



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
TE TĀHUHU O TE MĀTAURANGA

Special Education Update

Summary of
engagement
findings



Minister's foreword



The Ministry of Education began work on the Special Education Update earlier this year to make sure the education system fully supports the progress and achievement of all children, including those who need additional support to learn.

In recent years our education system has become much more inclusive. About 95 percent of children and young people who need additional learning support are now enrolled in regular schools and early childhood centres.

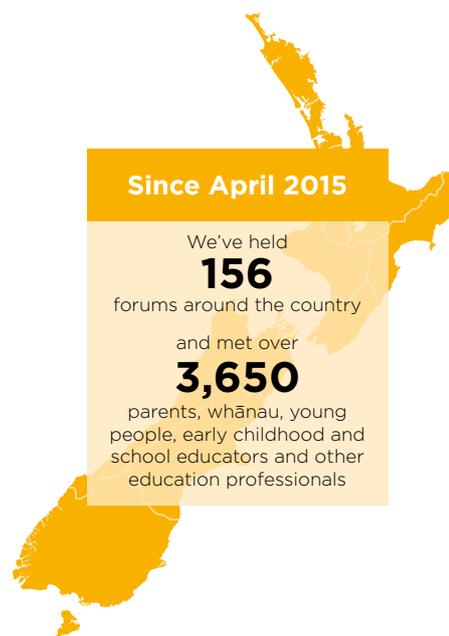
This suggests that the education system works well for many, but we've heard that sometimes our system fails and getting the right learning support is more complicated than it needs to be. There's a lot more we can do to help.

The Update forums

We've held 156 forums around the country since April 2015 to understand what improvements people think are needed. We met over 3,650 parents, whānau, young people, early childhood and school educators and other education professionals to find out how we can improve the education system for them.

These discussions didn't start from scratch because feedback since the 2010 review of Special Education gave us some ideas about what still isn't working. The topics we put forward for discussion at the forums focused on greater involvement of children, teachers, parents and whānau and simplifying and streamlining how additional learning support is provided.

We've gathered all the feedback from the forums, worked out the main themes and produced a full report to guide the next round of improvements for children and young people who need additional learning support. This summary introduces those themes and you can read the full report here: www.education.govt.nz.



WHAT WE HEARD

Most Update forum feedback was about six areas for improvement:

- 1 Better guidance and training for teachers - from early childhood education onwards
- 2 Greater involvement of parents and whānau and better information for them
- 3 Much simpler and more transparent access to support
- 4 Better interagency coordination
- 5 Better transparency and more joined up services across the education system
- 6 Streamlined support when a child moves - to primary or high school or to another school

Update Action Plan

The Ministry will work with others over the coming months and during 2016 to action these improvements in line with the engagement findings:

- ✓ We are going to reorganise how we support families and educators and simplify the support we offer, so it's child centred, easy to access, prompt, early and carries on for as long as it's needed. Families will have a single point of contact and support will be driven by the child's needs.
- ✓ Collaboration between professionals, educators, students, parents and whānau must underpin this approach.
- ✓ The Ministry and its partners will start trialling improvements in communities across New Zealand over the coming months.
- ✓ We'll also improve the way we gather, analyse and share information and review teacher training and professional development to strengthen practice.

Thank you to everyone who is supporting and contributing to the Update and spoke at the recent forums with such passion and commitment.

Together we'll build a strongly inclusive education system so all our children progress, learn and have a brighter future.



Hon Hekia Parata
Minister of Education

What we heard

1 Better guidance and training for teachers – from early childhood onward

People at the forums know that confident and capable teachers make a big difference to the education and wellbeing of all children, particularly children who need additional support to learn.

They made the following points:

Good teachers can help all children progress and achieve no matter what their unique learning needs are.

Teachers should be comfortable raising their concerns with parents and whānau and know how to help organise the right support for children who need it.

We need a system-wide focus on improving teaching and all teacher training and development should include a much stronger focus on how to teach children with a diverse range of learning needs.

Universities have a big role to play because they train new teachers. The teacher training curriculum needs to emphasise teaching all children. Training should also inform trainee teachers about the additional support available to them as teachers and how to access it.

Teachers need to be better trained to quickly recognise when children need more help – and what to do about that.

2 Greater involvement of parents and whānau and better information for them

Parents want to be heard and respected as active and equal participants in their child's learning. This will reduce stress, anxiety and frustration for them. It will free up their time and mental energy for positive, child-centred interactions that improve relationships and are better for their child.

Some of the points made include:

Parents and whānau want to be much better informed about the help available to them and their children – and how to access it.

We need to get much better at supporting and involving parents and whānau in the process of understanding a child's learning needs and working out the best response. Too often parents and whānau hear about meetings and decisions after these have happened.

They also want easily understood information about their children's progress at each step and they often don't get that now.

Better information and involvement also makes it easier for parents and whānau to confidently support their child's education in the right ways.

Simplicity, transparency and accountability matter. The information parents get about their child's progress and wellbeing isn't always up to date or sufficiently detailed. We need to capture better data and improve the quality of reporting.

People liked our suggestion of a single point of contact to liaise with the child, parents, whānau, teachers and others to plan and arrange additional learning support.

Many parents also see the need for an advocate to make sure they get continuity of service and that there is a good 'fit' between the single point of contact, the child, parents, whānau and anyone else on a child's support team.

3 Much simpler and more transparent access to support

Most people at the forums described the same barriers to making sure the right additional learning support is in place.

Their concerns include:

Accessing timely service involves complex referral processes and paperwork. Some criteria are set too high and they can sometimes be unclear. Many forms of additional learning support are limited by age and there are waitlists for many.

Many people said the approach to identifying a child's need for support should be standardised and happen sooner. A simple, transparent and flexible identification process would make the service more timely and more responsive to need.

Information about how the system of additional learning support works is limited and confusing.

Services need to be culturally appropriate, available in all communities and free of negative perceptions.

Professionals outside the education system such as doctors and social workers find it just as difficult as parents to get action and a 'wait and see' attitude sometimes gets in the way of early help.

4 Better interagency coordination

Many people talked about the importance of identifying a child's need for additional learning support as early as possible – and that paediatricians, nurses and social workers who work with the very young are vital to getting this right. Education professionals need to link up with them much more.

With stronger relationships we can build wider understanding and help colleagues to spot the need for additional learning support as early as possible.

How well specialists in the education system work with their colleagues in the health sector in particular is a major concern. Many people said health and education services are disjointed. This leads to inefficiencies and some children fall between the cracks.

5 Better transparency and more joined up services across the education system

Many people said the current system of additional learning support is driven by multiple criteria, labels, ages, stages and other artificial barriers – not by what the child needs. Transitions can be difficult and transparency and continuity are a challenge.

People want streamlined, consistent, better coordinated services delivered by skilled professionals with clear roles and responsibilities.

Ministry staff and everyone else should use plain language to describe how we can help and avoid technical jargon.

Wellbeing and achievement plans should be in place for each child based on a well-rounded understanding of their need for additional learning support. This plan should also reflect the child's goals and aspirations and the views of parents and whānau and teachers. Plans should be reviewed and updated as the child's needs change.

6 Streamlined support when a child moves – to primary or high school or to another school

Transitions (for example, from early childhood education to school) can be challenging for all children and sometimes even more difficult for children and young people who need additional learning support.

We heard that better planning and information sharing and focusing on continuity of support make all the difference.

More information

More information about the Special Education Update, including the complete report of Engagement forums feedback, is available on our website: www.education.govt.nz

You can email us at: special.education@education.govt.nz