



Including Students with Special Needs:
School Questionnaire Responses →

April 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 documents the progress of some schools and gives us an insight into schools' views on how well they include children with special education need. It also tells us what more can be done to move towards the Government's 2014 goal.

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

ERO's 2010 report *Including Students with High Needs*¹ found that half of schools demonstrated mostly inclusive practices for students with high needs, 30 percent had some inclusive practices, and 20 percent had few inclusive practices. Subsequently, the Government, through the *Success for All* policy, requires all schools to demonstrate inclusive practice by the end of 2014, with a goal to have 80 percent of schools doing a good job, and none doing a poor job, of including and supporting students with special education needs.

This report, *Including Students with Special Needs: school questionnaire responses* presents the findings from a questionnaire completed by schools reviewed in the first two terms of 2011. It is based on schools' own views of how well they include children with special needs.

The questionnaire defined special education students as those who have learning, communication, emotional or behavioural difficulties, or intellectual, sensory, or physical impairments. However, schools' responses indicated that many used a broad definition of special needs and some included gifted and talented students, students for whom English was a second language and boys. On this basis, approximately 90 percent of schools reported having at least some students with identified special needs and/or requiring an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

A majority of schools (88 percent) reported having mostly inclusive practices, 12 percent said they had some inclusive practices, and one school said they had few inclusive practices. Some schools said they integrated students with special needs as much as possible, some provided in-class support so that students could be mainstreamed, and some withdrew students for targeted support.

Most schools (81 percent) had a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). A majority of these SENCOs have had extensive teaching experience with many having special education qualifications or experience.

Almost all schools had accessed some form of professional and learning development or support to help staff include students with special needs. Two-thirds of schools had undertaken special property projects to cater for students with physical disabilities, such as ramps, bathrooms and sound systems.

Schools used a wide range of approaches and programmes to support the learning and inclusion of students with special needs. Systems included:

- clear roles and responsibilities for SENCOs, teachers and teacher aides
- processes to identify the specific needs of students
- prioritising students with the greatest needs
- providing professional learning and development
- staff sharing effective strategies
- IEPs
- transitions processes

¹ Education Review Office (2010)

- reviewing the effectiveness of programmes to support students with special needs.

A majority of schools provided literacy programmes, and smaller numbers provided programmes to support students numeracy, communication, physical and behavioural needs.

The main challenges schools identified were funding, access to specialist advice and support, students with behavioural needs or high needs, and employing appropriate staff.

When asked about outcomes for students, most schools did not report on the actual gains made by students. Instead, most schools reported general progress, improved attitudes, or described the contribution they had made to the inclusion of students with special needs.

Most schools reported that they gave the Board self-review data about the achievement and inclusion of students with special needs. However, the comprehensiveness of the information varied. Reports to the Board tended to list the types of special needs identified and describe the school's actions in areas such as staffing, special programmes, resourcing, property and access to specialists. Only 15 percent of schools provided their Boards with any achievement information regarding students with special needs. The lack of achievement information limits a Board's ability to understand how effectively the school is including students with special needs.

The lack of specific information about the academic outcomes for students also suggests that schools' ratings of themselves as inclusive are not well supported by evidence that these students have actually been achieving their potential at school.

Next steps

Schools should use the findings in this report to:

- review the quality of their monitoring, analysis and reporting of how well students with special needs are succeeding at school
- use student academic and social outcome data in reviewing the quality of their initiatives to include students with special needs.

ERO will continue to investigate how schools provide for students with special needs.

Introduction

A 2010 Education Review Office (ERO) report, *Including Students with High Needs*,² found that half of schools demonstrated mostly inclusive practices for students with high needs. Thirty percent of schools were found to have some areas of good performance, and 20 percent had few inclusive practices. ERO recommended that school staff should:

- use the report's findings, case studies, self-review questions and inclusive teaching indicators to review the extent to which students with high needs are included across the school

² See www.ero.govt.nz

- identify where students are not well included and implement a plan to extend the effective practice already in the school.

Subsequently, the Government's policy *Success for All* set a performance target that all schools demonstrate inclusive practice by the end of 2014, with 80 percent of schools doing a good job, and none doing a poor job, of including and supporting students with special education needs.

To help monitor schools' progress, ERO asked schools reviewed in Terms 1 and 2, 2011 to complete a questionnaire about their provisions for students with special education needs.

The *Success for All* policy

The Government's *Success for All* policy has a vision of 'Every School Every Child', that requires all schools to 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 aim of the policy is for schools to respond to the needs of the child.

Methodology

Evaluation approach

All state and state-integrated schools having an education review in the first two terms of 2011 were asked to complete a self-review questionnaire.

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
- professional learning and 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 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.

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

Schools in this study

This report is based on questionnaires completed by 253 schools in the first two terms of 2011. Table 1 shows that the schools responding were broadly representative of schools nationally, except that the resulting sample had proportionately fewer composite, rural, small and high decile schools.³

	Number of schools responding (253)	Percentage of responding schools	National percentage
School type			
Full primary	115	45	44
Contributing	89	35	33
Intermediate	14	6	5
Composite (Year 1-15, Year 1-10)	6	2	5
Secondary (Year 7-15)	7	3	4
Secondary (Year 9-15)	22	9	9
Location of school			
Main urban	139	55	52
Secondary urban	13	5	6
Minor urban	39	15	12
Rural	62	25	30
Size of school			
Very small	13	5	9
Small	53	21	23
Medium	103	41	39
Large	63	25	20
Very large	21	8	9
Decile			
Low decile (deciles 1-3)	87	34	30
Medium decile (deciles 4-7)	101	40	40
High decile (deciles 8-10)	65	26	30

Analysis of documentation

As part of this questionnaire most schools provided a copy of their policies, and one quarter provided a copy of their report to the Board. These documents and the collated survey responses were analysed for this report.

³ Differences between the responding schools and schools nationally were tested using chi square tests and were found to be not statistically different.

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 have used a variety of interpretations of inclusive.

While the intention was to gather information about the one-to-six percent of students with moderate to high needs, questionnaire responses suggest that schools were considering a much wider range of students when they responded.

These limitations need to be kept in mind when interpreting the report's findings.

Findings

Students with special needs

In this questionnaire ERO 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 and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS), speech language, severe behaviour, or High Health Needs. The next four-to-six percent of students are defined as moderate needs and are resourced through a mix of resources allocated individually or through schools.

Questionnaire responses show schools considered the needs of a wide range of students, not just those with moderate to high needs. For example, schools discussed the needs of a diverse range of students including gifted and talented students, English language learners and boys.

A substantial majority of schools reported having students with identified special needs (85 percent) and/or with Individual Education Plans (92 percent). Half the schools identified at least seven percent of their students as having special needs. One in eight schools reported that a quarter or more of their students had special needs.

Schools most often noted special needs related to communication, behaviour, and ORRS students, and less often, to well-being, dyslexia, hearing, low vision, high and complex needs, and attendance.

School's rating of their inclusiveness

The questionnaire asked schools how inclusive they thought they were, and referred them to ERO's report, *Including Students with High Needs*. Self-review questions and evaluation indicators in this report can be used by schools to identify strengths and weaknesses.

A substantial majority of schools (88 percent) rated themselves as mostly inclusive, and all but one of the remaining 31 schools said they had some inclusive practices.

Primary schools were more likely than secondary and composite schools to rate their practices as mostly inclusive (91 percent compared with 64 percent).

Comments made by schools to support their self rating of mostly inclusive included:

- opportunities for students to participate in all school and class activities and events
- relationships with families/whānau
- high quality support and programmes
- support from outside experts
- inclusive school philosophy, values or culture and a commitment to meeting the needs of all students
- a planned, coordinated approach
- good transition into, within, and out of the school
- PLD and support for teachers and teacher aides (TAs)
- good management of funding, including additional funding from the Board
- capable staff who understand how to meet the needs of students with special needs
- accepting attitudes of teachers and students
- regular monitoring of IEPs.

Schools rating themselves as having ‘some’ or a ‘few’ inclusive practices were more likely than ‘mostly inclusive’ schools to have few students with high needs.

Policies

ERO asked schools what policies they have to address the inclusion of students with disabilities and/or special education needs. Most schools had policies specifically on students with special needs and these students were also included in other policies such as curriculum delivery, learner assistance, teaching, assessment, learning and achievement, NAG 1,⁴ resourcing, reading recovery, behaviour, English as a second language, equity (usually referring to physical disabilities), and property. Policy titles in a few schools referred specifically to inclusive education, inclusion or mainstreaming.

Policy content

School policies for students with special needs typically included a rationale, purposes, guidelines and a range of other specific details. The rationale was usually a philosophical statement that included the school’s commitment to meeting the needs of all students, or the rights of students with special needs to attend their local school and to have their educational needs identified and met so that they could achieve their full potential. Some policies referred to the *Education Act 1989*. Some referred to a commitment to meeting the students’ needs in regular classrooms as much as possible,

Policy guidelines listed actions or procedures for staff to follow. The amount of detail varied, with some schools having general one page policies, and some having several pages with a wide range of information.

Policies included various combinations of:

- budget, equitable allocation, and use of funding
- roles of key people, such as the SENCO, teachers and TAs
- processes to identify and refer students with special needs, including flow charts
- support available including programmes and resources
- consulting, involving, communicating with regularly, and reporting to parents
- liaising with external specialists and agencies
- monitoring and reviewing provisions for special needs students
- reporting to the Board.

There were a few policies that did not reflect a fully inclusive philosophy. For example, some policy statements indicated that students with special needs would be included if the school considered it had sufficient resources.

⁴ *National Administration Guideline 1: Curriculum Delivery* documents Board requirements to foster student achievement by providing teaching and learning programmes which incorporate the National Curriculum. 1(c) refers to using good quality assessment information to identify students and groups of students who have special needs (including gifted and talented), 1(d) refers to developing and implementing teaching and learning strategies to address the needs of the identified students.

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/Schools/PolicyAndStrategy/PlanningReportingRelevantLegislationNEGSAndNAGS/TheNationalAdministrationGuidelinesNAGs.aspx>.

No child with special needs will be placed in a mainstream class until we are sure that the placement is in the best interests of the child and the school. ... Our students' needs are paramount and can best be met by assessing the needs of individual students and matching them with our school's ability to meet identified needs. This will determine the enrolment decision.

Such a statement is contrary to the Education Act 1989, the Human Rights Act 1993, and the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

Professional learning development and support

ERO asked schools what professional learning and development (PLD) and/or support, for assisting students with special needs, had been received by school leaders, mainstream and specialist teachers, and TAs. A variety of information was provided including the type of special needs involved, the programme provided, and who provided the support.

All but seven schools reported they had received at least some PLD or support. Schools had most often received PLD or support related to dyslexia, behaviour, and autism/Aspergers. Other common areas included literacy, particularly Reading Recovery, for specialist teachers; literacy and working with deaf students for mainstream teachers; and literacy, numeracy and working with deaf students for TAs.

Teacher aides often received training in specific literacy programmes such as Rainbow Reading, Toe by Toe, Clicker 5, Steps to Literacy, and Perceptual Motor Programme.⁵

Approximately ten percent of schools reported that mainstream teachers had received PLD or support in effective teaching strategies such as differentiated programmes, English as a second language, speech and oral language, restorative practices, non-violent crisis intervention, and Incredible Years.⁶

Support was most often provided by Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), Group Special Education (GSE) and Resource Teachers: Literacy (RT:Lit). These specialists ran workshops for school clusters, and provided advice, support, and help with funding applications and IEPs. Other providers included speech language therapists (SLTs), public health nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists (OTs), and psychologists.

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.

Overall intent of provisions

About one fifth of schools specifically referred to being inclusive, or to integrating students with special needs as much as possible. One quarter noted that they provided in-class support so that students could be fully mainstreamed, and some included students for most of the school day and withdrew individuals or small groups for periods of targeted teaching.

Teachers in some schools were expected to provide differentiated programmes through strategies such as establishing learning goals and activities that were appropriate for all

⁵ See Glossary.

⁶ See Glossary.

students, adapting the curriculum, or scaffolding learning through cooperative teaching and learning.

Some schools included all students in school events such as musical productions, trips outside the school, and sporting events, while others encouraged students with special needs to participate as much as possible.

Other ways schools said they supported inclusion were through pastoral care where key staff regularly monitored students with special needs and discussed how to support them. Some schools said their school culture supported inclusion through restorative practices, and whole school programmes such as Positive Behaviour for Learning,⁷ praise and reward strategies, and lunchtime programmes and supervision.

Systems

Schools identified many different systems they used to support students with special needs. The most commonly identified were:

- assigning responsibility for students with special needs to a particular person such as the SENCO, the senior management team
- documented roles and responsibilities for SENCO, teachers and TAs (this includes teachers, rather than TAs, being responsible for designing student learning programmes)
- the use of processes and tools to identify students with special needs⁸
- establishing IEPs
- prioritising students with the greatest needs
- allocating and coordinating resources such as TAs to support students
- sharing information, ideas and strategies that are effective for individual students
- providing or accessing PLD about effective teaching strategies and training in particular programmes
- monitoring progress of individual students with special needs
- reviewing the effectiveness of particular programmes and strategies.

Other strategies schools used included ability grouping within and across classes, streaming, home rooms, vertical form classes, learning support centres, dual enrolment with The Correspondence School, electives, assistive technology, information and communication technologies (ICT), community volunteers, community projects, and alternative education-type programmes.

Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

Over a quarter of schools said they developed IEPs to support students with special needs, such as behavioural, learning, sensory and communication needs. Schools commented on various aspects of developing and monitoring IEPs. Some developed IEPs for ORRS students, some for all students on their special needs register, and some for other students when schools considered there was a need.

⁷ See Glossary.

⁸ Most commonly asTTle, SEA, Probe, PAT, STAR and the Six Year Net. See Glossary.

The plans included identified strengths and specific learning needs, clear short-term and long-term goals, plans and strategies to meet identified needs, and support to be provided. RTLBs and other external specialists were involved in developing the plans and deciding on appropriate short-term and long-term goals. Long-term goals set a direction for the student's development, while short-term goals allowed successes to be celebrated frequently.

IEP meetings were used to develop a shared understanding of the student's needs and goals, to plan strategies, monitor progress, and decide on next steps. These meetings involved various combinations of SENCOs, teachers, specialists, parents, and support staff and helped foster regular communication between all parties so there were shared expectations of roles for all those involved, progress was reviewed, successes were celebrated, and any concerns were followed up. Some IEPs were reviewed twice a year and some each term.

Transition

A fifth of schools commented on transition processes used to support inclusion of students with special needs. These generally related to students enrolling at the school, although some also described processes to transition students within the school, to the next school, or into further education or employment.

The processes usually involved meetings with early childhood centre staff, parents, and relevant specialists such as Group Special Education (GSE) or RTLBs. These meetings were used to build relationships, share information, and decide on class placement, appropriate strategies and support for the student. Schools promoted continuity in a number of ways such as employing the TA that had worked with the student at the previous school, the SENCO attending the final IEP at the previous school and by continuing established relationships with professionals.

Some schools arranged school visits for the student and their parents, so they could meet the teachers and support staff they would be working with. Some SENCOs compiled resources and strategies for staff, and some prepared other students by discussing with them how they could help the student with special needs or by setting up a buddy system.

The senior management team interviews parents and students which helps to build up rapport. Being aware of expectations, previous history, and any problems enables us to place new students better. Getting the history and advice from parents enables us to know a lot of information about the new student which we can share with teachers. This makes the transition easier for the students and if help is required we are able to set this up quickly. (Area school response)

Teaching programmes

Over 80 percent of schools reported providing literacy programmes to support the achievement of students with special needs. Most schools provided a range of programmes for different groups of students. The programmes listed most often were: Reading Recovery, Rainbow Reading, Lexia, Toe by Toe, and various phonics programmes.

Around 40 percent of schools listed programmes to support numeracy, with most not naming the specific programme provided. A few schools said they used Mathletics, Numicon and COSDBRICS⁹.

⁹ See Glossary.

Thirty-five percent of schools said they provided programmes to support communication. These were mostly oral language programmes for junior children, but some involved New Zealand sign language for deaf students. Talk to Learn was the oral language programme named most often.

Twenty-nine percent of schools provided programmes for students with physical needs, including the Perceptual Motor Programme (PMP), Riding for the Disabled, Special Olympics, and swimming.

Twenty-eight percent of schools reported they had students with inappropriate behaviour and 17 percent said they provided social skills programmes to improve behaviour across the school. These programmes often involved specialists such as GSE or RTLB, and a TA working with one or more students.

We have a number of students who have poor social and behavioural skills, and we have programmes run by our social worker and our community liaison workers that aim to cater to that learning need.

Around ten percent of schools reported using ICT to support students with special needs. These included assistive technology, sound systems, and a range of software to develop skills, particularly in writing and numeracy.

Other programmes included life skills, work experience, mentoring, leadership, music therapy, programmes to build self esteem and confidence, art, kapa haka, and bilingual tutors. Some secondary schools had arranged reader-writers to support some students in external exams.

Personnel

Each school involved a range of personnel in providing for students with special needs. Within the school, these included SENCOs, class teachers, specialist teachers, TAs, and other students. Specialists accessed from outside the school included RTLBs, GSE, RT:Lits, SLTs, social workers in schools, public health nurses, occupational therapists and physiotherapists.

SENCOs were involved in:

- assessing students and identifying needs
- establishing and maintaining a special needs register
- developing IEPs
- collecting and analysing school data
- liaising with specialists, parents and school staff
- allocating resources and coordinating programmes
- facilitating staff meetings to share information and effective strategies
- providing PLD
- monitoring student progress and reviewing programme effectiveness.

Some TAs worked with students in the classroom, either individually or in small groups, while others withdrew them for particular programmes. Some TAs supported students to develop social skills by helping them learn with other students. In some cases, the TA worked with the rest of the class so that the teacher could teach the student with special needs. Some schools noted that TAs worked under the direction of a teacher or RTLB, and others that they received training or attended PLD.

One quarter of schools supported students with special needs through programmes involving other students. These usually related to social skills and friendships, and included buddy programmes in class and in the playground, peer tutoring (usually for reading), peer support and mentoring, tuakana-teina,¹⁰ peer mediator programmes, and social skills groups. Two schools noted that other students were learning New Zealand sign language.

Schools involved parents/whānau in various ways. Schools noted that by involving parents in the transition process, they developed a relationship with the parents and student, and gathered information that helped them to better meet student needs. When parents attended IEP meetings with school staff and outside experts, it was easier for all to have a shared understanding and for parents to reinforce the school programme. Close and regular communication meant all worked together for the benefit of students.

Outcomes for students

ERO asked schools to describe outcomes for students as a result of their systems, initiatives and programmes. Schools usually described student outcomes in general terms by saying that there had been 'progress', 'improvement' or 'higher achievement'. They noted general improvement for students most often in literacy, but also in numeracy, social skills, behaviour, communication, and life skills. Schools rarely provided information on the extent of student progress or the number of students involved.

Schools reported that students had also benefited in terms of improved attitudes. Some had developed confidence, self esteem, or a sense of belonging, while others were more motivated and engaged in their learning. Some secondary schools noted improved attendance and retention, or reduced stand-downs and suspensions.

Some schools wrote about initiatives or programmes that had resulted in increased participation and improved provision for students with special needs. These could be seen as interim or shorter term outcomes that would be expected to lead to improved outcomes for students.

Examples of comments

Advice from outside experts and PLD resulted in more knowledgeable staff.

The staff provided individualised and differentiated programmes and resources that improved student access to the curriculum.

Programmes and support had increased the participation of students with special needs in many types of sporting, social and cultural events with other students.

Initiatives in some schools had improved acceptance of students with special needs, and increased empathy and understanding from other students. Some students benefited from working with students with special needs on particular programmes such as teaching sport skills.

¹⁰ The tuakana-teina relationship provides a model for buddy systems. An older or more expert tuakana (brother, sister or cousin) helps and guides a younger or less expert teina (originally a younger sibling or cousin of the same gender).

Self-review data given to the Board of trustees

Schools were asked what self-review data had been given to the Board on the achievement and/or inclusion of students with special education needs. One quarter of schools provided a copy of reports received by the Board in the last twelve months. This section integrates information from schools' responses and the reports they provided.

Boards in approximately 90 percent of schools had been given self-review information, including data on student achievement. Reports were usually from the SENCO or special needs department, or statements included in the principal's report to the Board. They also included the annual report, reports of other departments or faculties, and reports from particular personnel such as RTLBs. Some SENCOs attended Board meetings to discuss their reports.

The reports varied in the amount of information provided. They were usually descriptive and focused more on what was done rather than specific outcomes for students. They included information about the types of programmes provided, school staffing (SENCO, TAs, class teachers), access to specialists such as RTLB or GSE, funding (usually categories of funding rather than amount), use of the special needs grant, resources and property, numbers and types of special needs, and reviews of programmes provided. Some reports covered only ORRS or students with high needs.

Most reports did not include a budget although a few reports presented data for programmes on number of students involved, student progress, cost and time.

Some described processes such as identifying students with special needs, IEPS, monitoring progress, involving parents and whānau, and transition. Small numbers described the role of the SENCO or special needs committee in deciding priorities and coordinating use of TAs, and PLD by teachers and TAs accessed. Some noted that staff meetings were held to share information about students and their progress and to discuss ways to meet their needs by differentiating the programme or modifying activities.

Some schools surveyed or interviewed staff and parents to inform their review of programmes and provisions for students with special needs. Some referred to trialling programmes, reflecting on their effectiveness, and modifying or discontinuing them. Some reports included annual plans and objectives or recommendations for the following year. These often related to PLD for staff, processes to identify students at risk and continuing to provide programmes for students with special needs.

Fifteen percent of schools said they included information about progress, outcomes, or student achievement. This information was based on a variety of assessment information, such as Reading Recovery reports, STAR, Rainbow Reading, Six Year Net, and asTTle. Some (usually small) schools said they did not report separately on students with special needs because they were concerned other parents could identify individual students. The examples below show how some schools described the data they gave to the Board.

The SENCO prepared a slideshow breakdown of types of programmes run in the year and graphs showing 'value added', beginning and end results. She also provided handouts and spreadsheet information on students' achievement, and spoke to these at a Board meeting. (primary school)

The Board receives extensive Student Achievement Reports which include analysis of data (under year groups, gender, Māori/other). Within the analysis, a summary of current programmes, interventions and future recommendations is included. This allows the Board to make informed, critical and responsible

decisions related to learning targets, priorities and funding etc. IEP goals are graphed to show the number of IEP goals achieved in 2010. (primary school)

Special educational needs coordinators

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

Secondary and intermediate schools were more likely to have a SENCO – 93 percent of each compared with 74 percent of full primary and 86 percent of contributing schools¹¹.

Most teachers holding SENCO positions had many years of teaching experience, with approximately 40 percent having taught for 20 or more years. Forty percent currently held a senior position or had done so previously.

Just over a quarter of schools reported their SENCO had a special education qualification such as a Diploma in Education of Students with Special Teaching Needs, a Diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language, or Masters in Educational Psychology. Other qualifications included university papers in special education or second language teaching, Reading Recovery training, RTLB or RT:Lit training, and special education courses.

Of the 48 schools without a SENCO, 35 had five or fewer teachers, and eight had five-to-ten teachers. In the remaining five schools, responsibility for special needs was allocated to a person with management responsibility, and the fifth school was a special school.

Special building or property projects

Schools were asked what 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:

- improving access such as installing ramps or lifts
- toilets, bathrooms, washrooms
- classroom upgrades or modifications, decks, increased space
- ICT hardware and software
- speakers, sound systems
- fencing, gates
- assistive technology such as aids for low vision, hoists.

Challenges

ERO asked schools to describe the challenges they faced in including students with special needs. The challenges identified most often related to funding, access to specialists, providing for students with behaviour and high needs, and finding appropriate staff.

¹¹ As only six composite schools responded, findings for these schools are not reported separately.

Funding

Approximately half the schools considered the funding available was insufficient to meet the needs of all children who required additional support, or to provide the amount of support needed for some students with high needs.

The main challenges were:

- funding for specialist staff/number of hours funded
- funding for support staff/hours available for TAs
- funding for resources, such as particular programmes
- criteria that meant some students were not funded for the support they needed.

Some schools provided additional funding from the special education grant (SEG), operations grant or fundraising to meet the needs of students with high needs.

Some schools reported that limited funding meant they could provide TA support for only part of the week. Schools believed some high-needs students needed this support for most of the time so they could participate in the class programme with other students.

Access to specialist advice and support

Forty-three percent of schools said they had difficulty in accessing sufficient specialist advice and support. This included RTLBs, GSE, physiotherapists, OTs, RT:Lits, nurses, SLTs, and child and adolescent mental health services.

The main concerns were: services being short-staffed, waiting lists, delays in processing documentation between agencies, personnel changes in agencies delaying processes and the cost of testing.

Behavioural and high needs

The inclusion of students with behavioural needs and students with high needs had been challenging for one third of schools. Their responses referred to students whose behaviour was challenging but not extreme enough for specialist support, and having a disproportionate number of students with behaviour needs.

Appropriate staff

Finding staff with appropriate training, skills and attitudes had been a challenge for almost a quarter of schools. Some rural schools said travel time to the school made this an issue.

Other

The other main challenges schools identified were: location or isolation, property issues such as ramps, space, lifts, parents of children with special needs having unrealistic expectations or not following through on agreed plans, organisation in the school, accessing appropriate PLD, time for liaison and planning, diagnostic information and programmes and resources.

Conclusion

This report is based on schools' responses to a questionnaire about how they provide for students with special needs. Although the intention was to gather information about students with moderate to high needs, many schools have used a broader interpretation of special needs.

Approximately ninety percent of schools had identified students with special needs and rated themselves as mostly inclusive. They expressed positive attitudes towards having students with special needs in the school and an intention or commitment to meeting their needs in regular classrooms as much as possible. Staff in almost all schools had received PLD or support so that they could assist students with special needs.

Schools documented their commitment in the policies they provided. Usually, the policies referred to students with a wide range of special needs and not just the students with high needs who were the focus of ERO's 2010 report, *Including Students with High Needs*.

Schools have used a wide range of approaches to support the achievement and inclusion of students with various special needs. However, many described outcomes for students in general terms such as improvement or progress, rather than having specific information about achievement. When reporting to the Board, many schools did not talk about the specific progress made by students with special needs but instead reported the support provided by the school.

The lack of outcome analysis does not allow schools to fully evaluate the effectiveness of their provisions for students with special needs and to make informed decisions about changes needed to improve their achievement and well-being.

Next steps

Schools should use the findings in this report to:

- review the quality of their monitoring, analysis and reporting of how well students with special needs are succeeding at school
- use student academic and social outcome data in reviewing the quality of their initiatives to include students with special needs.

ERO will continue to investigate how schools provide for students with special needs.

Appendix 1: Glossary of terms

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. It includes anything that can help a person with disabilities do something that might otherwise be difficult or impossible.
Clicker 5	Clicker 5 is a writing support and multimedia tool to help learners write with whole words, phrases or pictures. Learners can 'click on' words, phrases, or pictures on the screen, to hear the words before they are written, or hear whole sentences when they are written.
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 by using the sounds the letters in a word make. Encoding is the converse as children use their knowledge of the relationship between letters and sounds 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.
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.
Learning Support Funding	Funding provided to RTLB clusters to meet the needs of students with learning and behaviour difficulties. It 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.
Makaton	Makaton is a communication programme, based around a core vocabulary that includes speech, signs and/or symbols, that is designed to help children and adults with communication and learning difficulties.
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)	A statement of school operation requirements that is 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.
Numicon	Numicon is an inclusive, multi-sensory approach to teaching numeracy, using patterns to represent each numeral. It is designed for preschool and primary-aged students, especially those with learning difficulties or special needs.
Ongoing and reviewable resourcing schemes (ORRS)	The Schemes are resources for a small group of children (about one percent of the school population) who have severe difficulties and therefore the highest need for special education.
Perceptual Motor	<i>PMP</i> is a programme which uses facets of physical education, music,

Programme	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.
Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L)	<i>PB4L</i> 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.
PROBE	<i>Prose reading observation behaviour and evaluation of comprehension</i> is one type of reading running record that includes an oral reading comprehension test.
Progressive Achievement Tests (PATs)	<i>PATs</i> are standardised tests developed by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). They include reading comprehension, reading vocabulary and mathematics for Years 4-10 and listening comprehension for Years 3-10.
Rainbow Reading	<i>Rainbow Reading</i> 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	<i>Reading Recovery</i> 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 in 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.
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.
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(c) and (d). It includes a base amount plus per-student funding.
Steps to Literacy	Steps to Literacy is a remedial literacy course designed for pupils aged 8 years and over with a reading/spelling age of 7-10 years.
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 ORRS 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.
<i>Talk to Learn</i>	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.
<i>Toe by Toe</i>	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.

Appendix 2: Evaluation Indicators

Including students with high needs - indicator framework

Presence	
Enrolment and induction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

	<p>teacher to teacher)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans are in place to ensure that all students with high needs can attend school if a teacher aide is absent
School-wide culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 (ORRS, 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has resourced high quality physical and educational support for the 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

• 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 expect to adapt their practice to support the achievement of students with high needs?
3. To what extent do staff at your school have access to 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 meet to 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, including information about achievement, social and physical skills, to better include and support 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, ORRS, 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?