

Green Party Responses

Under your party, when will ALL teachers be trained in special needs education as part of their training?

The Green Party believes that all children have the absolute right to education in their local school. Despite positive moves in this direction in recent years, many children with special needs are still unable to access this right in practice. One barrier is the fact that some teacher education still does not include any component on supporting children with diverse needs.

The Green Party has long advocated mandatory training about disability issues, needs, and rights (including ASD) as part of all teacher education. We understand that the Government intends to begin training all teachers in special needs education in 2012. We support this.

Obviously such training will need to be developed carefully, with input from parents, families, communities, and the disability sector. The new training would need to be streamlined with the existing teacher training curriculum, and staff who undertake teacher training may themselves require up-skilling to teach the new modules. In practice, it would take several years to fully implement this policy, which is why it is vital to begin as soon as possible.

Alongside the development of mandatory teacher training, we would ensure that schools come under the New Zealand Disability Strategy implementation and reporting process, and are accountable for the way they use disability funding.

The Green Party also has concerns about the new National Standards and their application to children with ASD. We are concerned that the standards are not helping children with ASD to reach their full potential.

ASD children seem to miss out on funding in both education and health as their needs are not as visible as some others. When will this change?

The Green Party believes disability funding should be needs-based, regardless of how “visible” the impairment is, or its cause.

ASD children may miss out on funding because their needs are less visible than others; they may also miss out because of the unnecessary complexity of funding support arrangements for people with impairments. We know of one woman who receives funding for her son from five different agencies, each with its own staff and reporting requirements. With individual funding capped, children with moderate needs often miss out, and may rely on the goodwill of schools and other agencies to meet their needs.

We support individualised funding for all people living with impairments and their families who wish to choose this option. Individualised funding bypasses the complex bureaucracy that has evolved, and gives control back to individuals and their families.

We would start by introducing needs-based funding for children with impairments and aim to double the percentage receiving individual funding. We believe this would go a long way towards addressing inequities in the current provision of funding, which may disadvantage children with ASD.

In addition, we would review the Child Disability Allowance with a view to increasing it, in recognition of the extra financial needs of parents and caregivers raising a child with special needs.

Again, we recognise that some of these changes would take several years to fully implement. We would therefore begin the process of implementing them as soon as possible.

What supports are politicians going to put in place for adults with ASD?

We have a wide range of policies to support people living with impairments including ASD. Some that may be of particular interest for adults with ASD are listed below, but there are many more in our full Disability Policy, which is available at <http://www.greens.org.nz/policy/disability>. We would:

- increase support for people with impairments to gain employment and self-employment until equity is achieved;
- ensure education at all levels is accessible to all and well resourced, and flexible, alternative approaches are available to meet the needs of disabled adults;
- set aside 3 per cent of the Disability Services budget to directly fund leadership training for people living with impairments and independent advocacy organisations;
- ensure people with impairments are entitled to take leadership roles in evaluation and auditing of services, and that auditing focuses on the ability of services to meet individual needs, provide inclusive support and improve quality of life;
- support individualised funding for all people living with impairments and their families who wish to choose this option;
- improve inter-agency cooperation, streamline services and reduce the complexity of funding and the need for constant advocacy for basic entitlements;
- introduce mandatory disability issues training for all public sector employees;
- introduce further service provision in rural areas to ensure equity with cities; and
- ensure that those needing intermittent care or support can access services without having to go through a screening process every time.

How will your party ensure and maintain the rights of all disabled people (including people with ASD) in the current recessionary environment?

There are a number of steps we would take to enhance the rights of disabled people to ensure that they enjoy the same rights as all citizens both in theory and in practice. These include legislating to ensure that people with impairments who are in employment have the same employment rights as all other workers, and developing and implementing a comprehensive action plan to ensure all people with impairments can access their democratic and voting rights.

We endorse the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the New Zealand Disability Strategy and would work proactively to ensure their continued implementation in Aotearoa New Zealand. For people with ASD in particular, we endorse the New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline and would like to see it widely applied.

In the current recessionary environment, we believe disabled people face particular challenges from the proposed direction of welfare policy. We are concerned about the impact of the recommendations of the Welfare Working Group on disabled people, especially moves to work-test sickness and invalids' beneficiaries, and to decrease and cut off benefits for those who fail to meet these work-tests. Such a regime is inappropriate for many disabled people, and we can have no confidence that planned changes will take the rights of disabled people into account when the Minister for Disability Issues is not on the Ministerial Group working on welfare changes.

We acknowledge that many disabled people would like to be in paid employment, but believe this requires a commitment to flexible working practices, education and awareness training with employers, and a high level of individual support, not a 'one-size-fits-all' 'job-seeker' based approach to welfare. We strongly reject the recommendations of the Welfare Working Group and would instead invest in policies that support disabled people into flexible, appropriate work.

Please feel free to outline any other policies relevant to people with ASD and their families.

We acknowledge the challenges of successfully parenting children with ASD and other impairments. Two policies of interest to people with ASD and their families that have not been mentioned yet involve greater support for parents of children with ASD and other special needs: we would reinstate the Parent Advocacy phone line to support parents needing to advocate for their children's needs, and provide further support for families struggling to cope with children with high needs and difficult behaviours.

At a more general level, we see a role for greater disability advocacy at the highest level. In the current Parliamentary term, our Disability Spokesperson Catherine Delahunty has been instrumental in establishing the new position of Disability Commissioner within the Human Rights Commission (it was Catherine's member's bill proposing this change which prompted the Government to announce the creation of the new position). We are delighted with this success, but we would still like to see a permanent, stand-alone Disability Issues Commission to provide the leadership needed to ensure that disability services become more responsive, flexible and empowering. The Commission would work with key sector leaders and families to develop a national strategy, oversee and monitor its implementation, and provide advice to the Minister. This remains a long-term policy goal.

The Green Party has a comprehensive Disability Policy covering a wide range of policy initiatives to support people with impairments, including ASD. We encourage everyone to read our full disability policy here: <http://www.greens.org.nz/policy/disability>