

Education for All

Background To This Presentation

Disabled Persons Assembly (NZ) as the national pan disability organisation recognised the need for a wide variety of sector organisations to meet to discuss their respective views on the Special Education Review.

The specific purpose of meeting was to:

1. Provide a collective voice to the Associate Minister of Education
2. Discuss our Review submissions so as to clarify points of agreement and points of difference.
3. To discuss any plan of action relating to the Review.

Two collaborative meetings have been held where it was decided to write this joint presentation to assist the government with its review. All organisations support the presentation in principle.

Paul Gibson - Member Special Education Review Reference Group attended the meetings.

The following organisations have been involved in preparing this presentation and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with the Minister, Ministry and the Minister's Review Panel:-

Association of Blind Citizens New Zealand
CCS Disability Action
Deafblind (NZ) Inc
Disabled Persons Assembly New Zealand
IHC Advocacy
Inclusive Education Action Group
Parent to Parent New Zealand
Parents of Visually Impaired New Zealand
People First New Zealand

We wish to make it clear that this presentation is not designed to replace the specific examples presented in our respective organisational submissions. This presentation is designed to bring together the areas of commonality of the organisations represented thus none of the content should be taken in isolation of this statement in principle.

Vision Statement

The organisations involved in developing this presentation believe that this statement by a past chair of the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind, Don McKenzie, provides a strong, lasting statement of intent about the education of disabled children and young people.

“We seek an approach that see education as a preparation for the whole of life: that sustains and lifts the civilised spirit; that genuinely embraces ethnicity, families, professional and concerned communities; that fosters cross-government and community collaboration and action; that sees special needs education as an investment in human potential; that grows young people with disabilities as valued contributors, endowed with self-efficacy and who are truly integrated as participants in everyday life”

Our Key Messages

1. The shift to a rights based inclusive education approach for all students
2. The need for United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities UNCRPD, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child UNCRC, the New Zealand Disability Strategy NZDS and Te Tiriti O Waitangi to underpin this approach
3. The need for legislative and policy changes to enable this to happen.
4. The need for a collaborative strategic plan involving all those concerned in this area to implement and develop the way forward.

The Present System

The organisations represented in the presentation want to celebrate and acknowledge that some teachers and schools are practicing rights based inclusive education now. A good example of this is Victory School in Nelson (the school community which won the Kiwibank Community of the Year award.) This school, from a low decile area in Nelson, has dramatically reduced the number of referrals to Group Special Education by seeing the diversity of students in the classroom, with all they bring to this experience, as something to be celebrated rather than classed as a problem or “special”

Unfortunately not all New Zealand schools share this inclusive education approach. Parents and disabled students themselves often find that rather than being welcomed and celebrated they are categorised negatively. It is all too common in the disability sector to hear stories from parents of schools whose school leadership have said “If John doesn’t bring resourcing, he can’t be a member of our school.” This attitude causes parents to fear that their child will not receive resourcing and this deficit based attitude impacts on how the child is seen at school. IHC’s DVD, “Learning Better Together: Working Towards Inclusive Education in New Zealand Schools”, provides a number of examples of inclusive education working well.

It is also often said that a tremendous amount of money - \$450 million dollars – is spent on special education every year. Our collective believes that this Review provides a very real opportunity for the Government to think creatively (with human rights at the centre) to make sure that we are ensuring best quality outcomes for all disabled children, not just those who are lucky enough to receive support from the state. In recent research undertaken by CCS Disability Action, parents described themselves as “lucky” when they were able to access the school of their choice.

We also believe that teacher education is not serving either teachers or disabled students well. Too often teachers don't feel they were “trained to do this” (teach disabled students). Too many children and their teachers are receiving insufficient levels of support at their local regular school.

Our Proposal

The most important change to our present system of special education is the shift in thinking and practice to a rights base inclusive education approach for all students. The word ‘special’ is no longer appropriate within this future context.

This shift requires the commitment and leadership from our government to plan for the future a true inclusive education system. This system needs to offer flexibility in the way resources are made available to disabled learners and families so they can fully participate in their local regular or preferred educational setting.

Evidence based research tells us inclusive education provides consistently better social, psychological and academic outcomes for disabled children and young people. Young people are better prepared for life's joys and challenges: having relationships, being part of their community and having employment opportunities like anybody else. This will require a systemic shift and legislative changes to affirm Government's commitment to inclusive schools in accordance with relevant United Nations Conventions and domestic legislative and policy imperatives. This will also require an indepth examination of the school wide barriers to the presence, participation and learning of disabled students.

Government's ratification of UNCRPD signals its commitment to improve the lives of disabled people. Disabled people are now part of an international legal framework of human rights. The UNCRPD (refer to General Principles and to Article 24), UNCRC and NZDS must now totally underpin the principles of this Review and all future government policy and practice must be assessed by using these core documents in respect to the education of disabled learners. The documented principles for the Review do not truly reflect these international human rights obligations.

This shift requires the Ministry of Education to take responsibility for the development of a strategic plan to achieve the vision of inclusive education for New Zealand. This will require new National Administrative Guidelines and National Education Goals to support schools in their understanding and commitment to inclusive education. Different forms of accountability involving

the enforcement powers of the Ministry of Education, the Education Review Office, comprehensive parent and consumer advocacy involvement and independent conflict resolution processes will be needed.

This shift is also likely to require at least a short term increase in Vote Education. The Review should discover greater efficiencies in how present resources are allocated. However, a fiscally neutral constraint is most likely to be unsustainable. We believe however that a focused short term investment in the education of disabled students will benefit both those students and the country in terms of improved social and economic outcomes.

A commitment of all concerned to inclusive education practices will allow us all to work to a common goal rather than the present system of different sector groups fighting with each other in unconstructive ways over limited resources. The present system is complex and non cost effective with some duplication of resources and difficult to effectively monitor school performance in respect to inclusive education practices.

Inclusive education is about:

- All schools and school communities ensuring that they are welcoming of all students. We remind the Ministry of Education that every school has an obligation to educate all students and that special education is not a mechanism to relieve schools of that responsibility.
- All schools being adequately resourced. We believe that new ways of thinking about how schools are resourced through their Operational Grants are needed. In our view, funding provided to schools should ideally be used on teacher professional development which enables them to understand the importance of practicing inclusive education in line with the UNCRPD and the NZ Disability Strategy. This should also apply in pre service professional development of classroom teachers. A fundamental premise of inclusive education is that the learner is primarily the responsibility of the classroom teacher.
- Classroom teachers and education support staff should also have equal access to specialist resource personnel (within or outside the school) to help their understanding of the specific learning needs of disabled children and young people. We believe that the provision of this support to classroom teachers will greatly assist their teaching practice when working with a diverse range of students. A good example of the development of this specialist workforce which is already being undertaken is the collaboration between Massey University College of Education and the University of Canterbury in delivering and teaching the Post Graduate Diploma for Specialist Teachers.
- Resource decisions should be made closest to the child by the people who know the child best. One possible model for this could be Individualised resource funding deriving from IEPs with the full participation of parents and students should also be available specific to the learning and support needs of each disabled child or young person.

Resources are at a level that enables disabled children and young people to receive a quality education that provides the opportunity to have an education equivalent to that received by their non disabled peers in their local regular school. Examples of these supports include NZSL interpreters, resource teachers of vision and teacher aides.

- Individual assessments are holistic and cover all aspects of the disabled person's life. Assessment processes are streamlined where information is shared between agencies.
- Disabled children and young people have access to resource centres for concentrated learning and support programmes specific to their learning needs. The focus of these resource centres should be on providing specialist teaching and support to facilitate the maximum presence, participation and learning of disabled children and young people in their local regular school.
- The unique cultural, linguistic and high quality teaching requirement for blind, deaf or deaf/blind learners requires a national resource service provision. The national education plans developed with the Deaf and Vision Impaired sectors are good examples of responding to the specific needs of disability communities.
- All schools practice zero tolerance to bullying and other negative behaviours towards disabled children and young people.
- Transitions and resources for disabled learners are coordinated between local regular educational settings and planned well before transitions take place.

Recommendations

1. The UNCRPD, UNCRC and NZDS underpin the outcomes of the Special Education Review and future government policies and practices.
2. The Government affirms its commitment to inclusive education practice through legislative changes to the Education Act, 1989 in accordance with relevant UN Conventions.
3. The Government considers increasing Vote Education to fully implement an inclusive education rights based approach for the education of disabled children and young people.
4. New National Administrative Guidelines and the New Zealand Curriculum are reviewed to ensure that their provisions are able to support schools in their understanding and commitment to inclusive education.
5. The Ministry of Education undertakes the responsibility of developing a realistic strategic plan to achieve the vision of inclusive education for New Zealand in consultation with all stakeholders. We envisage that

such a plan would address: teacher professional development using operational grants, learner centred funding provisions for disabled children and young people, access to resource centres, coordinated transition arrangement between educational settings, the use of enforcement powers and the availability of independent conflict resolution processes, A representative group of all those involved should be established to support this initiative.

6. The proposed disability awareness campaign funded by the Government in Budget 2010 includes information about the importance of inclusive education for disabled children, young people and their families.
7. National resource provisions are retained and further developed for learners who are deaf, blind and deaf/blind.