Including Students with High Needs: School Questionnaire Responses (2)

September 2012

Foreword

The Education Review Office (ERO) is an independent government department that reviews the performance of New Zealand's schools and early childhood services, and reports publicly on what it finds.

The whakataukī of ERO demonstrates the importance we place on the educational achievement of our children and young people:

> Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa
> The Child – the Heart of the Matter

In our daily work we have the privilege of going into early childhood services and schools, giving us a current picture of what is happening throughout the country. We collate and analyse this information so that it can be used to benefit the education sector and, therefore, the children in our education system. ERO's reports contribute sound information for work undertaken to support the Government's policies.

All children deserve the right to an education including those with special education needs. Through its *Success for All* policy, the Government expects all schools to demonstrate inclusive practice for children with special education needs by the end of 2014. This report presents the findings of a questionnaire where schools assess their own provisions for students with special education needs. It follows on from a similar report produced in early 2012.

Successful delivery in education relies on many people and organisations across the community working together for the benefit of children and young people. We trust the information in ERO's evaluations will help them in their work.

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Overview

A 2010 Education Review Office (ERO) report, *Including Students with High Needs*,[1] found that half of schools demonstrated mostly inclusive practices for these students. Thirty percent of schools had some areas of good performance and 20 percent had few inclusive practices.

Subsequently, the Government developed a policy, *Success for All - Every School Every Child,* to promote the achievement, participation, and presence of children with special education needs in every mainstream school. The policy requires all schools to demonstrate inclusive practice by the end of 2014, with a target of 80 percent of schools doing a good job, and none doing a poor job, of including and supporting students with special education needs.

Two hundred and fifty-four schools reviewed by ERO during Terms 3 and 4, 2011, completed a questionnaire about providing for students with special education needs. It should be noted that schools rated their own performance and provided information they considered relevant. Some schools interpreted special needs very broadly and, in some cases, information supplied did not support their rating of how inclusive they are.

Eighty-eight percent of these schools rated themselves as having mostly inclusive practices, 10 percent as having some inclusive practices and one percent (three schools) said they had few inclusive practices.

Most schools expressed positive attitudes to inclusion and identified a variety of ways they provided for students with various special education needs.

- Most schools had policies to address the inclusion of students with disabilities or special education needs.
- Eighty percent of schools had a special education needs coordinator.
- Almost all schools had accessed some form of professional learning and development or support to help staff include students with special needs.
- Schools had developed various approaches and systems to support the learning and inclusion of these students.
- Schools used a wide range of programmes to provide for students with special needs, most often for their literacy and numeracy needs.
- Two-thirds of schools had undertaken special property projects to cater for students with physical disabilities.
- The main challenges schools identified were funding, access to specialist advice and support, employing appropriate staff, and catering for students with challenging behaviours or high needs.

These responses are very similar to those from schools reviewed in Terms 1 and 2, 2011.

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[1] ERO (2010). *Including Students with High Needs*. Wellington: Education Review Office

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When asked about outcomes for students resulting from their systems and programmes, most schools commented in general terms that students had made progress or achieved their learning goals. Some schools reported specific information on aspects of literacy such as raised reading ages, and schools also reported improvements in speech, numeracy/mathematics, social skills and behaviour. Some schools noted that students were more confident, more independent, more engaged, and had developed a sense of belonging to the school.

Most schools said they reported self-review data to the board about the achievement and inclusion of students with special needs. However, analysis of reports provided by 51 schools found variation in terms of the nature and amount of information provided. Most reports contained very little information about the achievement of students with high needs, and did not contain sufficient information for boards of trustees to obtain a comprehensive picture of the impact of the school's provision on student learning.

Overall, schools expressed positive attitudes towards including students with special needs, and described many ways they included these students in all aspects of school life. However, schools provided less information about how well they promoted students' learning and academic achievement.

Schools should be gathering and using more robust achievement information to:
- review the effectiveness of their programmes for learners with special needs
- identify which of their strategies are the most effective and promote these among staff to support students to make better progress
- identify needs for professional learning and development.

Next steps

To improve the learning and academic progress of learners with special needs, schools should:
- more systematically assess students' learning and evaluate their progress
- review the effectiveness of teaching strategies and programmes
- promote increased use of effective teaching strategies by accessing targeted professional learning and development and sharing good practice among staff
- develop expertise in using achievement data to inform teaching practice.

The Ministry of Education should support schools to develop evaluation processes that enable them to determine how well their programmes and initiatives improve achievement for their students with special needs.

Introduction

The vision in *Success for All - Every School Every Child* requires that all schools demonstrate welcoming and enabling learning environments. The *Success for All* policy recognises the right of students with disabilities to be educated and to achieve in the same educational settings as all other students.

This policy promotes the achievement, participation, and presence of children with special education needs in every mainstream school. The policy's aim is for schools to respond to the child's needs.

This is ERO's second report about how schools view their provisions for students with special education needs. The first report, *Including Students with Special Needs: School Questionnaire Responses (April 2012)*, documented responses from schools reviewed during Terms 1 and 2, 2011.

Methodology

This report is based on questionnaires completed by 254 schools reviewed in Terms 3 and 4, 2011. Appendix 1 shows that the schools that responded were broadly representative of schools nationally, with proportionately more contributing schools and fewer composite, secondary, rural, and very small schools.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire defined *special education students* as those who have learning difficulties, communication, emotional or behavioural difficulties, or intellectual, sensory, or physical impairments.

The questionnaire asked schools to report on:
- the number of students in various special needs categories
- policies addressing the inclusion of students with disabilities or special education needs
- PLD (professional learning development) and support related to students with special needs
- systems, initiatives, and programmes to support the achievement and/or inclusion of students with special education needs
- SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Coordinators) and their relevant experience and background
- self-review data given to the board about achievement and/or inclusion of students with special needs
- building projects or hardware additions
- challenges in including students with special education needs
- a self-rating of inclusiveness with supporting comment.

Analysis of documentation

As well as completing the questionnaire, one-fifth of schools provided a copy of information reported to the board. These documents and the collated questionnaire responses were analysed for this report.

Limitations

This report is based on data reported by schools. Although the questionnaire referred schools to ERO's report on *Including Students with High Needs* (2010) as a basis for identifying their strengths and weaknesses, schools interpreted inclusion in a variety of ways.

The questionnaire defined special education students as those who have learning, communication, emotional or behavioural difficulties, or intellectual, sensory, or physical impairments. However, school responses indicated that many considered a broad range of needs as they responded. For example, some wrote about gifted and talented students, and students for whom English was a second language.

It should be noted that schools rated themselves on how inclusive they thought they were. Nevo[2] points out the benefits of internal self review for accountability, but reminds that the credibility of the findings might be limited without external evaluation. These limitations need to be kept in mind when interpreting the report's findings.

The information for this report was provided by schools reviewed during Terms 3 and 4, 2011. Schools responded to open questions and they varied in the amount of detail they provided. The report describes the most common responses given but it should be kept in mind that they may also apply to other schools. When a percentage is given it should be seen as a minimum.

Findings

Students with special needs

ERO's questionnaire focused on gathering information about students with moderate to high levels of need. The three percent of students with the highest level of needs have individually allocated resources provided through the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS), speech language, the Severe Behaviour Service, or School High Health Needs Fund.[3] The next four to six percent of students are defined as moderate needs and resourced through a mix of resources allocated to individuals or to schools.

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[2] Nevo, D. (2002) Dialogue evaluation: combining internal and external evaluation. In Nevo, D., (Ed) *School-based evaluation: an international perspective*. United Kingdom: JAI Press.

[3] A very small number (three percent) of children are defined as having high needs and meet the criteria for specialist services, usually in the form of individualised programmes and specialist support at

A substantial majority of schools reported having students with identified special needs (92 percent) and/or students who had Individual Education Plans (91 percent). Sixty-five percent of schools had one or more ORS students, 55 percent had one or more students receiving Supplementary Learning Support, and 37 percent had one or more students enrolled with the Severe Behaviour Service.

Most schools had policies to address the inclusion of students with disabilities and/or special education needs. Some were policies specifically about students with special needs and some schools included these students in other policies such as curriculum delivery, equity, National Administration Guideline 1(NAG 1[4]), learning support, teaching, assessment, reading recovery, and behaviour.

Schools' rating of their inclusiveness

The questionnaire asked schools how inclusive they thought they were, and referred them to ERO's 2010 report, *Including Students with High Needs*.

Eighty-eight percent of schools rated themselves as mostly inclusive, and all but three of the remaining 28 schools said they had some inclusive practices (six schools did not answer the question).

Primary schools were more likely than secondary and composite schools to rate themselves as mostly inclusive (90 percent compared with 79 percent), but the difference was not statistically significant ($p>0.05$).

Schools provided detailed comments to support their self-rating. Many of those that rated themselves as mostly inclusive commented on:

- inclusive school philosophy, values or culture and a commitment to meeting the needs of all students
- high quality support and programmes
- accepting attitudes of teachers and students
- students being included in school and class programmes, activities and events.

Schools also wrote about relationships with families/whānau, capable staff who understand how to meet the needs of students with special needs, and support from outside experts.

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school. These children require significant adaptations at school so they can achieve. Their need may be for adapting the content of the curriculum, and/or for helping them to access learning opportunities.
[4] National Administration Guideline 1: Documents the requirements to foster student achievement by providing teaching and learning programmes which incorporate the National Curriculum. It refers to using good quality assessment information to identify students who have special needs (including gifted and talented), and developing teaching and learning strategies to address their needs. http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/Schools/PolicyAndStrategy/PlanningReportingRelevantLegislationNEGSAndNAGS/TheNationalAdministrationGuidelinesNAGs.aspx.

The following are examples of the detailed responses made by two schools who rated themselves as mostly effective:

> We believe all students belong in their local school. We are a long way along the inclusive continuum and have found ways to overcome most of the barriers that divergent learners may present us with. All staff share responsibility for students and work together to facilitate inclusion in regular classes. Management employs a SENCO and extra support staff so that all students belong in regular classes and all learn. We have teachers who can teach divergent curriculum and support staff who assist regular teachers and work collaboratively with outside agencies and parents and whānau to enhance learning.
> [Decile 6 contributing primary school, with large roll, in main urban area]

> Our systems and programmes are well established and robust. They enable us to work with students, teachers, parents and support resources, within classroom environments. The programmes – academic, sporting, cultural and arts – are differentiated in such a way as to be inclusive of all students. Teachers have a variety of skills and knowledge regarding students needing support and this is growing. ... Teachers are usually skilled at ensuring that buddy systems and peer support strategies are in place. Full staff professional development in autism spectrum disorder has been beneficial. There is now an understanding that strategies that are successful for students on the autism spectrum are often effective for many other students in the class. [Decile 7 intermediate school, very large roll, in main urban area]

Schools that judged themselves as having some or a few inclusive practices made similar comments but usually in less detail. They were generally positive about inclusion although a few had reservations due to staff knowledge, the funding available, or the school's ability to cater for students with high needs.

ERO found that some of the self ratings did not give an accurate indication of the extent of inclusive practices. For example, one school that rated itself as mostly inclusive provided an annual report for its special needs centre that said classroom teachers were not planning an adapted programme for ORS students, the centre was not mentioned in the school prospectus, and the school's magazine did not show special needs students participating and learning alongside mainstream students. Another school that rated itself as mostly inclusive expressed reservations about its ability to provide appropriately for children with special needs.

> Being a small school, we do not have adequate facilities for severe behaviours (no place for time out or supervision) to keep other students safe. Other parents seriously consider moving their children away if there are safety issues caused by severe behaviour. Our buildings are not suitable for physically disabled students at present and that would pose quite a financial impact on our tight budget. With only 2.4

teachers we find it a challenge because of lack of personnel, specialist staff, facilities and resources. [Decile 7 full primary school, very small roll, in rural area]

A school that rated itself as having only some inclusive practices had similar practices to many schools rating themselves as mostly inclusive. This school had one ORS student and two severe behaviour students.

Students are included in classroom programmes with individual needs catered to through modification. Our school shows a caring environment that supports, develops and works hard to empower students with high needs. The SENCO meets with the RTLB (resource teacher learning and behaviour) fortnightly and various specialist teachers keep staff up to date with student progress. [Decile 5 full primary school, medium roll, in rural area]

Although many schools expressed positive attitudes to including students with high needs, only a few systematically reflected on how effectively their programmes and practices lead to improved learning outcomes for these students.

Providing for Ongoing Resourcing Scheme students

One in five schools provided information about how they supported ORS students. These included:

- using the IEP (Individual Education Plan) process to identify specific needs, plan how to meet them, set goals, and monitor progress towards them
- bringing together families/whānau, teachers, specialists and teacher aides
- allocating resourcing such as teacher aides
- providing support, guidance and, where necessary, PLD for the staff involved
- obtaining advice and support for teachers and teacher aides from external specialists[5]
- using the teacher resourcing funding provided through ORS to plan programmes, work with students and meet with teacher aides
- developing individualised programmes, most often for literacy, numeracy/mathematics, communication/speech, life skills and social skills
- modifying learning programmes and activities so that students could access the curriculum and participate as much as possible with their peers
- teacher aides supporting students in their learning programmes so that they could be included in mainstream classrooms
- teacher aides developing students' social skills by facilitating their interactions with other students

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[5] These specialists included speech language therapists, itinerant teachers for the deaf, resource teachers for the deaf, psychologists, Blind and Low Vision Network itinerant teachers, RTLB and GSE (Group Special Education, the abbreviated term used for the Ministry of Education, Special Education).

- withdrawing some students from classes for short periods for targeted teaching and support
- using dual enrolment with Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura) [6] to obtain activities and material at an appropriate level.

In all but two of the schools that described their provisions for ORS students, teacher aides had received recent professional learning and development (PLD). These two schools were supported by resource teachers learning and behaviour (RTLB) and Group Special Education (GSE). Teacher aides had most often received professional development on literacy, speech/communication/oral language, autism, numeracy/mathematics, and behaviour.

One primary school described how they modified the programme and provided teacher aide support so that the ORS students were fully included in all aspects of the class and school programme and developed a sense of belonging.

> *Teachers provide modified programmes and support to ensure students are fully able to access all curriculum areas including technology, physical education and sport. The teacher aide works around the ORS student and not always alongside. The teacher aide timetable is set so that they are available to support students at technology, school sport days and camp. Our two ORS students are valued members of the whole school and quickly develop a sense of belonging like any other student. The real sense of achievement and belonging happens at the four-day camp, where they work with peers in activities outside the classroom.* [Decile 1 full primary, medium roll, in minor urban area]

Another primary school was supported by a speech and language therapist to create a language group to provide opportunities for students to interact with their peers and experience success.

> *The Language Group involves seven senior students, four with ORS funding. This group is designed to build confidence while teaching basic life skills. Topics such as cooking, using money, growing plants, and drama have enabled the students to take part in intensive activities suited to their needs. The students experience a lot of success as this group is aimed to their level of understanding. Items made in the Language Group are often shared with the class giving the students a chance to talk about their success with their peers.* [Decile 2 contributing primary, very large roll, in main urban area]

Another school described the benefits they saw resulting from their ORS student having knowledgeable and thoughtful staff to support their integration.

> *The current ORS student has a highly effective, experienced special needs classroom teacher who is well supported by teacher aides who*

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[6] Formerly the Correspondence School.

are caring, patient and understand the child's needs. Peers are supportive and want to engage. The outcome for the child has been a positive school experience. [Decile 7 full primary, small roll, in minor urban area]

When asked about outcomes for students, very few schools reported progress or achievement, although small numbers noted their ORS students had improved communication and social skills. Instead, most schools wrote about their provisions or general benefits for ORS students, such as being included in a mainstream class or having opportunities to interact with their peers.

It is a concern that schools did not identify the impact of their provisions and programmes on the learning outcomes for their ORS students. This suggests that schools are not in a position to know whether the resources supporting ORS students are having the intended impact and are being used in the most effective way.

Providing for students with challenging behaviour

One-third of schools described systems, initiatives and programmes they used to support students with challenging behaviour. Some schools wrote about targeted provisions for small numbers of students with very challenging behaviours while others described more general programmes that applied across the school.

Schools often worked with external specialists such as RTLB and GSE to develop individual behaviour plans (IBPs) that documented goals and strategies to use and enabled schools to monitor progress towards the goals. Schools described supporting students with challenging behaviours by ensuring their learning needs were met, and through counselling, action plans, and home rooms. Many schools employed teacher aides to support these students and some said they involved families/whānau in reinforcing the planned strategies.

> *Individual Behaviour Plans are developed for children with extreme defiant behaviours in class and playground. Positive rewards rather than negative consequences encourage positive behaviour. GSE works with families and students and teachers to teach strategies to better support three ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) students with extreme behaviours. This has resulted in fewer incidents in the playground and classroom.* [Decile 4 contributing primary, medium roll, in main urban area]

Schools also supported students with challenging behaviours by analysing behaviour data, developing action plans and monitoring progress towards goals. Schools used a range of strategies such as introducing behaviour management programmes, positive reinforcement/rewards systems, programmes to promote self-esteem, social skills programmes and lunchtime activity programmes. Some schools were involved with

Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L)[7] which was intended to set clear boundaries and expectations and to make students aware of consequences for particular behaviours.

> *Positive behaviour management and systems are agreed, known, planned and implemented together. All children are involved in setting goals, making rules and responsibility for their own behaviour and learning. All stakeholders know the systems, rewards and consequences.* [Decile 2 full primary, very small roll, in rural area]

Outcomes described for students included improved behaviour, increased engagement and achievement, students being better able to manage themselves, and students being included in class activities to a greater extent.

One secondary school noted that behaviour was a major consideration. They analysed behaviour to identify needs and developed programmes that focused on different priorities at particular year levels. Year 9 teachers analysed behaviour together in meetings and, with RTLB input, developed Group Action Plans supported by teacher aides. This reduced problem behaviour and increased student engagement in their classes.

The school also established a class for a group of ten Year 11-13 students identified as having higher needs (behavioural and/or academic) than other mainstream students. Although the students were in a separate class, some might otherwise have left school. Some of them were expected to move onto Level 2 NCEA[8] classes once they had achieved Level 1. The teacher built relationships with the students and provided positive feedback. The teacher addressed learning needs and student attitudes improved.

> *[The teacher] maintains respect and a positive work ethic whilst being flexible enough to respond to needs as they arise. Clear rules develop expectations of behaviour and instil responsibility. Students completed a baseline assessment to find their areas of strength or weakness. Gaps in their learning are taught, and once understood, they move onto Unit Standard level work. Life skills are included such as budgeting and cooking, as well as tax, Kiwisaver, legal obligations etc. Tasks given to the students allow them to feel comfortable and challenged in an increasing way rather than overwhelmed. These students are trying to achieve Level 1 NCEA.* [Decile 5 Year 7-13 secondary, medium roll, in minor urban area]

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[7] *PB4L* is a Ministry of Education initiative that builds a supportive and effective learning environment for *all* students based on the principle of inclusion. It focuses on preventing problem behaviour, developing social skills, reinforcing desired behaviour, consistent management of inappropriate behaviour and using data-based assessment and problem solving to address concerns.
[8] National Certificate of Educational Achievement.

Special educational needs coordinators (SENCO)

ERO asked whether the school had a SENCO and if so, what relevant experience and background they had. Eighty percent of schools had a SENCO.

Most SENCOs had many years of teaching experience, with almost half having taught for 20 or more years. Forty percent of SENCOs currently held a senior position or had done so previously. Approximately two-thirds had some experience of teaching students with special needs. Ten percent of schools reported their SENCO had a special education qualification such as a Masters in Educational Psychology or Post-Graduate Diploma in Special Education, and a further 40 percent had completed special education papers or attended conferences or courses on special education.

SENCOs were involved in:
- assessing students, identifying needs and developing Individual Education Plans
- allocating and coordinating the use of staffing
- liaising with specialists and parents
- developing programmes and strategies
- overseeing and supporting teacher aides and providing guidance and support to teachers
- working with individual students and monitoring their progress
- attending in-school special needs meetings and cluster meetings.

Rural schools and small schools were least likely to have a SENCO: 57 percent and 55 percent respectively compared with 80 percent of all schools. Full primary schools were also less likely to have a SENCO: 67 percent compared with 89 percent of other schools.[9] Most schools without a SENCO were small schools.

Teacher aides

Two-thirds of schools wrote specifically about teacher aides supporting students with special needs. Other schools described programmes or support that may also have involved teacher aides.

Some schools noted that the teacher aides carried out programmes that were planned and monitored by teachers, the SENCO, a specialist teacher, or an external specialist such as an RTLB, speech language therapist, or Resource Teacher: Literacy (RTLit).

The main ways teacher aides supported students were on literacy or numeracy programmes in mainstream classes, both individually or in small groups. They also supported students on programmes for language/speech, behaviour, and ESOL.

The following example illustrates some effective practices when using teacher aides to support students.

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[9] Many full primary schools are small (45 percent) and located in rural areas (48 percent).

Teacher aides commonly work with a small group of students in class as part of lesson design aimed at increasing student inclusion in the peer group's learning. The support is discreet so students are not overwhelmed or embarrassed. Support is used at particular times for specific purposes within the lesson, linked to learning and withdrawn for some of the time. It focuses on maximising students' independence through engaging them and building their confidence. Wherever possible, the teacher and teacher aide will at least have shared planning or discussed the lesson and their roles beforehand. Support is delivered by adults who understand each student's individual needs, targets, learning objectives and expected learning outcomes, and know how to help students to achieve them. [Decile 6 intermediate, very large roll, in secondary urban area]

Involving parents

Some schools wrote about how they involved parents and whānau with their own child. Actions included welcoming parents when they first enrolled their child, discussing the child's needs, keeping parents informed about progress, and consulting them about referral to specialists. Some schools wrote about the importance of building relationships with parents, working together as partners to meet the child's needs, and providing ideas for parents about how they could support their child's learning and reinforce the school's approach. Some schools described ways they supported parents, such as accompanying them to meetings with specialists.

Parents also supported children more generally through parent-tutor programmes, usually in literacy. Schools provided training for parents (and sometimes grandparents) so that they could support selected students, often to increase their reading mileage.

Professional learning development and support

ERO asked schools about any PLD and/or support which school leaders, mainstream teachers, specialist teachers, and teacher aides had received for assisting students with special needs.

All but 11 schools reported they had received at least some PLD or support to assist students with special needs. Responses covered a variety of information. Some schools wrote about the type of special needs focused on, some about the programme provided, and some about who provided the PLD or support.

Schools had most often received PLD or support related to autism/Aspergers, dyslexia and behaviour. Other common areas included literacy, numeracy or mathematics, speech/oral/communication, English as a second language, and working with deaf students.

In addition, specialist teachers had received PLD on Reading Recovery and applying for funding. Mainstream teachers had PLD on Incredible Years; and leaders had PLD on restorative justice. Teacher aides often received training in specific literacy programmes such as Talk to Learn or Rainbow Reading.[10]

Some schools had held staff meetings in which experts talked about various topics such as dyslexia, autism, curriculum implementation and oral language. Some schools said they had received PLD on differentiated teaching or effective teaching strategies.

External support and PLD was most often provided by RTLB, GSE and RTLit. These specialists ran workshops for school clusters and provided advice, support, and help with funding applications. Other providers included speech language therapists, psychologists, and public health nurses.

Systems, initiatives and programmes

Schools were asked to describe systems, initiatives and programmes they used to support the achievement and/or inclusion of students with special education needs.

Systems

Schools identified many different systems they used to support these students. It should be noted that other schools may also have used these systems but not have written about them in their questionnaire response.

Over half the schools said they:
- taught students with special needs in small groups (by level or ability), or placed them in a small class or a learning support centre
- worked with external specialists such as RTLB, RTLit, GSE, public health nurses, social workers in schools, and physiotherapists
- had a systematic approach to identifying students with special needs, maintaining a special needs register, and developing IEPs.

Thirty to 40 percent said they:
- tracked or monitored the progress of individual students with special needs
- differentiated the curriculum, adapted the programme, targeted teaching to groups of students, or used effective teaching strategies
- provided a specialist teacher, or additional teacher to teach the student or develop a programme for the teacher aide.

About 20 percent said they:
- individualised support for students

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[10] See Glossary.

- supported staff through training in particular programmes, accessing PLD or sharing effective strategies
- had a process to transition students into the school or on to the next school.

The following response describes one school's well-coordinated and informed approach to providing for students with special needs.

> *There are well organised systems in place to identify and track these students. Teamwork supports the child within the school and there are ongoing constructive relationships with outside agencies. There is open ongoing communication with the families and whānau of high needs students and their concerns are addressed during IEP meetings. Observations from GSE staff are carried out as needed and the results of these observations are shared with the child's teacher and teacher aide. Planned transitions to new classes for students with high and moderate needs consist of: pre-entry visits and observations; meetings with early childhood staff; involvement of GSE and any other agencies working with the student; modifications to buildings and equipment where necessary; hiring and training of teacher aides and ORS teachers; and development of IEPs.* [Decile 4 full primary, large roll, in minor urban area]

This example from a secondary school illustrates an effective approach to monitoring progress and sharing information to improve teaching and learning.

> *The co-ordinator of the Junior Pathways programme brings together the teachers of the lower ability Years 9 and 10 core classes to share information about the students and the pedagogies that are working. There is also emphasis on the collection, analysis and sharing of achievement data so that students can be better targeted and progress tracked over time. This initiative started this year but we believe it is already making a positive difference.* [Decile 4 Year 9-15 secondary, large roll, in main urban area]

Learning programmes

Schools used a wide variety of programmes to support students with special needs. The following table shows the most frequent areas of need and commonly used programmes. Other programmes included life skills, buddy systems, gifted and talented, music, and kapa haka.

Table 1: Areas of need and learning programmes used

Area of learning	Approximate percentage of schools	Most common programmes
Literacy	80%	Reading Recovery, Rainbow Reading, Lexia, Toe by Toe, and various phonics programmes
Numeracy/ mathematics	50%	Targeted teaching to groups of children, AliM, Mathletics, and COSDBRICS
Communication	34%	Talk to Learn
Social skills	29%	
English as a second language	22%	
Physical	20%	Perceptual Motor Programme (PMP), Riding for the Disabled, and swimming
Technology	10%	Assistive technology, sound systems, and a range of software to develop skills in writing and numeracy/mathematics

National Standards

Twenty-seven schools described a variety of ways they were supporting learners who were below or well below the National Standards. The programmes usually involved identifying needs and providing individualised targeted teaching through a teacher or teacher aide. Some schools noted they provided support to small groups of learners, and others involved parents. Support in mathematics was also provided through the ALiM (Accelerating learning in mathematics) programme and a specialist teacher. In some schools, reading was supported through a phonics programme or by parent tutors.

Some schools did not provide information about whether these approaches had led to students meeting the standards, particularly in writing. However, four schools noted that learners now met the reading standards and eight schools reported that they had made some progress. Four schools described some progress in mathematics and three said students now met the mathematics standards. ERO would expect the numbers of reports about achievement in relation to National Standards to increase as schools respond to annual reporting requirements in 2012.

The following response describes a school-wide intervention designed to accelerate the progress of students at risk of not meeting the National Standards in writing.

> *Students were identified through e-asTTle assessments along with teacher judgements based on draft writing. Students were placed in three tiers depending on needs analysis. Tier 1 and 2 students are catered for within class with teachers targeting immediate needs through daily mini lessons, and teacher aide support. Tier 3 students are our most at risk writers. These students are withdrawn four days per week for one hour and 20 minutes to work with a specialist teacher, targeting their most immediate needs.*
> [Decile 3 intermediate, large roll, in main urban area]

Special building or property projects

Schools were asked about special building projects or hardware additions they had carried out since their last ERO review to support the achievement and/or inclusion of special education students. Two-thirds of schools provided information about such developments. The most common were:

- new or upgraded toilets, bathrooms, washrooms
- improved access such as installing ramps or a lift
- new or upgraded withdrawal rooms or specialist classroom areas
- classroom sound systems or speakers
- ICT hardware and software
- fencing and/or gates
- assistive technology such as low vision aids.

Outcomes for students

ERO asked schools to describe outcomes for students as a result of their systems, initiatives and programmes. The findings reported here are similar to those already reported for ORS students and students with challenging behaviour.

Many schools reported outcomes for students in general terms such as stating achievement or learning had improved or students had progressed. Where schools did identify specific outcomes, these were most often in literacy. Outcomes included accelerated progress, increases in reading levels or ages, and learners reaching their expected level. Schools also identified improvements in particular aspects of literacy such as reading, writing, comprehension and spelling. Other areas where specific outcomes were identified included communication, mathematics/numeracy, social skills, and physical.

Some schools noted that their programmes and systems had resulted in improved attitudes. These included students becoming more confident, more engaged, increasing their self esteem, and developing a sense of belonging. Some students had improved their behaviour, and others had increased their independence and self management skills.

Although the question asked about outcomes for students, many schools described actions that resulted in students being included in mainstream classes and being able to access the curriculum in a way that met their needs, rather than achievement or learning. These actions included individualising programmes, targeting teaching, adapting the curriculum, seeking specialist advice, and providing PLD for staff.

Self-review data given to the board of trustees

Approximately 85 percent of schools reported that their board had been given self-review information on students with special needs. One-fifth of schools (51) provided ERO with a copy of a report given to the board in the last 12 months.

The reports which schools provided to ERO included those specifically about the special needs department or programmes, analysis of variance reports, the principal's monthly report to the board, reports on learning support, and Reading Recovery reports.

The nature and amount of information in these reports varied and was usually descriptive rather than reflective or evaluative. The information was often about the programmes provided and rarely included data about the effectiveness of the programmes or whether students were making sufficient progress. Sometimes detailed information was provided for only some programmes such as Reading Recovery.

Some schools noted information about staffing, the work of the special needs committee, the involvement of specialists, PLD, particular programmes and adapted teaching strategies used, and tests to monitor progress. A small number provided information on funding and how it was used.

Some reports included information about processes used to identify students with special needs, the involvement of parents and whānau, the areas of student need, criteria for support and students on the special needs register.

Seventeen of the 51 reports provided data about the progress or achievement of students on one or more programmes. These included mathematics/numeracy, reading (eg. Reading Recovery, Rainbow Reading), writing, ESOL, and NCEA.

Information from eight other schools noted improvement or progress in general terms with statements such as *mixed success, making progress, making huge strides, fantastic results,* and *significant reading gains.*

Eighteen schools described the provisions they had made for students with various special needs but not their progress. One school enclosed a report on an external review that was intended to include the effectiveness of their provisions. This report did not report or comment on any progress or achievement data.

The reports from eight schools were brief and contained limited information about such aspects as areas of need, staffing and specialist support. None of these reports included information about outcomes for students.

Only about one-fifth of the reports showed that the school had reflected on their achievement data to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme and identify specific strategies to trial in future.

An example is a school which reported that 11 of their 68 students were below the appropriate level for place value understanding. They noted that this was

disappointing as place value knowledge has been their stated goal for two years. The report noted teachers would continue the focus on place value, identified a resource with useful teaching activities, and planned professional development for new teachers.

Another example is a school where teachers collaboratively reflected on writing data that showed 25 children improved, 43 stayed the same and four went down. The school noted in their report to the board:

> *The writing data is disappointing; student achievement has dropped rather than the gains we were hoping to see. As a staff we have discussed possible reasons for this and have come up with strategies to assist in this area for 2012. The consistent use of The Literacy Learning Progressions, learning intentions, success criteria and students having individual writing goals are all strategies that staff have decided are paramount to making a difference for our students.* [Decile 4 full primary, medium roll, in minor urban area]

One school reported against their strategic goals to increase the number of students achieving at or above the National Standards for reading, writing, and mathematics, noting progress towards each target. The report identified actions that were likely to achieve the targets. The school planned to use assessment data to identify particular learning needs of target students, review teaching practices, arrange PLD targeted to individual teacher needs, and support staff to enhance their teaching practices.

The analysis of the reports indicates that although many boards fund a variety of interventions, they do not all receive comprehensive information about all their students with special needs and the effectiveness of the interventions, nor do they have sufficient information for their decisions about future resourcing.

Challenges

ERO asked schools to describe the challenges they faced in including students with special needs. Funding and access to specialists were the main challenges identified. Many schools said they did not have enough funding to pay for the teacher aide support hours they felt were needed to meet student needs. Some schools said this was due to students not fitting funding criteria and others noted that funding was discontinued when learners moved from early childhood to school.

> *Children identified in early childhood facilities as special needs and receiving support there should receive the same or more hours when they enrol in a mainstream school. The present system of a few hours for a few weeks is not sufficient. This lack of continuing support is much more likely to compound the already evident problems. Time and time again these children do not receive the support they, their family and the school need to successfully transition them into school. It is always too little and often too late as the primary school has to make new applications for support.* [Decile 7 contributing primary, medium roll, in main urban area]

Challenges in access to specialists included delays for initial assessments and processing documentation, waiting lists for support, and services being short staffed. Other concerns included finding appropriate specialist teachers and teacher aides, providing for students with high needs and challenging behaviour, and finding suitable PLD for staff who were working with students with special needs.

Conclusion

A majority of schools rated themselves as mostly inclusive. These ratings were usually based on high level aspects such as the school's philosophy or culture and the attitudes of staff and students. Schools' policies reflected these views, and most had developed systems to identify and address students' needs. Eighty percent of schools had a SENCO.

Almost all schools described a range of ways they included students with various special needs. These covered individualised support and programmes, adapting curriculum programmes, targeted teaching, providing teacher aides to support students in classrooms, working with parents, obtaining specialist advice and guidance, and property projects.

Almost all schools had accessed PLD to help them provide for students with special needs. However, several schools noted that some teachers needed to develop their expertise in differentiating the curriculum.

Although most boards funded a variety of interventions, they did not receive comprehensive information about all their students with special needs and the effectiveness of the programmes provided for them. Schools did not report information that evaluated their programmes in terms of outcomes for learners with special needs. Many schools reported outcomes in general terms or referred to improved attitudes. Some schools collated achievement or progress data for particular programmes or interventions such as Reading Recovery, but did not have comparable data on other interventions.

It is a concern that boards do not have robust information to monitor how well they are meeting the needs of their students with various types of special needs and to inform their decisions about allocation of resources. Very few reports to the board included information about the cost of different programmes in relation to either the number of students participating or the outcomes for students. This means schools are not able to judge whether their resourcing decisions are having the intended outcomes, or are the most appropriate way of supporting students with special needs.

The academic progress of these learners may be improved if schools had better self-review data that shows which programmes and teaching strategies are most effective. This sort of information could be shared more systematically with other staff and may also identify needs for additional PLD for the staff involved.

Next steps

To improve the learning and academic progress of students with special needs, schools should:

- more systematically assess students' learning and evaluate their progress
- review the effectiveness of teaching strategies and programmes
- promote greater use of effective teaching strategies by accessing targeted professional learning and development and sharing good practice among staff
- develop expertise in using achievement data to inform teaching practice.

The Ministry of Education should support schools to develop evaluation processes that enable them to determine how well their programmes and initiatives improve achievement for their students with special needs.

Appendix 1: Schools included in this report

Table 2: Schools included

	Number of schools responding (254)	Percentage of responding schools	National percentage
School type			
Full primary	109	43	44
Contributing	99	39	31
Intermediate	12	5	5
Composite (Years 1-15, Years 1-10)	7	3	6
Secondary (Years 7-15)	10	4	4
Secondary (Years 9-15, Years 11-15)	17	7	10
Location of school			
Main urban	142	56	52
Secondary urban	13	5	6
Minor urban	37	15	12
Rural	62	24	30
Size of school			
Very small	16	6	9
Small	62	24	23
Medium	94	37	39
Large	52	21	20
Very large	30	12	9
Decile grouping			
Low decile (deciles 1-3)	71	28	30
Medium decile (deciles 4-7)	102	40	39
High decile (deciles 8-10)	81	32	32

Differences between the responding schools and schools nationally were tested using Chi-square tests. Type of school was the only characteristic that was statistically different ($p<0.05$).

Appendix 2: Evaluation Indicators

Including students with high needs - indicator framework

Presence	
Enrolment and induction	• The school welcomes students with high needs • The school is prepared to make appropriate changes to support a student with high needs (ie, has not suggested to parents that children would be better off elsewhere) • The school's induction process is organised and welcoming for students with high needs and their families • The induction programme works well at all times through the year
Identifying student needs and strengths	• The school has high quality processes in place for identifying the educational needs of students with high needs • The school has sought and used the student's point of view with regard to what supports their inclusion and learning (decision-making) • The school has used valid and reliable methods to identify the interests and strengths of students with high needs in order to fully support their learning and development • The school has processes in place for identifying the needs of students in relation to any physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric, behavioural or intellectual impairments • School personnel understand that it is their role to adapt to the needs presented by a student – rather than 'fit' the student to their school
Participation and engagement	
Links with families	• The school respects and values the knowledge parents have of their child's learning, development and achievement • Relationships are focused on building a constructive partnership between families and the school, and supporting the ongoing inclusion of students with high needs • The school is proactive in creating positive links with families (ie, regular home/school contact) • Feedback to families includes a celebration of success and is not (deficit) focused on negatives or a sense of 'failure' • Parents are included in IEP processes and provided with regular feedback about their child's progress and how they might complement school-based learning at home
The coordination of services and support	• The school has coordinated an appropriate range of services or personnel in support of any specialised needs presented by students with high needs, for example Special Education, RTLBs, therapists • The coordination and monitoring of specialist services and support for students with high needs is given high status in the school eg, it is overseen by an effective, senior member of staff • The SENCO (or equivalent) provides support and guidance for teachers and teacher aides to include students with high needs • The SENCO (or equivalent) oversees the progress of students with high needs • Teachers share their knowledge of the needs, likes, interests and specialist support requirements of students as they progress through the school, from year to year (ie, there is a formal process of planning for students as they progress from teacher to teacher)

	• Plans are in place to ensure that all students with high needs can attend school if a teacher aide is absent
School-wide culture	• The board of trustees and principal emphasise the importance of an inclusive culture through their comments, policies, processes, resourcing and planning
	• The principal provides ethical leadership for the school on the importance of meeting the diverse needs of all students, including students with high needs
	• There is a school-wide emphasis on meeting the needs of all students, including students with high needs
	• The board has invested in appropriate resources to support inclusion (this includes the board using special education funding and staffing (ORS, Learning Support etc) to support students with high needs
	• The staff and students at the school are positive about the involvement of students with high needs at the school
	• Regular students have been provided with coaching, support and modelling to appropriately relate to students with high needs
	• Students with high needs are not seen in terms of their impairments, but are seen as students who are expected to achieve, contribute to school culture and have strengths worth nurturing
	• There is an absence of bullying (especially towards students with high needs)
	• There is evidence that the school has adapted its physical environment to meet the needs of current students with high needs
	• The success of students with high needs is celebrated
	• Teachers openly share with one another the success and challenges in their teaching of students with high needs (no blame approach)
	• The board has developed appropriate behaviour management plans for students with high needs
Relationships with peers	• The relationships students with high needs have with their peers are supportive
	• Students with high needs have their social development supported as required
	• Students with high needs have friendships with regular students
	• Students with high needs are included in social events in and outside of the school (eg, school socials, birthday parties)
Classroom teaching	• Students with high needs learn alongside their peers in regular classes as much as possible
	• Learning programmes support the objectives identified in IEPs or other planning
	• Students with high needs have well-planned learning experiences, not just 'busy work'
	• Teaching is planned and differentiated with the learning of all students in mind
	• Lessons encourage students with high needs to participate and interact
	• Students with high needs work cooperatively along with other students
	• There is evidence of student to student communication and teacher to student communication (and that the teacher aide is not the sole medium of information)
	• Teacher aides support teachers to include students with high needs
	• Classroom teaching underlines the importance of diversity
Extra-curricular involvement	• Students with high needs take part in sporting and cultural activities alongside regular students at the school
	• Students with high needs take part in physical activity (where appropriate) and other learning activities outside the classroom
Learning	• The school has resourced high quality physical and educational support for the

supports	range of needs demonstrated by students with high needs
	• The effectiveness of learning supports are monitored
	• Learning support is coordinated with IEPs and well developed objectives for student learning and development
Professional development and support	• Staff receive high quality professional development to understand and support the specific learning needs of particular students with high needs
	• Professional development and support is readily accessible
	• Professional development for teachers and teacher aides supports their ability to teach students with diverse needs
Culturally responsive	• The school has culturally responsive processes to identify and support the needs and aspirations of Māori and Pacific students with high needs and their whānau/families
Achievement	
The achievement of students with high needs	• There are high expectations for all students (including students with high needs)
	• The achievements of students with high needs reflect deep and/or meaningful learning
	• Students with high needs are making progress in their IEPs and/or any particular academic, intellectual, behavioural, communication, social or physical goals agreed to be appropriate
	• Students with high needs succeed in a variety of contexts, academic, leadership, sporting and cultural
The benefits to mainstream students	• Students without high needs demonstrate tolerance, warmth, understanding and friendship to students with high needs in their classrooms
	• Parents, whānau and the wider school appreciate the benefits for all students of their children working with students with high needs

Appendix 3: Self-review questions for students with high needs

• School culture and leadership for including students with high needs
1. How caring is the culture of your school towards students with high needs?
2. To what extent do the staff at your school adapt their practice to support the achievement of students with high needs?
3. To what extent do staff at your school access a wide range of knowledge, strategies and networks to support students with high needs and their whānau/families?

• Teamwork, working with families, using information and transitions
1. To what extent do your staff discuss ways to support students with special needs?
2. To what extent does your school meet with outside experts and agencies to support students with special needs?
3. To what extent do the school's relationships with the parents/whānau of students with high needs support the inclusion and achievement of these students?
4. How well does your school use information about students' achievement, social and physical skills, to better include, support and improve learning of students with high needs?
5. To what extent does the school have the systems, expertise, and links with external agencies to support the transition of students with high needs both to and from their school?

• Cultural identity, ORS, individual learning programmes and school safety
1. To what extent do all your teaching staff know how to develop differentiated programmes for students with high needs?
2. To what extent do your school's IEPs provide specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound goals for student achievement?
3. To what extent does your school support the cultural identity of students with high needs?
4. How does your school know that students with high needs are safe from bullying?

Appendix 4: Glossary of terms

ALiM	Accelerating learning in mathematics was designed to accelerate learning in mathematics of low achievers through targeted teaching for a short period.
Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle)	asTTle gives information about children's achievement and progress in reading, writing and mathematics from Years 4-12.
Assistive technology	A wide range of tools for students with special education needs that help them access the learning curriculum, including anything that can help a person with disabilities do something that might otherwise be difficult.
Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)	ASD is a disorder of development that affects language, social skills and behaviour. Children with ASD are unable to interpret what is happening around them in the same way that other children do. There is a range of severity and intellectual ability, from the severely impaired child with classical autism, to a child with Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism. Children with Asperger syndrome may have a high level of intelligence but have difficulty with social interaction.
COSDBRICS	COSDBRICS is a remedial maths programme for primary and intermediate pupils who are delayed in number knowledge.
Decoding and encoding	When decoding children work out what a word is saying by using the sounds the letters in a word make. Encoding is when children use their letter-sound knowledge to work out how to write a word.
Enhanced Programme Fund	A supplementary grant for schools with a disproportionate number of students with moderate special education needs. It is to enhance programmes and interventions that raise presence, progress and participation in learning for these students in their regular classrooms.
High Health Needs Fund	This fund provides support for children at school/kura who have a significant health condition.
Incredible Years	Incredible Years has programmes for parents, teachers and children that are designed to improve parenting skills, teacher competencies, home-school links, and develop children's social skills to promote emotional and social competence and reduce behavioural and emotional problems in young children.
Individual education plan (IEP) or Individual behavior plan (IBP)	An IEP is a succinct outline of a few priority learning goals and strategies to meet them within the classroom programme. It shows what supports are needed (including for team members), and records student achievements. IBPs focus on behaviour.
JOST	The Junior oral language screening tool covers vocabulary, social language and grammar. It is intended for use with five year olds whose oral language is of concern and aims to support teachers to build a programme, group children appropriately for language groups, and decide about referral to a speech language therapist.
Learning Support Funding	Funding provided to RTLB clusters to meet the needs of students with learning and behaviour difficulties. They can be used to provide release time for classroom teachers to meet with the RTLB, or to prepare an IEP.
Letter-sound knowledge	When teachers assess a child's letter sound knowledge they find out what the child knows about the names of the alphabet letters and some of the sounds they make.
Lexia	Lexia Reading is a software package that helps teachers to monitor and inform reading instruction.
Mathletics	Mathletics is an international network of websites designed to help students enjoy and achieve well in maths. It provides access to a wide range of tools and resources for students, teachers and parents, covering the mathematics curriculum Years 1-13.
National Administrative Guidelines (NAGs)	Statement of school operation requirements that are addressed to boards of trustees. A component of the National Education Guidelines.
Numeracy Project Assessment (NumPA)	A Diagnostic Interview used to assess children's number knowledge and operational strategy in number.

Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS)	The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) provides support for children with the highest level of ongoing need (about one percent of the school population) to help them join in and learn alongside other children at school.
Perceptual Motor Programme	PMP is a programme which uses facets of physical education, music, fitness, dance and gymnastics to develop children's self-perceptions.
Phonics	Phonics is the relationship between spoken sounds and the letters that represent them; and the correspondence between sound and symbol in an alphabetical writing system.
PROBE	Prose reading observation behaviour and evaluation of comprehension is one type of reading running record that includes an oral reading comprehension test.
Progressive Achievement Tests (PATs)	PATs are standardised tests developed by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. They include reading comprehension, reading vocabulary and mathematics for Years 4-10 and listening comprehension for Years 3-10.
Rainbow Reading	Rainbow Reading has two programmes for intensive, individualised instruction of students reading below expected levels and two for reluctant readers. The books cover a variety of topics, styles and illustrations to meet the varying needs and interests of a wide range of students.
Reading Recovery	Reading Recovery is a one-to-one teaching programme for children who have made slow progress learning to read and write in their first year at school. It is a 12 to 20 week programme undertaken for half an hour daily. Each child's reading and writing is assessed close to their sixth birthday and some children are selected to take part.
Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour (RTLB)	Specially trained teachers who support and work within schools to assist staff, parents and community members to meet the needs of students with moderate learning and/or behaviour difficulties.
Resource Teacher: Literacy (RTLit)	Specially trained teachers who support and work in schools, assisting staff to meet the needs of Years 0-8 students with reading and writing difficulties.
School Entry Assessment (SEA)	SEA is a standardised assessment procedure to collect information on oral language, early mathematics and early reading knowledge and understanding of new entrants four to eight weeks after children start school.
SENCO	A SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) is a senior staff member who is assigned a range of responsibilities and often has a teaching and leadership role within the school.
Severe Behaviour Service	Provision of advice and specialist support for students with severe behaviour difficulties and their schools, and their parents/whānau.
Six-year net (Six-year observation survey)	The six-year observation survey is a comprehensive assessment of progress in reading and writing on or immediately after the child's sixth birthday.
Speech-Language	Speech-language therapists work with students with severe communication needs who have speech (articulation) difficulties, fluency disorders, voice resonance disorders, language difficulties or significant language delay.
Special education grant (SEG)	A grant provided to schools to support students with moderate special education needs, such as learning and behaviour difficulties, in accordance with NAG 1(iii) and (iv). It includes a base amount plus per-student funding.
Supplementary Learning Support (SLS)	SLS aims to better support students with special education needs including students with significant and ongoing learning needs who have missed out on ORS support.
Supplementary Test of Achievement in Reading (STAR)	STAR was developed by NZCER and has tests for three age groups (Year 3, Years 4 to 6 and Years 7 to 9). Sub-tests within each test relate to word recognition, sentence comprehension, paragraph comprehension and vocabulary range. Year 7-9 tests also cover the language of advertising and reading different text types.
Talk to Learn	Talk to Learn is a programme designed to develop children's skills in oral language and conversation. It is taken with small groups, and uses a range of themes to aid discussion along with fun 'making and doing' experiences.
Toe by Toe	Toe by Toe is a synthetic phonics programme that uses repetition so a student can learn the alphabetic sounds to allow easy decoding. It has proved successful with students in Years 9-11. It requires a regular 15-20 minute session with a tutor and most students complete the book in about 50 sessions.