

# Public Response Summary

**success for all**  
Every school Every child

## Review of Special Education

### MINISTER'S FOREWORD

In February this year, the Government invited the public to provide feedback on the Review of Special Education. It is with pleasure we release this summary of public responses.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their views – students, parents, caregivers, educators, specialists and the range of non-government, community and private sector representatives. The depth and breadth of issues canvassed in your submissions were essential to informing the Review team alongside the research evidence, the *New Zealand Disability Strategy*, the *United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and other essential documentation and information.

Children and young people with special education needs deserve any improvements we can make as a result of the review. They, and their parents, have a right to expect the very best support we can provide so they can achieve success. This success is not just in education, but in society, and not just while they are at school, but for the rest of their lives.

Our challenge now is to ensure that every school delivers success for every child. We need to draw on all the resources and expertise available to deliver the result we want for all children and young people.

This step recognises that responding to the range of needs within our communities is a shared responsibility. It makes sense that all policies, funding and practices within the education sector reflect our shared responsibility. It makes sense that we begin to see that each and every one of us has an important part to play in helping children and young people with special education needs to succeed.

That means drawing on the entire community for the best result for every child. It's the child's need that should drive the system, not the system serving its own needs. We must ensure that those who provide services meet the child's needs in the best possible way.

We received more than 2,000 submissions from groups and individuals during the consultation phase of the Review of Special Education 2010. Oral submissions were heard in three locations around the country by Government and Ministry of Education officials who were available to hear people's experiences first hand. Themes emerged that have been invaluable in identifying where gaps exist, where work needs to be done, and what is currently working well.

Within the submissions it was clear that a lot of good practice occurs across the sector, with much of it captured in this summary. Submissions also showed that there are differing views on special education – from how it should be funded and who should manage that funding, through to how services should be provided and how they impact on the lives of children, their parents and caregivers.

## MINISTER'S FOREWORD – continued

Feedback has given us many excellent ideas, many of which align with what research says about improving student outcomes. It tells us that success for students with special education needs doesn't necessarily arise from more funding. Instead success comes from positive attitudes and using what we have better. It's what we do with what we've got that counts. The feedback gives a rich insight into the range of personal and professional experience that exists within the special education sector. It also confirmed that families expect a great schooling experience for their children – schools that are welcoming and successful for every child and young person.

I would like to acknowledge the members of the advisory panel, Dr Roderick Deane, Dr Jill Bevan-Brown, Paul Gibson, Dr Brian Hinchco, Paul Kennedy and Heather Lear. They provided much appreciated advice and guidance, and wanted the Review to go further.

Feedback to the Review Discussion Document demonstrated much shared passion, commitment and strong support for providing high-quality education for all. Thank you to everyone who took part in the consultation. You made a valuable contribution to the final outcomes of the Review of Special Education and to helping us achieve Success for All.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rodney Hide', written in a cursive style.

Hon Rodney Hide  
**Associate Minister of Education**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This year the public were invited to participate in the Review of Special Education by responding to a discussion document featuring questions on special education. Here is an executive summary of the public feedback. Refer to the appendices for information about how the information was analysed and presented.

### **Schooling (Q1a)**

#### ***Successful schools***

Respondents were asked what was needed to help schools succeed.

They said teachers with the right skills and knowledge were needed. About 20 per cent suggested trainee teachers needed more and better training about special education. Nearly 30 per cent said ongoing teacher education was needed. Views on training content and how training should take place were wide ranging.

About 40 per cent of respondents wanted improved internal systems and processes within schools, emphasising strong leadership, governance and whole-school professional development.

About 20 per cent talked about the need to improve the professional development opportunities available to teachers' aides.

Eighteen per cent wanted improved access to good-quality specialist services as well as training and programme development that was responsive to the school context.

### **Schooling (Q1b)**

#### ***A network of successful schools***

Respondents were asked how could schools work together to succeed.

Nearly half of respondents contributed positive ideas for working together, although many noted it would not be easy to achieve and needed to be well supported.

A wide range of ideas on how schools could share knowledge and staff were offered. Respondents suggested school clusters be developed to support special education practice based on successful clusters found elsewhere in the education sector.

Four options on the future of special schools were outlined in the discussion document. Most respondents did not express a preference outright, but did express support (19 per cent) for retaining special schools in some form. One per cent wanted special schools closed and regular schools improved.

One of the four options – option C, special schools as resource centres – prompted significant discussion about the overall merit of resource centres throughout the feedback. Various options for the governance and management of resource centres, beyond special schools were suggested.

### **Transitions and agencies working together (Q2)**

#### ***Transitions***

There was considerable agreement about what would make transitions work better, with respondents highlighting the need to focus on the transition to school and the transition at the end of school.

Respondents reinforced the need to continue using and building on existing best practice and the transition programmes that were proving successful. They supported information sharing, committing time and resources to transitions and improving coordination, leadership and planning. Involving families and students more, being flexible about resource use and increasing the awareness of disability in the community were other ideas emphasised.

The idea of a national transition policy that would incorporate best practice was suggested.

## **Transitions and agencies working together (Q3)**

### ***Agencies working better together***

When asked how services could be better coordinated and focused on the needs of students and families, nearly 60 per cent of respondents indicated that services and agencies probably needed to continue as separate entities.

But respondents wanted agencies and service providers to find ways to overcome service fragmentation and streamline the range of assessment, diagnosis, funding and philosophical approaches across agencies.

Respondents recommended services and agencies have a single coordinator for a family across all services and improve the way they shared information.

Nearly 20 per cent raised the idea of setting up a system of local centres that offered all special education services under one roof or through a single management structure. Agencies or entities put forward for the centre management role included the Ministry of Education, school clusters, a school set up as a resource centre or a separate agency set up specifically for the purpose. Only a few respondents suggested centres should go beyond education to include a broader range of services.

## **Funding and resource use (Q4)**

### ***Funding and resources for students***

Respondents were asked to comment on their preferred arrangements for funding, decision-making, verification and fundholding.

Overall, they expressed concern about the strong demand for special education services and the finite level of funding available to meet that demand.

They also wanted to use funding more flexibly and loose restrictions such as those related to the amount that could be spent on specialists, teachers and teachers' aides.

About 17 per cent wanted verification processes improved, showing equal support for a national or local Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS) verification process. Some respondents were critical of the ORRS verification process, finding it impersonal and negative.

Eight per cent of respondents said the criteria for ORRS needed to change to include more students. About six per cent said more needed to be done to ensure the criteria were clearer to families and schools, fairer and more consistently applied.

About 18 per cent suggested ORRS funds be managed by a broader range of people and organisations such as schools, families, clusters of schools, special schools on behalf of regular schools, national providers, a representative group of school boards and non-Government agencies such as disability groups or new Government entities.

## **Funding and resource use (Q5a)**

### ***Funding and resources for students***

Making individually-targeted services and supports more efficient was the focus of this section.

Fifteen per cent of respondents had ideas about the decision-making processes related to funding use. They suggested using funding more creatively, ie, to make schools more accessible and to increase a student's access to technology. These ideas had the potential to reduce a student's reliance on adult support because he or she could move more freely around the school grounds and better access the curriculum.

Rationalising the many funding schemes available and the administration time and resource spent on each one was suggested by about eight per cent of respondents.

Nearly seven per cent suggested the ORRS application process could be streamlined by having verifiers draw on existing assessment information generated about a student's needs. They also agreed with the discussion document idea that students who received Supplementary Learning Support (SLS) for a set amount of time should automatically become eligible for ORRS. However, some were concerned that, should this happen, other more needy students could miss out on ORRS.

Nearly 12 per cent showed general support for the discussion document idea of aggregating ORRS .1 and .2 teacher time with a variety of proposals for management given.

Around six per cent of respondents recommended making more efficient use of teachers' aides by clustering staff, matching staff to the needs of students and improving knowledge and skills. Streamlining the allocation of teacher's aide funding was a concern for around four per cent.

## **Funding and resource use (Q5b)**

### ***Funding and resources for students***

Respondents looked at the current mix of programmes, services and supports to see if it was right and provided value for money.

About half commented on the mix of services, with 60 per cent saying they thought it was about right and 40 per cent saying it was not. Examples of what worked well tended to relate more to special schools, special units and residential special schools, although there were positive comments about regular schools as well. Examples of what needed to improve mostly related to regular schools. Feedback highlighted the ongoing challenges associated with special education in regular schools.

## **High-quality services and being accountable (Q6)**

### ***High-quality services***

Respondents were asked how the quality of services could be improved.

Approximately a third said high-quality services relied on having skilled and experienced staff.

Thirty per cent wanted a better quality framework that set standards, provided opportunity for feedback and established practice guidelines for research or evidence-based practices. The framework would better explain services and be available to monitor quality performance.

Nearly 20 per cent said quality relied on improving access to special education services and involved being clear about what people could expect to receive and what outcomes were likely to occur.

About 18 per cent thought the service delivery model should change, commenting on the comparative pros and cons of specialist advice for teachers and staff versus specialists' direct, hands-on support.

Ten per cent of respondents wanted services focused more on the needs of students and families rather than the requirements of the school. About nine per cent said better collaboration would save time and costs across the education sector and about seven per cent said more acceptance of difference and inclusion would improve the quality of schooling.

## **High-quality services and being accountable (Q7)**

### ***Being accountable***

Better information for families and schools was the focus of this section.

Respondents felt most informed about their child's programme at school and, to some degree, their child's progress.

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) was highlighted as a useful tool for sharing information. But respondents said there was a lack of information available about services, funding and outcomes. They said there was too little information about the performance of the system as a whole.

Respondents wanted more and better information for parents and schools, contributing a wide range of ideas and emphasising face-to-face contact for individual information and when things went wrong, and group and electronic material for service and system-related information.

## **High-quality services and being accountable (Q8)**

### ***Being accountable***

Respondents were asked what successful special education would look like and how it would be measured.

Respondents said success would mean children were present, participating and learning at school. Success would mean schools and society would include children and young people with special education needs more often.

Around 23 per cent of respondents went beyond presence, participation and learning and used words like 'happy' or 'happiness' to express what students and their families would like to experience from the school system.

Happiness would be achieved when a student with special education needs had easy access to the education setting of their choice, when he or she was attending regularly and participating in the life of their school and when he or she was learning and feeling supported, not stressed or bullied.

About a quarter described the characteristics of a successful school system. Almost two thirds of these respondents wanted a system that offered choice with access to regular classes, units and classes within regular schools. Students needed specialist itinerant teachers, special schools, satellite classes within regular school sites and to feel included in all settings.

Respondents noted the benefits of using IEPs as a measurement tool and suggested using the Education Review Office (ERO) to monitor special education through school reviews and special reviews and measuring the post-school achievements of students.

## **High-quality services and being accountable (Q9)**

### ***Being accountable***

This section asked respondents to say what arrangements needed to be in place to resolve issues when things did not go well.

Approximately half emphasised the importance of preventing problems early and using low-level solutions to sort out issues as and when they arose. They wanted clear policies, procedures and effective communication, as well as access to good information and someone to clarify issues with. Setting up a clear complaints process was raised in the discussion document and received support. Thirteen per cent of respondents agreed with such a process.

There was specific support for separate advocacy and mediation services when concerns could not be resolved by good prevention and problem solving. About 22 per cent commented on advocacy and an equal number on mediation. Respondents felt these services needed to be independent and easy to access. They needed to be available to families most of all, but schools were also said to need such services. Advocates were needed on both a short-term and long-term basis, depending on the situation.

Nearly 15 per cent wanted an independent review and arbitration process. Respondents wanted a process that would deliver a final result or decision and avoid situations of no resolution.

## **Single most important change (Q10)**

This final section asked respondents to describe the single most important change they wanted to see.

Respondents gave many more than one idea for change.

Forty per cent talked about the need to retain the range of settings currently available within the school sector, expressing support for special schools as part of the range of options.

Nearly a third said the one thing that needed changing was the level of funding and services available, particularly the funding and services available in regular schools.

Twenty-two per cent said the professional development and learning of teachers and other school-based staff was the top priority.

Fifteen per cent said attitudes towards students with special education needs had to change and they wanted inclusion promoted.

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## **Further Information**

For more detailed information on the changes resulting from the Review of Special Education:

call us on 0800 622 222

see the Questions and Answers on our website:

[www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/SpecialEducation.aspx](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/SpecialEducation.aspx)

or email us at: [se.review@minedu.govt.nz](mailto:se.review@minedu.govt.nz)