



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

13 January 2026

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 (System 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 proposes changes to the Education and Training Act 2020. The bill would make a range of amendments to the Act, including to:

- tighten attendance exemptions
- allow sponsors to hold a single contract for multiple charter schools
- make changes to the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand's role, including transfer of certain responsibilities to the Secretary for Education
- clarify the roles of the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office when State schools are identified as being "of serious concern"
- establish the New Zealand School Property Agency to manage the property of State schools, charter schools, and early childhood education and care centres operating on Crown premises
- transfer regulatory functions for private schools and school boarding hostels from the Ministry of Education to a new Director of Regulation in the Education Review Office.

Additionally, the committee is seeking views on whether to transfer regulatory functions for early childhood education (ECE) from the Ministry of Education to the Education Review Office. This proposal is not currently in the bill, because it would amend recent changes to the Act made through the Education and Training (Early Childhood Education Reform) Amendment Act 2025. The recent changes will establish a Director of Regulation within the Ministry of Education, who will have functions related to licensing, monitoring and compliance of ECE services. The committee now invites submitters' views on whether these functions should be transferred to the proposed Director of Regulation in the Education Review Office, instead of staying in the ministry.

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 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 in 2010-2011. 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

SUMMARY

PVI **does not support the Education and Training (System Reform) Amendment Bill** in its current form.

We are deeply concerned that the Bill:

- Centralises power and politicises education decision-making
- Weakens inclusive education safeguards for disabled learners
- Further marginalises Māori voices and undermines Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- Expands privatisation and charter school arrangements without sufficient accountability

- Reduces professional autonomy and community voice
- Introduces structural changes without adequate consultation, particularly with disabled people, whānau, educators, and Māori communities

For blind and low vision learners, system design matters. When inclusion is left to discretion rather than embedded in law, disabled children are disproportionately harmed.

PVI's analysis is grounded in Aotearoa New Zealand's domestic and international obligations, as noted earlier. We do not consider this Bill to be consistent with these obligations.

PROCESS CONCERNS AND DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

PVI strongly objects to the **lack of meaningful consultation** on a Bill with deep and wide-reaching implications.

Families, school communities, educators, disabled people, and Māori were given limited warning and literally no opportunity to co-design or meaningfully engage prior to introduction. The timing of submissions (at the end of the school year, during reporting periods, and major curriculum transitions) creates a significant participation barrier. One wonders if this was deliberate to reduce participation and objection. Such an approach is inconsistent with good faith governance, the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and inclusive policy-making. It is disappointing to see this approach being undertaken.

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND DISABLED LEARNERS

PVI is particularly concerned that the Education and Training (System Reform) Amendment Bill is **poorly aligned with the Ministry of Education's existing commitments to inclusive education**, including those arising from the settlement between IHC, the Minister of Education, and the Ministry of Education, and the associated *Framework for Action: A Quality Education for All*.

That Framework was developed in response to a Human Rights Act complaint alleging systemic discrimination against disabled learners. It represents a formal acknowledgement by the Crown that the education system has failed disabled children, and that **system-level change is required**.

The Framework commits the Ministry to a long-term, rights-based programme of work to improve outcomes for disabled learners, including:

- Making disabled learners visible through improved data collection and reporting
- Strengthening access to timely and appropriate specialist support
- Ensuring curriculum and assessment are inclusive of all learners
- Improving accessibility of school property and learning environments
- Embedding collaboration across system stewards, including ERO and the Teaching Council
- Working with stakeholders, including disabled people and whānau, to monitor progress

We are concerned that the System Reform Bill does not reflect, embed, or give effect to these commitments. In particular:

LACK OF EXPLICIT ALIGNMENT WITH DISABILITY RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

Despite the Bill proposing significant structural and governance changes to the education system, it **does not include explicit provisions to strengthen inclusive education for disabled learners**, nor does it reference the Crown's obligations under the UNCRPD, the UNCRC, or the IHC–MoE settlement. This omission is significant.

Inclusive education cannot be assumed to flow automatically from structural reform. The IHC settlement recognises that without deliberate, enforceable system design, disabled learners are left vulnerable to inconsistent practice, exclusion, and reliance on parental advocacy. The Bill, as drafted, risks perpetuating these same systemic failures.

CENTRALISATION WITHOUT DISABILITY SAFEGUARDS

The IHC/MOE Framework emphasises collaboration, co-design, and accountability across agencies to address long-standing inequities experienced by disabled learners. In contrast, the System Reform Bill prioritises centralisation of authority, including increased Ministerial control and changes to regulatory and oversight functions, **without embedding disability expertise, lived experience, or co-governance mechanisms**.

For blind and low vision learners, inclusive education depends on:

- Professional judgement and flexibility in curriculum delivery
- Access to specialist services and assistive technology
- School-level responsiveness to individual needs

Centralising power without explicit inclusive education safeguards risks reducing responsiveness and increasing variability in outcomes for disabled learners.

OVERSIGHT AND REGULATION

While the Bill proposes changes to the roles of ERO, the Ministry, and new regulatory structures, it does not ensure that these bodies are required to monitor and enforce inclusive education obligations in line with the new IHC/MOE Framework for Action. Transferring or restructuring regulatory functions without embedding disability-informed accountability risks weakening, rather than strengthening, protections for disabled students.

The Framework for Action recognises that oversight must actively address exclusion, barriers to enrolment and participation, and unequal outcomes. The Bill does not yet demonstrate how its proposed reforms will support this goal.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION STILL LEFT TO CHANCE

Overall, PVI is concerned that the Bill continues to leave inclusive education as **implicit rather than explicit**. This directly conflicts with the intent of the IHC settlement, which arose precisely because disabled learners' rights were not adequately protected by implicit or discretionary approaches.

Inclusive education must be:

- Clearly articulated in legislation
- Enforceable across all parts of the system

- Designed with disabled learners and whānau
- Resourced, monitored, and continuously improved

Without these elements, disabled learners - including blind and low vision children - remain at risk of exclusion, inequity, and harm.

CENTRALISATION, MINISTERIAL CONTROL, AND PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY

PVI shares concerns raised across the education sector that the Bill:

- Legislates for increased Ministerial control over curriculum and system settings
- Reduces professional autonomy of teachers and school leaders
- Weakens localised, culturally responsive, and learner-centred approaches

For blind and low vision learners, flexibility and professional judgement are essential to adapt curriculum delivery, assessment methods, and learning environments. Centralised, politicised control risks narrowing practice and undermining inclusion.

TE TIRITI O WAITANGI AND MĀORI LEARNERS

PVI is concerned that the Bill further marginalises Māori voices and te ao Māori approaches within education governance and decision-making.

Disabled Māori children and whānau sit at the intersection of systemic inequities. Any reform that sidelines Māori participation and leadership exacerbates existing disparities and breaches Te Tiriti obligations.

An inclusive education system must be **Te Tiriti-based**, co-designed with Māori, and responsive to whānau, hapū, and iwi aspirations.

CHARTER SCHOOLS AND PRIVATISATION

PVI is concerned about provisions that:

- Expand charter school arrangements
- Allow sponsors to hold single contracts across multiple schools
- Introduce further pathways to privatise public education

Privatisation risks fragmentation, reduced accountability, and inconsistent access to specialist supports. Disabled learners are particularly vulnerable in systems where inclusion is not uniformly regulated, monitored, and enforced.

REGULATORY FUNCTIONS AND OVERSIGHT

PVI is cautious about transferring regulatory functions between agencies without clear evidence that this will:

- Strengthen inclusive practice
- Improve accountability for disabled learners

- Embed disability expertise and lived experience in regulatory decision-making

Whether regulation sits with the Ministry of Education or the Education Review Office, what matters is **robust, disability-informed oversight**, co-designed with disabled people and whānau, and aligned with UNCRPD obligations.

AN ENABLING GOOD LIVES PERSPECTIVE

From an Enabling Good Lives perspective, the Bill moves in the wrong direction. It undermines:

- **Beginning early**, by failing to strengthen early and consistent inclusion
- **Person-centred approaches**, through centralisation and standardisation
- **Mainstream first**, by weakening safeguards in mainstream education
- **Mana-enhancing systems**, by sidelining whānau voice
- **Relationship building**, by closing doors to community involvement

Disabled children and the families should not have to fight the system to access education, or to belong in education settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND ALIGNMENT WITH THE IHC–MOE FRAMEWORK

PVI recommends that the Education and Workforce Committee:

1. **Amend the Bill to explicitly recognise and give effect to the IHC–Ministry of Education settlement and the Framework for Action: A Quality Education for All**, including alignment with the Crown’s obligations under the UNCRPD and UNCRC.
2. **Embed a clear statutory duty to uphold inclusive education for disabled learners** across all system actors, including the Minister, the Ministry of Education, ERO, the Teaching Council, and any new regulatory or property agencies established under the Bill.
3. **Require that all new or restructured governance, regulatory, and oversight functions include disability expertise and lived experience**, including formal mechanisms for engagement with disabled learners and whānau.
4. **Ensure that any transfer or reconfiguration of regulatory functions strengthens—rather than weakens—monitoring, accountability, and enforcement of inclusive education obligations**, particularly in relation to access, participation, and outcomes for disabled learners.
5. **Mandate transparent data collection and reporting on disabled learners’ participation, access to supports, and educational outcomes**, consistent with commitments made under the IHC–MoE Framework.
6. **Pause or reconsider reforms that centralise decision-making unless accompanied by explicit protections for professional autonomy and localised, learner-centred practice**, which are essential for inclusive education.
7. **Undertake a disability and human rights impact assessment of the Bill**, in partnership with disabled people and representative organisations, prior to further progression.

CONCLUSION

PVI stands for a strong, inclusive, public education system that recognises disabled children as valued learners who have potential and a right to inclusive education.

We support the progress being made with the new Framework for Action, part of the Settlement between IHC, the Ministry of Education and Minister of Education. We are disappointed that this settlement does not appear to be considered, let alone included, in this legislation.

This Bill risks centralising power, marginalising voices, and leaving disabled learners behind. We urge the Committee to listen to families and disabled communities, and to do better for all learners in Aotearoa New Zealand.