should be available throughout the compulsory school years, where necessary for the student. We were advised that speech language therapy services focus on children under the age of eight years, because intervention and support when a child is young provides maximum benefits. However, the ministry told us that current policy settings enable access to speech language therapy for children beyond eight years. In the 2015 financial year, of the 6,859 children who were provided with speech language therapy services, 1,174 were aged eight years or older, with 253 of those children being older than 10 years.

The ministry also told us that it plans to review the Communication Service as part of the Learning Support Update. One purpose of the review is to improve flexibility to respond to the needs of older children.

Recommendation

27 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education, as part of the Learning Support Update, to conduct an analysis of the demand for communication services for students with speech, language, and communication needs associated with

dyslexia, dyspraxia, or autism spectrum disorder, and make recommendations for workforce planning, and that policy is changed to meet the needs identified.

Special assessment conditions

Special assessment conditions provide extra help for approved secondary students when they are being assessed so that barriers to achievement can be removed and they have a fair opportunity to achieve credits.²⁰ The support is used both for internal and external qualifications standards.

Currently, students approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) can use special assessment conditions for National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) assessment. In 2015, there were 7,024 applications for special assessment conditions, covering 7,886 needs in learning, medical, physical, and sensory categories.

Examples of special assessment conditions are the use of a writer or computer, rest breaks, Braille or enlarged papers, or a reader.

Readers and/or writers are currently provided to some secondary students who need additional support in qualifications assessments. They may read the questions out loud to a student, write down the answer for a student, or do both. If a person is providing support with reading or writing, they may not guide the student or explain the assessment.

We heard that there is a relationship between school decile and the proportion of students who access special assessment conditions, with higher-decile schools having a higher percentage of students accessing special assessment conditions than lower-decile schools.

The ministry told us that it has identified several reasons for this disparity. They include:

- the complexity of the special assessment conditions application process
- the timing of the application process (too late in the year)
- the timing of special assessment conditions approvals (too late in the year)
- the high cost to parents of having a Level C Assessor or registered psychologist assess their child (for a specific learning disability)
- the resources needed for schools to identify students, carry out school-based assessments, manage the special assessment conditions process, and access community supports (such as readers and writers)
- the need for low-decile schools to focus on priorities other than special assessment conditions—for example, broader student achievement goals and language, literacy, and numeracy achievement.

We heard that, in response to this disparity, the ministry has undertaken to improve access to special assessment conditions. The ministry has worked with the RTL service to develop resources that promote good practice in accessing special assessment conditions.

²⁰ New Zealand Qualifications Authority, *Special Assessment Conditions*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/assessment-and-moderation/managing-national-assessment-in-schools/special-assessment-conditions/>.

The 2015 results show an improvement over 2014, with a 77 percent increase in applications received from decile 1–3 schools, compared with a 10 percent increase in applications received from decile 8–10 schools. The ministry expects the decile imbalance to continue to improve as a result of the actions being taken.

Recommendations

28 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to continue to work with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, and cluster managers of Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour, to develop resources to promote good practice for access to special assessment conditions.

29 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to continue to work to provide more equitable access to special assessment conditions—in particular, for low-decile schools.

30 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to support building capability for special assessment conditions staff.

Assistive technology

Assistive technology helps students with learning differences to improve their writing and reading skills, their engagement with the curriculum, and their social interaction and behaviour.

Assistive technology varies greatly, depending on the learning needs of a student, and may include devices such as laptops, tablets, specialist software, or hearing loops for classrooms. For example, a student with dyslexia or dyspraxia may have a literacy app on an iPad to aid them with reading and writing, or a student with ASD may use it to keep them on task and improve their communication skills.

The ministry funds some assistive technology. The ministry also expects schools to provide assistive technologies to students from its own resources, such as the Special Education Grant. However, we heard from submitters that many families are required to pay for assistive technologies for their children.

We heard from submitters that many families cannot afford to pay for the technology their children need, and have tried to get funding from the ministry. However, only students with the highest need are currently eligible for assistive technology. The ministry told us that, in Budget 2016, an additional \$1.45 million was allocated over the next four years to support the existing assistive technology budget.

Many submitters found that students with dyslexia were able to improve their achievement when they could use speech recognition programs, such as Dragon software, to help them read and write. Many schools support the use of these programs in a classroom setting.

However, although students have access to a wide range of assistive technology, students are prohibited from using this technology during NCEA examinations, which submitters felt disadvantages these students. Additionally, allowing students a greater use of digital technologies would reduce the need for reader/writer resources. (One school reported having to employ up to 172 readers/writers during an assessment period.)

The ministry said that NZQA is in regular communication with sector groups to ensure that there continues to be an ongoing awareness of new technologies to assist students. We heard that these technologies are considered and assessed as NZQA increasingly moves toward digital assessment.

As technology continues to develop and improve, it can assist more and more students. There is an upward trend in the number of students accessing assistive technology. The ministry said that, although the growth of personal devices provides an increasing range of options, the focus needs to remain on effective teaching practice.

Recommendation

31 We recommend that the Government ensure that the Ministry of Education investigates current research on assistive technology for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder, and updates its policies on effective teaching and assessment accordingly.

Special Education Needs Coordinators

Some schools designate teachers as SENCOs. SENCOs can provide advice as well as coordinate additional support for students with learning differences who need it.

Some submitters said that not all schools employ SENCOs to help manage the needs of students with learning differences. Submitters also noted that the SENCO role was often an additional role done by busy senior staff as part of their work, and felt that these staff did not have adequate time or training to fulfil this role.

We consider that work should be done in investigating the appropriateness of funding full-time SENCO positions for schools with larger student rolls.

We consider that there are further opportunities to help schools make better use of their SENCO resource. One opportunity is to develop an information and support package that will bring together all the information SENCOs need for effective practice. We also consider that the ministry should investigate whether staff in a SENCO role should be formally trained and qualified.

The ministry is also working to better align specialist support services in schools in Communities of Learning. This would enable Communities of Learning to pool their SENCO resources so that individual schools without a dedicated SENCO could still access one.

Recommendations

32 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to investigate the feasibility of a recognised qualification for Special Education Needs Coordinators.

33 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education with assessing the feasibility of funding full-time trained Special Education Needs Coordinators for schools with more than 200 students.

34 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to develop an information and support package for Special Education Needs Coordinators.

Other services

Other specialist services are also available to students with learning support needs, including occupational therapists and behaviour specialists. Submissions noted that these services are important, particularly for students with ASD and dyspraxia. However, we heard from many parents that they found it hard to access these services, in part because of demand and in part because of financial constraints.

The ministry acknowledged that growing demand is placing pressure on these services. The ministry said that, through the Learning Support Update, it is reviewing these services to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, and to help meet demand pressure. As discussed previously, the ministry is also actively pursuing opportunities for Communities of Learning to collaborate to share expertise and resources.

5 Investigate how teacher training and professional development prepares teachers to identify and support the education of dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autism spectrum students

One of the main themes that came through the oral submissions was about teachers' capability to effectively teach students with additional learning needs such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD.

Many submitters argued that teachers, teacher aides, and SENCOs were not adequately trained, either when they completed their qualification or through further professional development. Some submitters even reported that the classroom teacher did not know what dyslexia or dyspraxia were.

Some submitters expressed frustration that there seems to be no mandatory ongoing training about how to teach the curriculum in a way that engages, and uses the strengths of, students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. Some submitting parents believe that current teaching techniques are outdated, disenfranchise students with learning differences, and breach the students' right to receive an education.

Some submitters reported positive and supportive experiences with teachers. However, submitters argued that even effective teachers lacked the necessary training, and that their methodologies for adapting to learning differences were "ad hoc, chaotic, and courageous" with little evidence of a uniform best-practice approach.

Submitters argued that more time, funding, and development needed to be allocated to professionally develop teachers and specialist support staff to effectively teach students with learning support needs. Some submitters called for a review of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes and ongoing professional development.

Submitters also suggested that teacher aide and SENCO roles needed to be valued and remunerated appropriately to avoid burnout and high turnover.

Initial Teacher Education

The ministry's current expectation for training teachers to support students with learning needs, as set out in the Minister of Education's 2011 Letter of Expectation to the New Zealand Teachers Council, is that "...all teachers are confident and competent to teach students with disabilities and special education needs". This is reinforced by the Graduating Teacher Standards, which require teachers to have the skills and knowledge necessary to teach "diverse learners".²¹

²¹ Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, *Graduating Teacher Standards*, retrieved September 2016 from <https://educationcouncil.org.nz/content/graduating-teacher-standards>.

Of the 46 teachers who submitted, including an initial graduate, 35 indicated that their training did not prepare them for working with students who have dyslexia, dyspraxia, or ASD.

However, the ministry told us that it has an expectation that more recent graduate teachers will have a better understanding of teaching learners with learning support needs such as dyslexia. It estimates that, currently, 11 percent of teachers could reasonably be expected to have graduated in the last five years.

The ministry told us that it believes that variability in the competency of teachers to teach students with learning support needs can be explained by variability in the ITE—depending on where and when they trained—and professional development opportunities during their careers. For example, the ministry advised us that all ITE providers have been teaching some phonological awareness in their programmes, which it recognises as effective for teaching literacy skills to students with dyslexia. Most have explored additional needs associated with dyslexia, if only briefly, since 2007 when the ministry officially acknowledged it.

The ministry recognises that ITE providers will train teachers to address the needs of diverse learners but that this might not result in all trained teachers having the skills and confidence to teach students with the specific learning needs of dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD.

The ministry said that it has supported the teaching of students with dyspraxia, dyslexia, and ASD by publishing professional support material for teachers. However, we note that none of the submitting teachers mentioned any of the ministry-provided supports and resources that are available online or in hard copy booklets in schools.

We heard that the ministry wishes to explore the issue of teacher training further with the Education Council, which is currently reviewing the teacher standards and the provision of ITE.

Recommendation

35 We recommend that the Government ensure that the Ministry of Education works with the Education Council to strengthen initial and ongoing teacher education to identify and respond to students' additional learning needs, particularly those associated with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder.

Professional development for practising teachers and teacher aides

Many submitters were concerned at the quality of ongoing professional development available to teachers and teacher aides. They argued that research about dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD is a dynamic and evolving field, and that the implications for teaching and professional development are ongoing. Parents of children with ASD were particularly concerned, and listed in their submissions the capability of teachers, specialist teachers, and teacher aides as their top three issues.

Some submitters felt that schools neglected to provide ongoing professional development because of cost and time pressures. Many submitters felt that teacher aides, in particular, were an undervalued and under-invested resource, noting their low pay and high turnover.

Some submitters argued that, with little knowledge and training, teacher aides functioned as “babysitters” with harmful consequences for students of whom the teacher aide had little understanding of how to address their learning needs and behaviours.

The ministry said that it is working to strengthen the capability of less-recent teaching graduates. Teachers must renew their certification every three years, and are required to meet the Practising Teacher Criteria to renew their certificate.²² These criteria include requirements that practising teachers “select teaching approaches, resources, technologies and learning and assessment activities that are inclusive and effective for diverse ākonga”²³ and “modify teaching approaches to address the needs of individuals and groups of ākonga”.

The ministry expects that this will ensure that all teachers are confident in teaching students with learning support needs arising from dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. However, based on the submissions of many teachers to our inquiry, this is not always the case.

Recommendation

36 We recommend that the Government ensure that the Ministry of Education asks the Education Council to consider amending the Practising Teacher Criteria Key Indicators list to include “ability to create an inclusive classroom, meet the needs of students who need learning support, and access additional help where needed”, as well as “(ii) select teaching approaches, resources, technologies, and learning and assessment activities that are inclusive and effective for diverse ākonga”.

As noted previously in our report, in 2015 the ministry delivered workshops to 1,520 RTLs, SENCOs, learning support staff, principals, deputy principals, and ministry special education staff. These workshops introduced inclusive education concepts and resources, with a focus on effective, flexible teaching practices for all students, including those with needs arising from dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ASD. The ministry said that it hopes to further develop and continue these workshops.

Some of us argued that the ministry should centrally fund mandatory professional development for teachers and teacher aides to address the gaps in teacher capability raised by the submitters. The ministry said that it has chosen not to mandate professional development, because schools need to retain the discretion to identify their own unique professional development needs, and determine the most appropriate way to meet them.

However, the ministry said that it is working with schools to update them on what packages of learning support are available, and on how to access support based on individual learning needs.

Recommendation

37 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to strengthen professional development and support for teachers to identify and respond to learners with additional needs, such as dyslexia, and to engage with the parents of these children.

²² Education Council of New Zealand, *Practising Teacher Criteria*, retrieved September 2016 from <http://educationcouncil.org.nz/content/practising-teacher-criteria>.

²³ Ākonga: Māori word for “learner” or “student”.

Professional Learning and Development review

PLD is currently being changed as a result of the PLD review, which we discussed in the Introduction.

One priority of the review will be to strengthen professional support that builds the capability of teachers to carry out inquiry. The ministry hopes that building inquiry capability will support school leaders and teachers to identify and develop students who need additional learning support.

Other priorities of the review include a focus on developing reading and writing. In addition, the ministry will continue to support, develop, and strengthen Communities of Learning to enable teachers to learn with, and from, each other about effective practice.

The ministry told us that literacy, including dyslexia, is one of the national priority outcome areas for the next three to five years. The redesign of PLD will seek to ensure that quality support is available to schools, kura, and Communities of Learning. This includes making sure there are accredited facilitators who can support teachers and leaders to identify and respond to the different learning needs of their students.

The ministry is also seeking to build and strengthen local, regional, and national networks of expertise so that teachers can access timely support to respond to students with additional needs.

Recommendation

38 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to incorporate its work into strengthening professional development and support for teachers, to identify and respond to learners with additional needs, into its existing Professional Learning and Development programme.

Training of specialist teachers

The ministry told us that it takes steps to ensure that there are enough specialist teachers by providing about 200 special education study awards and scholarships each year.

However, the ministry acknowledged that RTLits and RTLBs do not receive explicit training in identifying or supporting students with dyslexia or dyspraxia, and that only some RTLBs have done a specialist course in ASD. Additionally, the RTLit and RTLB groups function with limited cohesion, with each group having different governance and management arrangements.

The ministry advised that the development of Communities of Learning provides an opportunity for schools to group together to share and allocate resources, such as RTLBs and SENCOs. This would mean that resources could be more coordinated and targeted to where they are most needed.

Recommendations

39 We recommend that the Government ensure the Ministry of Education makes available professional development for specialist teachers (such as Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour, and Resource Teachers: Literacy) and teacher aides to strengthen working relationships, improve role clarity, and build knowledge of inclusive practice.

40 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to review the alignment of specialist teaching services (such as Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour, and Resource Teachers Literacy services) and other specialist services, within Communities of Learning.

41 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to investigate and lift the capability of the specialist teacher workforce, including the current capacity and capability of the specialist teacher workforce to support students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder in schools and Communities of Learning.

42 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to ensure that Special Education Needs Coordinators' training and professional development focus on creating a school culture of inclusion, and on providing advice about access to additional services, including assisting with Ongoing Resourcing Scheme applications alongside families.

43 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to work with Communities of Learning on opportunities to use expertise in multiple schools.

6 Review the implementation of the 2008 New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline recommendations specific to education, to assess the level of progress

The New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline was jointly produced by the Ministries of Health and Education.²⁴ The guideline was created using evidence-based material from New Zealand and overseas. We wanted to know how the ministry was implementing and using the recommendations in the guideline specific to education.

Submitters' views

The submissions we received about ASD covered a range of concerns, including the following:

- Teachers and parents need more support and resources to ensure that children with ASD have the maximum opportunity to succeed.
- Parents lack information about how the education system works and how to access support. They also want more support to resolve conflicts at school.
- The initial transition from home/preschool/early intervention to school is very important.
- Parents value inclusive attitudes in schools, but some schools are unwelcoming to students with ASD.
- Teachers' attitudes and capability make all the difference, but many students experienced inconsistency from year to year. Parents want teachers to work with them, and to know their child as an individual.
- Support for communication and social relationships, sensory strategies, assistive technology, and behaviour support were identified as key areas of focus for students with ASD. Changes to the physical environment, such as quiet spaces and fencing, are valued. Many parents said that they found accessing specialist services difficult and the level of service inadequate, particularly for speech language therapy and occupational therapy.
- Typical learning environments may need to adapt to meet the needs of some children with ASD.

²⁴ Ministries of Health and Education (July 2016), *New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline* (2nd ed), retrieved September 2016 from http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/nz-asd-guideline-aug16v2_0.pdf.

Ministry of Education's use of the guideline

We heard that, since the ASD guideline was published, the ministry has researched and implemented a wide range of evidence-based interventions in line with the guideline. ASD-specific interventions include More than Words, Tips for Autism, Stepping Stone Positive Parenting Programme, SCERTS,²⁵ and ASD study awards. These approaches sit alongside specialist services, such as speech language therapy, occupational therapy, and RTLB services, to support students, parents, and educators.

The ministry said that it continues to collaborate with the Ministry of Health to fund Tips for Autism, which is a three-day course for teams that support students with ASD aged 5–12 years. The ministry also jointly funds ASD Plus with the Ministry of Health. This is an initiative to increase parents' knowledge and skill to support their pre-school children with ASD. Participation in these programmes is voluntary for teachers and parents.

The ministry told us that more students with ASD are now accessing a higher level of support. Overall, the numbers of students verified as having high or very high needs has increased to 8,507 in 2015. Between 2011 and 2015, the total number of verified students increased by 932. The percentage of students verified under criteria 4 and 8 (language use and social communication, including ASD) is increasing. This group now makes up 25 percent of all verified students.

Resources to build teacher capability have been made available online on the Inclusive Education website and on The New Zealand Curriculum Online website. This content includes ASD-specific information for educators, as well as information about inclusion, curriculum planning, progress, and achievement.

ASD-specific study awards are available for a range of educational professionals each year. Resources have also been developed so that ministry teams and RTLB clusters continue to support school staff to access other professional learning development about ASD.

New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline update

The ministry told us that the guideline has just been updated. Although the Ministry of Health has overall responsibility for reviewing the guideline, it is a shared initiative with the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education said that it will review its ASD action plan in response to the updated guideline. We were told that the review will seek input from families/whānau, educators, and specialists about additional professional learning and development needs for teachers. We will monitor this review with interest.

Recommendations

44 We recommend that the Government require the Ministry of Education to continue to build sector capability that includes autism spectrum disorder-specific content, inclusive practice, and curriculum planning.

45 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to review its autism spectrum disorder action plan in response to the updated New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline.

²⁵ SCERTS: Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, and Transactional Supports.

46 We recommend that the Government task the Ministry of Education to work with parents, the Ministry of Health, and Autism NZ to review information resources for parents.

7 Minority view of Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, New Zealand First, and the New Zealand Labour Party

Introduction

The Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, New Zealand First, and the New Zealand Labour Party are unable to fully support the select committee report on the inquiry into the identification and support for students with the significant challenges of dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder in primary and secondary schools.

Although this inquiry was initiated by the Green Party and selected by this committee, where members fully engaged with the issues, the report recommendations do not fully address some fundamental issues raised by submissions.

This minority view covers the gaps in the report and the alternative recommendations developed to address the clear and consistent messages we heard from the submitters.

The issues we believe have not been fully addressed are issues around children's rights, funding, equity, and accountability to ensure that inclusion is developed in all schools. The capped competitive funding model is at the heart of the problems identified by numerous submitters through the inquiry, and there is no political will in Government to address it.

We do not accept that the implementation of our recommendations is hampered by Tomorrow's Schools' autonomy, as presented to us at select committee. It is our view that the Ministry of Education carries the responsibility to ensure that schools are fully resourced and supported to meet their responsibilities to these students, and that the Tomorrow's Schools' model is not the barrier.

We acknowledge the progress we have made and the positive recommendations in the committee's report; however, the basic assumptions that we cannot afford to remove funding caps for the needs of these children is ignoring the cost of the current model to the health, education, and justice systems. Other countries, such as the United States of America, do not permit capped funding for disabled students' needs.

The recommendations related to funding from the Green Party, New Zealand First, and the New Zealand Labour Party reflect the underfunding of learner support needs in schools over many years.

Without changes to the Education Act 1989 to strongly enshrine disabled children's rights to education and a strong directive to fix a broken system, these recommendations fail to address the equity and accountability issues raised.

Recent examples of a hands-off approach to issues such as "seclusion rooms" have not reassured the Green Party, New Zealand First, or the New Zealand Labour Party that urgent action will occur. Extreme situations, such as year-long waiting lists for specialist support, parents paying for extra support in State schools, or a child only receiving one hour of education per day, are not addressed by recommendations which do not require targets or increases to the limited number of those currently in this skilled workforce.

The Green Party, New Zealand First, and the New Zealand Labour Party wish to honour the impassioned submissions of many students, parents, specialists, support groups, and teachers who asked for systemic changes to a broken and inequitable system that fails to provide authentic inclusion. We acknowledge that merely placing a child with special challenges in the mainstream system is not in itself inclusion. We particularly wish to acknowledge the students who were brave and articulate in their contributions and challenges to us at the hearings, and the hospitality of Kāpiti College when we visited their dyslexia class.

We also acknowledge that the committee has been willing to consider a wide range of issues and has addressed some very positively.

Context

A disturbing feature of the inquiry was virtually the complete absence of submitters identifying as Māori, Pasifika, or from cultures other than Pākehā. There is no evidence that suggests that these cultures have less learning support needs within our education system, but they were not represented and their needs are therefore not specifically addressed in the report, except to require research into this critical issue.

The failure to recognise the need for urgent action for dyslexic students (although the need was clearly articulated by submitters during the visit to the dyslexia classes at Kāpiti College) is particularly disappointing given the specific focus of the inquiry.

Content issues

This inquiry revealed that, for a significant number of students with learning differences, the experience of education is an experience of marginalisation. The experience is not one of inclusion or being taught in a manner that facilitates them to learn. As one submitter said, “how can you teach me if you don’t know how I learn?”.

Despite the Education Review Office target that 80 percent of schools would be “doing a good job” for children with high learning needs by 2014, and research saying 80 percent of schools are now “mostly inclusive”, we heard from many students and their families that they are not all satisfactory. They told us their children’s needs are not properly identified, properly supported, or included in school life, and that the supports are expensive, hard to access, and insufficient to allow them to fulfil their potential. An overriding theme of submissions was the need to pay for diagnosis and support that theoretically is not needed because the schools provide access to these things. The reality is that many schools are simply unable to fund support to the level it is required, and ones that have made this commitment are often skimping on other needs.

We heard a great deal about system failure and the absence of best practice, as well as some concrete examples of what works and what can be described as inclusive practice for these learning differences. The disturbing issue is the gap between how the supports in the system are supposed to work, and how they are frequently inaccessible to families. The assumption of the ministry that 80 percent of schools are inclusive was contradicted by the testimonies from throughout the country that the system is not including all children with learning differences, and unacceptable levels of bullying were mentioned by both students and parents.

As there is no accurate data about how many students have learning support needs and no register of the levels of need, it is very difficult to plan a system that covers this need.

Without this data, the competitive and capped funding system continues to fail Ongoing Resource Scheme (ORS) students and students with moderate needs, as well as students whose families cannot afford additional specialist help that is hard to access unless the families pay for it. We are pleased that the committee is recommending that data collection should be investigated, but we recommend that this is carried out immediately.

We are disappointed that the Government did not accept the Youth Law submission and that of the Human Rights Commission that there is a need to entrench the rights of disabled learners in the Education Act. Such an action is also implied in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCROC) Committee's 2016 comments about disabled children.

This makes our law considerably weaker than the United Kingdom's or the United States of America's laws and means that the human rights of disabled students can be endlessly debated rather than upheld. This is not acceptable.

The inquiry submissions also revealed massive inequities in access to assistance, including teacher aides and specialist support. It is clear that, despite ministry claims, student assessment is necessary to access specialist support and adequate teacher aide hours in a timely manner for students with high needs, and extremely difficult for students with moderate needs, unless the parents pay. Parents are paying for teacher aide hours, after-school coaching, assessment of needs, and speech language therapy, among other things.

The free services are overstretched and inadequate, and parents who can afford it do not wait. For learning needs such as dyslexia (which some schools do not acknowledge), additional support always costs money. Teacher aide hours are not for the whole school day, nor sustained throughout the schooling of some students. A number of families are regularly asked to take their child away from school or told that the school can only manage their needs for one hour per day. The Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) is often part-time and untrained in the specific learning support needs of individual students, so cannot help students and teachers without further professional development.

Reliance on Communities of Learning to address inequities and skills gaps will reinforce the inconsistent picture rather than universalise best practice.

The assumption that the Teaching as Inquiry model is the best way to support these students is debatable when the current inclusion culture is weak in many schools and resources are overstretched. It is our view that there is the need for mandatory Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and professional development supported with centralised funding. Voluntary professional development about learning support is one issue amongst many competing priorities that is not working.

Overall, the inquiry has made some good recommendations, but the systemic problems remain that have been raised by students, parents, teachers, and specialists in a series of inquiries and consultations. The Green Party, New Zealand First, and the New Zealand Labour Party additional recommendations are more concrete and specific for good reason.

Additional recommendations by the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, New Zealand First, and the New Zealand Labour Party

Recommendation 1 – That the Ministry of Education immediately create a register of students identified with learning differences requiring extra support, so that need can be measured and thereby funded.

Recommendation 2 – Increase Ongoing Resourcing Scheme funding to 3 percent to meet the actual number of high needs students, and remove the complex application process.

Note: The New Zealand Labour Party is committed to this increase and acknowledges it will be phased in over time.

Recommendation 3 – Ensure (rather than just consider) an uncapped Intensive Wraparound Services fund, or an alternative effective system of support, to meet students' needs.

Recommendation 4 – Provide for moderate needs by increasing the Special Education Grant to meet the actual needs of the identified number of students in each school, annually adjusted.

Recommendation 5 – That the Ministry of Education adjust the funding model so that schools leading on best practice are financially rewarded, not penalised for their efforts.

Recommendation 6 – Require the Education Review Office to report on the use of the Special Education Grant in each school, and report to Parliament annually on the adequacy of the Special Education Grant to meet needs.

Recommendation 7 – Create a nationwide professional development career pathway framework for teacher aides, and centrally fund the wages, to ensure skilled support for students who need it.

Recommendation 8 – Establish a national qualification and ongoing professional learning and development programme for Special Needs Coordinators with responsibility for the full spectrum of special needs learners.

Recommendation 9 – That the Government carry out a cost–benefit analysis of an uncapped funding model for learning support needs, which includes quantifying the savings in health and justice sectors if educational needs are met.

Recommendation 10 – Centrally fund mandatory professional development for teachers on inclusion and working with learning differences.

Recommendation 11 – That National Standards are not used to identify learning support needs, and that assessments are developed that are relevant to the diverse learning needs of students in schools and early childhood education.

Recommendation 12 – That the committee advocate to the Minister of Education for a Supplementary Order Paper in the Education (Update) Amendment Bill, with amendments to provide:

- a statement on the purpose of support in education for students with disabilities in line with international law
- clarity on the definition of “inclusive education” and the role of special schools
- the creation of a Code of Practice outlining procedural protections for the support in education for students with disabilities

- for amendments to Section 8 of the Education Act so that reference to section 14 cannot apply to students with high learning support needs
- for an enforceable right to meaningful education.

Recommendation 13 – That the Ministry of Education engage with peak bodies and educators to assess the level of need and access for Māori, Pasifika, and other cultures, which did not submit to the hearings, and whose issues of equity and access are not being recognised, and then make recommendations to support these students.

Recommendation 14 – That the Ministry of Education fully fund access to specialists when needed.

Recommendation 15 – That a national programme for dyslexic education is funded, with a key educational leader assisting schools to develop best practice.

Recommendation 16 – That Early Intervention Services are available free of charge to families from early childhood education through to age eight years.

Recommendation 17 – That reasonable criteria be developed so that parents are able to request a free assessment for a learning support need at any time and that schools are resourced for any request within three months.

Recommendation 18 – That Reading Recovery is not relied upon for dyslexic students.

Recommendation 19 – That the Ministry of Education assess the gaps, and create a workforce plan to attract and develop specialist services based on the issues identified in this inquiry around cost, waiting lists, and access.

Recommendation 20 – That the Ministry of Education expand its policy to clearly acknowledge that funded services for speech language therapists will be available throughout the whole of the compulsory school years, where necessary, for the students.

Recommendation 21 – That the Ministry of Education fund assistive technology when it cannot be covered by schools.

Recommendation 22 – That the Ministry of Education establish a pilot programme in partnership with the early childhood education sector, initially in a defined area, for the collection and analysis of school entry baseline evidence, expanded to include recently developed early screening tools for dyslexia, dyspraxia, and other challenges, to target staffing and resourcing to meet need and inform practice.

Recommendation 23 – That the Ministry of Education provide a clear policy to Communities of Learning about how they should collaborate and share resources for best practice, specifically in terms of inclusion of learning support.

Recommendation 24 – That the Ministry of Education request the Education Council of New Zealand to ensure that the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) curriculum includes education and skills for teaching students with specific learning support needs, with the aim of providers being required to offer a comprehensive education on inclusion strategies and basic familiarity with the range of learning differences.

Recommendation 25 – That the Ministry of Education creates a pathway for families with students on the autism spectrum, which includes legal rights to inclusion and access to appeal services when needed.

Recommendation 26 – New Zealand First recommends that the Government continue to support true choice for parents of children with severe and multiple challenges that includes easily accessible single-sex residential provision, day school provision, and inclusive mainstream provision, which provides both English medium and Te Reo Māori medium schooling.

Appendix A

Committee procedure

The committee met between 19 August 2015 and 16 November 2016 to consider the inquiry. We called for public submissions with a closing date of 2 October 2015. We received 445 written submissions from the organisations and individuals listed in Appendix D, and heard oral evidence from 194 of the submitters. A subcommittee heard evidence in Wellington, Christchurch, and Auckland. We received advice from the Ministry of Education.

Committee members

Dr Jian Yang (Chairperson)
Catherine Delahunty
Sarah Dowie
Chris Hipkins
Melissa Lee
Tracey Martin
Todd Muller
Adrian Rurawhe
Jenny Salesa
Stuart Smith
Hon Maurice Williamson

Appendix B

Useful resources for parents and educators, referred to in the report

About Dyslexia

December 2008. A publication produced by the Ministry of Education as a resource for classroom teachers of students who show signs of dyslexia. Retrievable from <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/assets/Uploads/About+Dyslexia.pdf>.

ASD Action Plan

September 2010. A Ministry of Education resource that maps out current activities that are funded by the ministry, including parent education, courses for teams, and practical teaching materials. Retrievable from <http://seonline.tki.org.nz/ASD/About/ASD-action-plan>.

ASD and learning

A guide focusing on areas for specific support and on whole-class strategies that benefit all students, including students with ASD. The website also contains links to in-depth resources and specialist support services. Developed by the Ministry of Education and retrievable from <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/autism-spectrum-disorder-asd-and-learning/>.

Assistive technology

May 2016. Produced by the Ministry of Education, this guide includes information about, and an application form for, assistive technology for students with special education needs to use in classrooms to participate and learn. Retrievable from <http://www.education.govt.nz/school/student-support/special-education/assistive-technology/>.

B4 School Check

June 2015. Information produced by the Ministry of Health about a nationwide programme offering a free health and development check for four-year-olds. Retrievable from <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/life-stages/child-health/b4-school-check>.

Developmental dyspraxia, a resource for educators

January 2015. A booklet produced by the Ministry of Education that examines how dyspraxia can influence learning, and provides strategies that teachers can use in the classroom. Retrievable from <http://www.inclusive.tki.org.nz/assets/inclusive-education/MOE-publications/MOESE0043DevelopmentalDyspraxia-booklet.pdf>.

Dyslexia and learning

A guide focusing on areas for specific support and on whole-class strategies that benefit all students, including students with dyslexia. The website also contains links to in-depth resources. Developed by the Ministry of Education and retrievable from <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/dyslexia-and-learning/>.

Dyspraxia and learning

A guide focusing on areas for specific support and on whole-class strategies that benefit all students, including students with dyspraxia. The site also contains links to in-depth

resources and specialist support services. Developed by the Ministry of Education and retrievable from <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/dyspraxia-and-learning/>.

Inclusive Education website

A Ministry of Education website providing schools, parents, and students with information, resources, and curriculum materials to enhance teaching and learning, raise student achievement, and advance professional development. Retrievable from <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/>.

Inclusive Practice and the School Curriculum

April 2016. A guide for teachers and educators in using inclusive practices when designing and delivering the school curriculum. Produced by the Ministry of Education and retrievable from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Inclusive-Practice-and-the-School-Curriculum>.

Language and Learning intervention

September 2014. Information produced by the Ministry of Education about support for students aged 5–8 years with severe communication difficulties, including access to speech language therapy. Retrievable from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD/Learner-initiated-supports/Language-and-Learning-intervention-LLi>.

Literacy Online, Literacy and students with special education needs: dyslexia

February 2016. Ministry of Education resource to help teachers develop teaching and learning programmes based on the literacy needs of students, including students with dyslexia. Retrievable from http://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/Literacy-Online/Learning-about-my-students-needs/Knowledge-of-the-learner/Literacy-and-students-with-special-education-needs#dyslexia_definition.

The New Zealand Curriculum Online

Ministry of Education website offering information, resources, news, advice, guidance, inspiring school stories, practical ideas, research reports, how to get support, and more. Retrievable from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/>.

New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline, 2nd ed

July 2016. Jointly produced by the Ministries of Health and Education, this guideline is an evidence-based summary about ASD for parents, teachers, carers, and specialists. The guide includes information about identifying ASD and access to interventions and services for individuals with ASD. Retrievable from http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/nz-asd-guideline-aug16v2_0.pdf.

Reading Recovery

September 2016. Information about the programme, which is delivered as a one-to-one intervention for learners who have low literacy achievement levels. This resource is produced by the Ministry of Education and includes an application form for the programme. Retrievable from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD/Learner-initiated-supports/Reading-Recovery>.

Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) service

Produced by the Ministry of Education, this resource includes information about the service, and links to resources to support the service. Retrievable from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD/Learner-initiated-supports/Resource-Teacher-Learning-and-Behaviour-RTLb>.

Resource Teacher Literacy (RTLit) service

Produced by the Ministry of Education, this resource includes information about the service, and links to resources to support the service. Retrieval from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD/Learner-initiated-supports/Resource-Teacher-Literacy-RTLit>.

Special assessment conditions

Produced by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, this resource details information for schools, parents, and caregivers about assistance available to students with sensory, physical, medical, and/or learning differences. Retrieval from <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/assessment-and-moderation/managing-national-assessment-in-schools/special-assessment-conditions/>.

Special Education Early Intervention Service

October 2016. Information produced by the Ministry of Education about a service that provides specialist support for children who have a developmental or learning delay, a disability, a behaviour difficulty, or a communication difficulty that significantly affects their ability to participate and learn at home or in an early childhood education setting. Retrieval from <http://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/learning-tools-and-resources/early-intervention/>.

An integrated system of supports for learners and schools

September 2015. A resource for educators to assist the identification of learning needs, select appropriate resources and support to meet those needs, and design learning processes and pathways. Produced by the Ministry of Education and retrieval from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD>.

Tips for Autism

Jointly funded by the Ministries of Education and Health, this free three-day course is for teams of parents, teachers, and specialists that support students with ASD aged 5–12 years. Retrieval from <http://www.tipsforautism.org.nz/>.

Appendix C

Glossary of acronyms and terms

ADHD: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

ASD: Autism spectrum disorder

CAS: Childhood apraxia of speech

ERO: Education Review Office

IEP: Individual education plan

ITE: Initial teacher education

NCEA: National Certificate of Educational Achievement

NZQA: New Zealand Qualifications Authority

ORS: Ongoing resourcing scheme

PLD: Professional learning and development

RR: Reading recovery

RTLb: Resource teacher: learning and behaviour

RTLit: Resource teacher: literacy

SCERTS: Social communication, emotional regulation, and transactional supports

SEG: Special education grant

SENCO: Special education needs coordinator

SPELD: Specific learning disabilities

TA: Teacher aide

TKI: Te Kete Ipurangi – the online knowledge basket (www.tki.org.nz)

Ākonga: Māori word for “learner” or “student”.

Assistive technology: Helps students with learning differences to improve their writing and reading skills, their engagement with the curriculum, and their social interaction and behaviour. Assistive technology includes devices such as laptops, tablets, specialist software, or hearing loops for classrooms.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: Any of a range of behavioral disorders occurring primarily in children, including such symptoms as poor concentration, hyperactivity, and learning difficulties.

Autism spectrum disorder: A general term for a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders are characterised, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviours.

B4 School Check: A free voluntary health and development check for all children in New Zealand when they turn four years old.

Childhood apraxia of speech: A complex speech disorder that affects control of the movement required for the accurate articulation of speech sounds and intonation.

Community of learning: A regional group of education and training providers (early learning, schools, kura, and post-secondary) working together to help students achieve their full potential. There are 148 Communities of Learning spread throughout the country.

Decile: A measure of the socio-economic position of a school's student community relative to other schools throughout the country. Deciles are used to target funding, for state and state-integrated schools, to help them overcome any barriers to learning that students from lower socio-economic communities may face.

Dragon software: Speech recognition software that converts speech to text.

Dyscalculia: A difficulty in learning or comprehending arithmetic, such as difficulty in understanding numbers, learning how to manipulate numbers, and learning facts in mathematics.

Dyslexia: A general term for disorders that involve an unexpected or persistent difficulty in learning to read, write, and spell that cannot be explained by other factors. Specifically, a person with dyslexia has difficulty decoding and encoding print.

Dyspraxia: Describes a difficulty in learning, planning, and carrying out coordinated movements in sequence to achieve an objective.

Early Intervention Service: Provides specialist support for children who have a developmental or learning delay, a disability, a behaviour difficulty, or a communication difficulty that significantly affects their ability to participate and learn at home or in an early childhood education setting. The service can work with children from birth until they start school.

Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder: A group of conditions that can occur in a person whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. Difficulties can include poor coordination, low intelligence, behavioural problems, and issues with hearing or seeing.

Global developmental delay: A child may be described as having global developmental delay if they have not reached two or more milestones in all areas of development, including motor skills, speech and language, cognitive skills, and social and emotional skills.

Inclusive education: This is founded in Part 8 of the Education Act 1989, which states that "people who have special educational needs (whether because of disability or otherwise) have the same rights to enrol and receive education at State schools as people who do not". At fully inclusive schools, all students are able to take part in all aspects of school life; students' identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed; and their learning needs are addressed.

Individual education plan: A written plan to support the education of a child with additional learning needs. The plan can include teaching strategies and supports, resources and special equipment, and goals and success criteria.

Irlen syndrome: A perceptual processing disorder that causes a problem with the brain's ability to process visual information.

Irlen lenses and overlays: Coloured screens that are intended to filter out wavelengths of light that inhibit people with Irlen syndrome from processing visual information correctly.

Learning Support Update: A programme of work being conducted by the Ministry of Education to strengthen inclusion and modernise how learning support is delivered throughout the education sector.

Magnet school: A school that attracts students from various areas or groups, especially because it offers specialist teaching or subjects.

Modern learning environments, also called **Innovative learning environments:** These are more open than traditional classrooms, and can often accommodate more than one class and several teachers. They are often made up of many different-sized spaces, so they can support different ways of teaching and learning, and can be used for different types of activities. They are designed with the right acoustics, lighting, technology, heating, and air quality to support learning.

Neuroplasticity programmes: Focus on strengthening and “rewiring” areas of the brain affected by learning differences.

Parents’ Advocacy Council: Established under the 1989 education reforms to represent parents in the new school system, but later abolished.

Perceptual motor programme: A programme designed to help children with their fine motor and gross motor skills.

Phonological deficit hypothesis: A prevalent explanation for the cause of dyslexia, which attributes a difficulty in connecting the sounds of language to letters because of a structural deficit in the part of the brain associated with processing the sounds of language.

Reading recovery: An early literacy intervention designed to accelerate a student’s reading and writing progress to the average level of their peers, and to identify students who need ongoing specialist literacy support.

RTLb: Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour, funded to work with schools, teachers, and Years 1–10 students with learning and behaviour difficulties.

RTLit: A Resource Teacher: Literacy has specialist skills in teaching reading and writing, and works with students experiencing literacy difficulties, and their teachers

Special assessment conditions: Provide extra help for approved secondary students when they are being assessed, so that barriers to achievement can be removed and they have a fair opportunity to achieve credits. Examples of special assessment conditions are the use of a reader/writer or computer, rest breaks, and Braille or enlarged papers.

Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO): Oversees the day-to-day operation of a school’s special education needs policy. The SENCO can provide advice, as well as coordinate additional support for students who need it.

SPELD NZ: A not-for-profit organisation that provides information, assessment, and tuition to families, whanau, schools, businesses, and individuals living with specific learning disabilities.

Appendix D

List of submitters

ACE Aotearoa
Action Dyslexia Training and Consultancy Ltd
ADHD Association
Adrienne Pallatt
Alena Wafer
Alex Gilks
Alice Mason
Alison Derbyshire
Alison Wardle
Allyson Mary Gofton
Altogether Autism/Parent to Parent
Amanda Drumm
Amanda Nasilasila
Amanda P
Amelia-Jane Brocklebank
Ananda Doornekamp
Andrea Aspden
Andrea Bailey
Ange Genet
Angela Basher
Angela Bensemann
Angela McLuckie
Anna Boyt
Anna Jenkins
Anna Lindroos
Anne Gaze
Anne Smith
Anne Stercq
Annette Bradley
Annie Bretherton
Annie Zhuoni Cai
Anonymous
Ariell King
Asperger's Connections, Tauranga
Autism Action NZ
Autism New Zealand
Autumn Ede
Babs Theinert-Brown
Barbara Broughton
Barbara Stet
Belinda Walsh
Ben Duffy
Berhampore School

Berinthia Binnie
Bernadette Reedy
Bre-Anne McDonald
Bronwyn Coppin
Broomfield School
Byrin Malone
Cade Brinck
Calliope Kennedy
Cameron Flude
Carol Webb
Caroline Cavanagh
Carolyn Holmes
Catherine Croft
Catherine Fraser
Catherine Frogley
CCS Disability Action
CDHB Child Development Service
Celeste Littek
Cellfield NZ
Cherie Apers
Cherie King
Cherie Stayner
Cheryl Hoskins-Wilder
Children's Autism Foundation
Chris Blewden
Christine Cole and Adele Hibbs
Christine Gallagher
Christine Hommel
Christine Thesiger
Claire Dowsett
Claire Hanham
Claire O'Connell
Colin James White
Colleen Shaw
COMET Auckland (Community Education Trust Auckland)
Cordelia Locket
Craig D. Atkinson
Craig Jackson
Danny de Hek
Darlene Warnock
David and Judith Squirrell
David Marra
David Taylor
David Whyte
Debbie Donald
Deborah Tobin
Debra Kenwright
Deidre Senior

Denise Hughes
Denise MacKenzie
Denise Marshall
Diana Bell
Dianne Khan
Dinah Hughes
D Zammit
Donna Miles
Donna Nugent
Dr Corrina Tucker
Dr Hilary Stace
Dr Sasha Gold
Dr Suzanne Henwood
Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand
Dyslexia Unlocked
Early Childhood Council
Eesha Fugaz
Elizabeth Brehaut
Elizabeth Earnshaw
Ellen Gee
Emma Heke
Emma Hunter
Esther
Ethan Caldwell
Finlayson Park School
Fion Hogan Costello
Florence Prosser
Frank Collette
Frank Sharpe
Fransisca Fitzell
Friar Wadia
Gabrielle Ann Brocklebank
Gabrielle Hogg
Georgia-Ann Ranga Perkins
Georgina B
Glenda Frapwell
Glenis Bearsley
Gwyneth Taylor
Harriet Epstein
Harsh Vardhan
Hazel Nelson Kelly
Heather Lear
H & D Nilsson
Helen Cheffings
Helen Lane and Gary Smith
Helen Pendlebury
Helen Ryane
Helen Wildbore

Henry Collette
Hermione Blair
Hobsonville Point Primary
Hugo van Stratum
Human Rights Commission
Ian McKelvie, Bernadette McIlwaine, Norma Humphries, Margaret Sagar, Liz Kane,
Lucinda Dodunski, Kathryn Marsh, Karen Swenson, John and Angela Turkington
IHC
Inclusive Education Action Group Incorporated (IEAG)
Irlen NZ
Jackie Ziegler
Jacqui Scott
James Barber
Jamie Marsden
Jan Wigmore and Andrew Bird
Jane Macgregor
Janelle Bailey
Janelle Wills
Janene Love
Janet Hunter, Liz Kane, and Deb Fitzgerald
Janin Deiconti
Janine Boag
Janine Lee
Jarrod Hook
Jayne Bolsover
Jayne MacDonald
Jayran Mansouri
Jen Cooze
Jennifer Parkinson
Jenny Tippet
Jill Hughes
Jo Moffat
Jo Voss
Joan Roberts
Joanna Hodgkinson
Joanna Kayes
Joanne Newlands
Jodi Mitchell
Jodi Wichers
Jodie Peterson
Jodie Ruth Garrett
Johanne McArthur
John Carrodus
John McKenzie
Jude Bignell
Judy Black
Julia Watson
Julie Utting

Justine Brock
Justine Fletcher and Giovanni Tiso
K Keppel
Karen Avery
Karen Davis
Karen E Jones
Karen Faye Holmes
Karen Holmes
Karen Lusi
Karen Marie Jones
Karen Radich
Kat Gilbert-Tunney
Kate Davey
Kate Spragg
Kath Heather
Katharine Shaw
Kathleen Jestin
Kathy Juriss
Kellie Sherwen
Kelly Cavanagh
Keren Graham
Kerrie Whistler
Kerry English
Kerry Stephen
Kihikihi School
Kiri Scott
Kirsty Christian
Korakonui School
Kristin McKee
Lara Gaze
Lara Lipp
Laughton King
Laura Ellis
Laura Katherine Manson
Learning for You—South Canterbury
Learning Support
Lee Tempest and Brian Humphries
Leigh Ezernieks
Leonie Partridge
Lesley Burkett and Annemie Peeters
Lesley Gray
Lesley Martin
Lewis J Cormack
Liliane Gordon
Linda Bowman
Linda Rowan
L. Shearman
Lisa Gibson

Liz Taute
Lois McNaughton
Lois Ruth Harrison
Lorreen Hartley
Louise Hayne
Louise Stephenson
Louise Vera Wassell
Luana Aulalo
Lucy Wilkinson
Lynda Woodgate
Lynne Lowery
Lynne Oldham
Mahia Hurst
Maj De Poorter
Malcolm Alexander Croft
Mali Allen
Mandia Mentis
Mandy Bunce
Manukau ASD & Related Disorders Whanau Support Group
Maree Evans
Maree Strange
Margaret Bothwell
Margaret Ereckson and Yvonne Browning
Margaret Hunt
Margaret Sagar
Maria
Marian Galvin
Martin Hales
Mary
Matipo Primary School
Megan Bourke
Megan Hunt
Megan Pickering
Mel Rea and Jackie Allen
Melanie Benge
Melanie Curry
Melanie Dorrian
Melanie Taylor
Melinda Lee E Silva
Melinda McNamara
Melissa Mitchell-Bain
Merlin Clisby
Merryn Giblin
Michael Grigg
Michael O'Keefe
M. Nicholas
Michelle Fitzsimons
Michelle Maule

Michelle McGuire
Michelle Robson
Michelle Strong
Michelle Tehiko
Michelle Wade
Miranda Baker
Monica Choy
Motupipi School
National Council of Women of New Zealand
Natoya Rose
Nawton School
Neil MacKay
Nelson Bays Cluster 30 Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour
New Zealand Educational Institute
New Zealand Kindergartens Inc.
New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association, Te Wehengarua
New Zealand Psychological Society
New Zealand Qualifications Authority
New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association (NZSTA)
Ngaire Allwood
Ngaire Sigmund
Nicki Falconer
Nicky O'Brien
Nicola Barr
Nicola Dunford
Nicola Easthope
Nicole Forster
Nicole Nelson
Nikki Mandow
Normandale School Board of Trustees and Community
New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI Te Riu Roa)
Ohomairangi Trust
Ok Kim
Omanu Primary School
Ongoanga School
Pamela Protheroe
Pasifika Autism Support Group
Pat, Fleur, and Max Murray
Paul Armstrong
Paul Veltman
Paula Amrein
Payal Ramritu
Pedro Silva, Quentin Allen, Sue Beechey, David Parker, Karen Margetts, Mark Bassett,
Layne Waewera, Donald Ripia, Meiolandre Tima, and Gema Carlson
Penelope Baber
Penelope Thomson
Peter Coleman
Peter Packard

Peter Ryan
Philipa Adam
Prader-Willi Syndrome Association (NZ) Inc.
Primary ITO
Professor James Chapman and Distinguished Professor William Tunmer
Puriri School
R. Anne Hoskin
Rachel Fowler
Rachel Mackay
Rachel McCulloch
Rachel Park
Rachel Trimble
Rachel Winter
Ragne Maxwell
Raising Achievement
Rangitoto College
Ravensbourne School
Rebecca Bosco
Rebecca Collis
Rebecca Fraser
Rebecca Hall
Rebecca Mathieson
Richard Belton
Robert John Michael Calder
Robyn Greig
Robyn Harawira
Robyn Joyce
Robyn Stead
Robyn Whitmarsh
Roger Hindle
Rose Gerven
Ross Dunn
Rowan and Maria Williams
Ruakituri School
Ruby Little
Ruth Gibbons
S Anonymous
S. Hartmann
Salisbury School
Sally Neary
Sally Waters
Sam Lane
Samantha White
Sandra Lewis
Sara Baker
Sarah Johnston
Sarah Laing
Sarah Lear

Sarah Millar
Sarah Prebble
Sarah Rose Fugaz
Sarah Sharpe
Sarah Urquhart
Shane McInroe and Roger Marsden
Sharon Thakur
Shelley McMeeken
Shelley Mercer
Sheree Coombes
Siobhan Harvey
Southern Regional Health School
Specific Learning Disabilities Whangarei Inc.
SPELADD NZ Inc.
SPELD NZ
St Therese School
Stasia Jackson
Stephanie Thomson
Steven Crawford
Stuart Trounson and Mary Trounson
Su'Rynn Wong
Sue Bannister and Paul Sutton
Sue X
Susan Anderson
Susan Haldane
Susan Taylor
Susanne Ritzenhoff
Suzanne M. Croft
Tami Harris
Tania Hodgson
Tania Longair and Heather Harvey
Tania Mahoney
Tania Vallender
Tanja Ottaway Parkes
Tansy Sayers
Tanya Coats
Tanya Hampton
Tara O'Neill
Te Marunui Toki
Tegan McIndoe
T. Moore
Terrie Beardsworth
Terry Burrell
Terry Casey
Tessa Purdue
The Cube—Invisible Disabilities Collective
The Dyspraxia Support Group of New Zealand Inc.
The Dyspraxia Support Group of New Zealand Inc. (on behalf of a parent)

The Learning Staircase Ltd
The Paediatric Society of New Zealand Developmental Special Interest Group
The Royal Australian and NZ College of Psychiatrists
Tisbury School
Todd Reid
Tom Nicholson
Toni Silvester
Tonya Cruikshank
Tracey Adams
Tracey Reid
Tracey Rountree
Tracey, Sean, and Connor Stevens
Tree Town Early Childcare Centre & Preschool
Tui Foster
Uaina Leuluai
Universities of Auckland and Canterbury, and Massey University
Ursula Edgington
Vanessa O'Sullivan
Vanessa Wood
Vicki Febery
Vicky Devine
Vijaya M.Dharan
W. Therese Eberhard
Waikato Bay of Plenty OMEP Chapter
Waikite Valley School
YouthLaw Aotearoa
Yvonne Culling
Zac Markham