**PARENTS OF VISION IMPAIRED (NZ) INC**
Postal address: PO Box 5629, Frankton, Hamilton 3242
www.pvi.org.nz
*Providing a community to support parents of children with vision impairments*

18 August 2025

Committee Secretariat
Education and Workforce Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Phone:04 817 9520
ew.legislation@parliament.govt.nz

Tēnā koe,

Please find attached a submission from Parents of Vision Impaired NZ on the *Education and Training (Early Childhood Education Reform) Amendment Bill*.

We would like to speak to this submission.

Ngā mihi,

Rebekah Graham

National Executive Officer

**Parents of Vision Impaired (NZ) Inc**

Mobile: 0226215740

Email: rgraham@pvi.org.nz

## ABOUT PARENTS OF VISION IMPAIRED NZ

Parents of Vision Impaired NZ (PVI) is a registered charity which supports parents who have blind, low vision, or vision-impaired children. There is no cost to enrol, and we provide a supportive community for parents who are overcoming challenges every day. We offer parents advice, information, and opportunities to meet other parents. We publish a quarterly newsletter (eVision) and have a members-only Facebook page for families and whānau to share information and to network. PVI also runs an annual conference which allows parents and whānau to get together face to face for a longer time to talk, listen and learn in a social setting. PVI takes an active part in the disability sector through making sure that the voice of visually impaired children and their parents is heard in consultations with government, schools, local councils, and other organisations.

## ABOUT THE BILL

The bill aims to improve the effectiveness of the early childhood education (ECE) regulatory system for children and parents, and to reduce the regulatory burden for service providers.

The bill seeks to amend the Education and Training Act 2020 to:

- clarify the purpose, objectives, and guiding principles of regulating ECE services
- establish a new statutory role, the Director of Regulation, with responsibilities for performing key regulatory functions in the ECE system
- clarify responsibilities relating to the prescribing of licensing criteria.

The bill would partly implement the Government's decisions resulting from the Regulatory Review of Early Childhood Education.

## PVI'S APPROACH

PVI takes a whole of life approach with the understanding that disabled children and whānau should have a say about outcomes that affect them. In doing so, we draw on key components of the following:

**New Zealand Bill of Rights Act (1990).** This Act states that everyone has the right to be free from discrimination from government and state officials, including with regards to education and on the grounds of disability.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a signatory to several United Nations conventions. As such, governments are required to undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights as recognized in the following relevant conventions:

- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD.**
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).**
- **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**

**NZ Disability Strategy (2016-2026)** is the Government's primary vehicle for implementing the UNCRPD and includes the NZ Disability Action Plan.

**Enabling Good Lives Principles.** These were developed in conjunction with disabled people and families. EGL is a foundation and framework to guide positive change for disabled people, families, communities and governance structures.

The **eight principles** are:

- *Self-determination:* Disabled people are in control of their lives.
- *Beginning early*: Invest early in families and whānau to support them; to be aspirational for their disabled child; to build community and natural supports; and to support disabled children to become independent, rather than waiting for a crisis before support is available.
- *Person-centred:* Disabled people have supports that are tailored to their individual needs and goals, and that take a whole life approach rather than being split across programmes.
- *Ordinary life outcomes:* Disabled people are supported to live an everyday life in everyday places; and are regarded as citizens with opportunities for learning, employment, having a home and family, and social participation - like others at similar stages of life.
- *Mainstream first:* Disabled people are supported to access mainstream services before specialist disability services.
- *Mana enhancing:* The abilities and contributions of disabled people and their families are recognised and respected.
- *Easy to use:* Disabled people have supports that are simple to use and flexible.
- *Relationship building:* Supports build and strengthen relationships between disabled people, their whānau and community.

## OUR SUBMISSION

The changes to ECE do not appear to improve the lives of our families or improve access to ECE for blind and low vision children.

Disabled children in general face exclusion from ECE:

| Area | Summary of relevant findings | Key source(s) |
|---|---|---|
| **Participation** | Around 95% of all 3–4-year-olds in NZ attend some form of ECE before school. Disabled children are included in this figure, but there is no national data disaggregated by disability. | Statistics New Zealand (2018); Morton et al. (2017) |
| **Legal entitlement** | The Education and Training Act 2020 guarantees that every child is entitled to enrol and participate in their local ECE service. | New Zealand Government (2020) |
| **Policy commitment** | The Learning Support Action Plan (2019–2025) aims to strengthen inclusion of disabled children from the early years; Disability Strategy and Action Plan commit to inclusion. Implementation gaps persist. | Ministry of Education (2019); Ministry of Education (2024); New Zealand Government (2016) |
| **Access to specialist support** | Wait times for Early Intervention Services (specialist teachers, SLTs, psychologists) are | Education Review Office, Human Rights Commission, & |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | long; in some regions families wait 6–12 months. | Office for Disability Issues (2022) |
| **Workforce capability** | Many teachers report low confidence in supporting disabled children due to lack of training in inclusive practice. Inclusion often depends on individual willingness. | Education Review Office, Human Rights Commission, & Office for Disability Issues (2022) |
| **Quality of inclusion** | Inclusion is inconsistent. Some centres provide strong support, but others discourage enrolment or limit attendance of disabled children (“soft exclusion”). | Education Review Office, Human Rights Commission, & Office for Disability Issues (2022); Education Review Office (2012) |
| **Physical & sensory access** | Not all centres are fully accessible (e.g., poor lighting, no tactile/Braille signage, limited quiet/sensory spaces). | Office for Disability Issues (2016) |
| **Funding** | Extra support funding is capped, and providers report it is often insufficient to meet needs. Parents (mostly mothers) sometimes fill the gap themselves. | CCS Disability Action (2025); Office of the Children’s Commissioner (2020) |
| **Family experience** | Families describe inclusion as a “lottery” – highly dependent on service leadership and staff attitudes rather than systemic guarantees. | IHC New Zealand (2025); IHC New Zealand (n.d.) |
| **International obligations** | NZ is a signatory to the UNCRPD (Article 24), which requires inclusive education from early childhood. Current practice does not yet fully meet this standard. | UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) |

**Summary**: While participation rates in ECE are high overall, and NZ has legislative and policy approaches that support disability inclusion and participation children in ECE, disabled preschoolers continue to face systemic barriers to inclusion. These include long wait times for support, limited workforce training, physical/sensory access gaps, and exclusory practices. Data gaps make inequities difficult to measure, but family testimony and reviews consistently describe uneven and unreliable inclusion.

The proposed legislative changes do not address this clear need or the gaps in ECE provision for disabled children. Below, we expand on our concerns:

## PARTICIPATION

The proposed objectives and guiding principles for ECE regulation do ***not*** (but should!) explicitly reference the rights of disabled children to access, inclusion, and participation. This is consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Articles 3, 19, 24, 31). They should also reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and the need for equitable outcomes for tamariki Māori, Pacific children, rural families, and other marginalised groups. The Bill does not strengthen Te Tiriti obligations in ECE, and in fact appears to weaken them. These changes are a missed opportunity to embed Māori perspectives, governance, and accountability in regulation. Erasing Māori perspectives leads to worse outcomes for all children. Without explicit reference, the framework may well look “tidier” but in practice it overlooks inequities in access and participation. It risks making ECE access ***worse*** for disabled children.

**Recommendation:** Amend the Bill to explicitly embed disability inclusion, Te Tiriti obligations, and equity for all children within the new objectives and guiding principles.

Establishing a Director of Regulation could potentially provide consistency and accountability. However, unless the role is given a statutory mandate to uphold accessibility, inclusion, and equity, it creates a purely bureaucratic compliance role, with meaningless outcomes and results for our children. Unless there is clear requirement to inclusivity, our children remain excluded from full participation in ECE.

**Recommendation:** Define in legislation that the Director is responsible for monitoring accessibility, inclusion, and equity in ECE, and for addressing complaints from parents about barriers to participation.

## ACCESSIBILITY

Current licensing criteria focuses predominantly on simple safety measures of physical safety and staff ratios. These are important but entirely insufficient to guarantee inclusive practice.

Inclusive practice requires:
- Accessible environments across a range of areas (e.g., physical, sensory, communication).
- Staff training around supporting disabled children and diverse learners across a range of areas (e.g., vision, hearing, mobility, autism)
- Recognition of cultural and whānau perspectives, particularly for Māori and Pacific families.

While there is an argument to be made to reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens on providers, this must not come at the cost of weakening expectations for accessibility, inclusion, or quality. For many disabled children and marginalised families, regulation is the only mechanism that ensures their right to participate is upheld. This is noticeable in Table 1, where, despite policy commitments to inclusion, implementation is patchy and inconsistent. These legislative changes risk making things worse for our children.

**Recommendation:** Explicitly safeguard inclusion and quality standards when streamlining regulation. Otherwise “reducing compliance burden” results in unsafe centres that do not undertake to uphold the rights of the child.

**Recommendation:** the legislation must embed accessibility and inclusive teaching practices within licensing criteria.

## WORKFORCE CAPABILITY AND SPECIALIST SUPPORT

The Bill does not address any of the known and current gaps in workforce development, training, or capability with regards to disability and/or specialist knowledge. These core areas are central to the provision of high quality ECE. Without skilled and supported teachers, regulatory reform will not lead to meaningful improvements for children, especially those with additional needs. There is a strong risk of providing low quality care, which leads to poorer outcomes for children overall. The Bill does not address the long wait times, uneven access to supports, or lack of funding for additional support needed to ensure disabled children can participate in ECE.

**Recommendation:** Include stronger requirements for workforce training in inclusive and culturally responsive practice; accessibility; and disability related training.

## EXTREMELY LIMITED CHILD AND WHĀNAU VOICE

The Bill is largely structural and does not establish any mechanisms for child or family voice. The lived experiences of families is vital to inform regulation and accountability. This is a significant gap, particularly for disabled children and their whānau, whose voices are already overlooked.

**Recommendation:** Pause the Bill until adequate consultation with parents, whānau, disabled people's organisations, and tamariki can occur.

## DATA AND MONITORING

The Bill does not provide clear requirements for data collection beyond compliance. This is most unfortunate and a missed opportunity. Without robust data, inequities in participation (e.g., for disabled children, Māori, Pacifica. and rural families) remain hidden. As noted in Table 1, there is already limited data on disability and ECE. This Bill weakens requirements, where it should strengthen them.

**Recommendation:** Require the collection and publication of participation and outcome data disaggregated by disability, ethnicity, and other relevant measures, consistent with UNCRPD Article 31.

## FINAL COMMENTS

Unless disability and inclusion are explicitly embedded, disabled children and their families risk being left behind. ECE is not only about compliance, it is about giving every child the right to belong, learn, and thrive. We urge the Committee to strengthen the Bill so that disabled children, Māori, and other marginalised groups are fully included in its vision and practice, and that the legislation upholds New Zealand's obligations under the UNCRPD and the Education and Training Act to deliver equitable and inclusive early childhood education.

The Bill does not explicitly embed disability inclusion, accessibility, or workforce capability in its objectives or licensing requirements. While some structural improvements could standardise compliance, disabled children under 5 will not experience meaningful improvement in access, support, or inclusion. In some areas, the focus on reducing regulatory burden could make things worse.

# REFERENCES

CCS Disability Action. (2023). *Pūrongo ā-tau / Annual Report 2022–2023*. CCS Disability Action.

CCS Disability Action. (2025, July 2). *Budget 2025: What it means for disabled New Zealanders* [Press release]. CCS Disability Action. https://www.ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/news/2025/july/budget-2025-what-it-means-for-disabled-new-zealanders

Education and Training Act 2020, No. 38. (2020). New Zealand Legislation. https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2020/0038/latest/whole.html

Education Review Office, Human Rights Commission, & Office for Disability Issues. (2022). *A great start? Education for disabled children in early childhood education*. Education Review Office. https://ero.govt.nz/news/a-great-start-education-for-disabled-children-in-early-childhood-education

Education Review Office. (2012). *Inclusion of children with special needs in early childhood services*. Education Review Office. https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/inclusion-of-children-with-special-needs-in-early-childhood-services

Education Review Office. (2022). *Thriving at the start: Early childhood education participation, engagement, and transitions*. Education Review Office. https://www.ero.govt.nz/our-research/thriving-at-the-start-early-childhood-education-participation-engagement-and-transitions

Hekupu. (2023). *What is inclusion? A focus on disabled children and their families in early childhood education*. Hekupu.

IHC New Zealand. (2025, July). *The cost of exclusion* [Report summary]. IHC New Zealand. https://ihc.org.nz/cost-exclusion-report-summary

IHC New Zealand. (n.d.). *Standing up for your rights* [Advice page]. IHC New Zealand. https://ihc.org.nz/standing-your-rights

Ministry of Education. (2019). *Learning support action plan 2019–2025*. Ministry of Education. https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/learning-support-action-plan-2019-2025

Ministry of Education. (2019). *Learning Support Action Plan 2019–2025*. Ministry of Education. https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/Learning-support-action-plan-2019-2025.pdf

Ministry of Education. (2023). *Early childhood education census 2023*. Ministry of Education. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/early-childhood-education/participation

Ministry of Education. (2024, January 17). *Briefing note: Update on priorities in the Learning Support Action Plan (2019–2025)* (METIS No. 1320371). Ministry of Education. https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-11/1320371-Update-on-priorities.pdf?VersionId=opiEB5LYCUr7KMdErxrwcHZXNq5tS4Is

Morton, S. M. B., Atatoa Carr, P. E., Grant, C. C., Berry, S. D., Tautolo, E. S., & Lee, A. C. (2017). *Now we are four: Early childhood education participation – Growing Up in New Zealand* [At a glance summary]. Superu. https://thehub.sia.govt.nz/assets/documents/Now_we_are_four_AAG_FINAL.pdf

New Zealand Government. (2016). *New Zealand disability strategy 2016–2026*. Office for Disability Issues. https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy

New Zealand Government. (2020). *Education and Training Act 2020, No. 38*. https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2020/0038/latest/LMS170676.html

Office for Disability Issues. (2016). *New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016–2026 monitoring reports*. https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/

Office of the Children's Commissioner. (2020). *Education matters to me: Experiences of disabled children*. https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/education-matters-to-me-disabled-children

Statistics New Zealand. (2018). *Census 2018 data*. https://www.stats.govt.nz/census

United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2016). *General comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education*. United Nations. https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/229/12/PDF/G1622912.pdf

United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2016). *General Comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education*. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1313836

Whaikaha (Ministry of Disabled People). (2020). *Disability Action Plan 2019–2023: Bi-annual report (January–June 2020)*. Wellington: Whaikaha.

Zhang, K. C., & Li, Q. (2021). Early childhood inclusion in the land of [Aotearoa New Zealand]. *Journal of the University of Glasgow Education Review*, (online Preprint).