Office for Disability Issues
Te Tari Mō Ngā Take Hauātanga
In Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People

TE IHUWAKA | Education Evaluation Centre

A Great Start?

Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood Education

EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE
Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga

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Executive summary

Quality early childhood education (ECE) affects how well disabled children do at school and in life – from academic achievement and earning potential, to health and wellbeing.

The Education Review Office (ERO), in partnership with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Office for Disability Issues (ODI), looked at how well the education system is supporting disabled children in early childhood education. We found that too many disabled children are excluded from ECE and, while many services provide safe and nurturing environments, we need to strengthen teaching practices. This report describes what we found and what is needed to significantly improve education for these priority learners.

Participation in high-quality ECE positively impacts a range of education and life outcomes including health, wellbeing, academic achievement, and earning potential. High-quality ECE supports children to develop the social, emotional, communication, cognitive, and motor skills which enable them to thrive. A focused, intentional approach to developing these skills is particularly critical for disabled children as it sets the foundation for their future learning and engagement with others. Research shows that the greater the participation in ECE, the greater its impact.

Disabled children and young people have the same rights to enrol and receive education as other learners. To thrive, they need to be able to enrol in and access early childhood education, be fully included in all aspects, and have the curriculum adapted to their needs. Like all learners, they need to receive quality teaching, in supportive environments, and with strong partnerships between their kaiako and their parents and whānau.

This study looked at the quality and inclusiveness of education provision for disabled children in early childhood education. It answers four key questions:

1) How well are disabled children doing?
2) What is the quality and inclusiveness of education provision (including teaching practice)?
3) How strong are the system enablers that support more inclusive and higher quality education?
4) What key actions could lead to improved outcomes for disabled learners?

How well are disabled children doing?

Disabled children enjoy ECE, feel safe and that they belong. We found disabled children are participating and enjoying ECE. Most parents and whānau believe their child feels loved and cared for, and that they belong at their service.

Disabled children are being excluded from enrolling and fully participating. We found a significant number of parents and whānau are being discouraged from enrolling their disabled child, and are asked to keep their disabled child home for specific activities. Kaiako also lack confidence about including disabled children in some activities.

We do not know how well disabled children are progressing. We found many services lack information showing how well disabled children are progressing, and do not communicate children's next steps with their parents and whānau.

Children with complex needs are doing less well. Children with complex needs experience exclusion more than their disabled peers with less complex needs. Kaiako are less likely to discuss children's learning with their parents and whānau. Parents and whānau of children with complex needs are less likely to report their child feels safe and that they belong.

Which areas of education for disabled children could be strengthened?

We found many committed early childhood services, and a range of good practice in providing education and support for disabled children. But we also found four areas that could be strengthened.

1) **Kaiako are not confident teaching disabled children, and struggle to access support to help them develop.** Kaiako confidence in teaching disabled children is low. A third of kaiako do not feel confident enough to deliver a curriculum that is inclusive of disabled children. Targeted professional learning and development, and experience supporting disabled children, improves kaiako confidence. Accessing development and capability-building support is an ongoing challenge.
2) **Partnerships with whānau need to be more focused on their child's learning.** Discussions with parents and whānau often focus on what has happened during the day rather than how learning is progressing. Parents and whānau are often not aware of how well their child is progressing. Only two-thirds of parents and whānau are satisfied with their involvement in developing and reviewing their child's Individual Learning Plan (ILP), a critical component of a disabled child's learning support.
3) **Services need to have a better understanding of how well disabled children are progressing, and how good their provision is.** Many services do not have good information about how well they are providing for disabled children, and many lack focus on this important group. Forty-one percent of leaders reported provision for disabled children is rarely or never a focus of internal evaluation. We also found that service leaders are much more positive about the quality of provision for disabled children than parents/whānau or kaiako, further highlighting the lack of clarity on quality of provision.

4) **Transitions from ECE to schools are not working as well as entry into ECE.** Transitions from ECE into school settings are not working well. Nearly a quarter of parents and whānau are not satisfied with how their child is supported when transitioning to school. Communication with and the sharing of information between ECEs, support services, and teachers is a challenge. The need to re-establish the case for their child's need for support, and navigating the system, is also a challenge for parents and whānau.

Recommendations

Early childhood education is still not delivering for all disabled children and improvements are needed. Based on this study, we have identified four areas to raise the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled children in early childhood education.

Area 1: To strengthen prioritisation of disabled children in ECEs, and accountability for how well they are doing:

1) Develop with services ways to better identify and track the enrolment and participation of disabled children in ECE at a national level.
2) Provide guidance to services on expectations for inclusion and provision of education for disabled children, and what needs to be in place in all services.
3) Provide support for service leaders and Governing Organisations on understanding how well their service is meeting the needs of disabled children.
4) Include provision and outcomes for disabled children as a focus in all ECE evaluations.
5) Explore policy options to support services to reduce the barriers to enrolment and participation for disabled children in high quality ECE.

Area 2: To build leaders' and teachers' capabilities to teach and support disabled children:

6) Continue to strengthen Initial Teacher Education focused on teaching disabled children.
7) Strengthen beginner teacher induction and mentoring.
8) Ensure guidance and other supports around standards for the teaching profession (*Our Code, Our Standards*) make explicit the expectations for inclusion of disabled children.
9) Include disability as a priority in professional learning and development (PLD) provision for kaiako, and encourage uptake of disability specific training.
10) Review the quality of disability specific PLD provision for ECE leaders and kaiako, and provide services with guidance on how to identify quality, targeted PLD and support to improve their practice.
11) Ensure guidelines, resources, and supports (assessment, curriculum, scaffolding, etc.) for teaching disabled children are in place, including supports to notice, recognise, and respond to progressions for disabled children, and support awareness and use of these.

Area 3: To empower disabled children's parents and whānau by increasing their understanding of their education rights, how to raise concerns or complaints, or how to get someone to advocate on their behalf:

12) Ensure there is support for parents and whānau to understand education rights, what they should expect from a service, how to raise concerns and complaints, and how to access advocacy support if they need it.

Area 4: To improve the coordination of supports for disabled children, and pathways from ECE to schools:

13) Ensure that tools and guidance are in place, and support awareness and use of these, so that information follows disabled learners across education settings.
14) Improve coordination across agencies on supporting disabled children's education.

Conclusion

Together, these recommendations have the potential to significantly improve education experiences and outcomes for disabled learners. Improving education for these learners can dramatically improve their lives and life course. It will take coordinated and focused work across the relevant agencies to take these recommendations forward and ensure change occurs. We recommend agencies report to Ministers on progress in July 2023.

About this report

Te Whāriki – The Early Childhood Curriculum is the core document supporting the delivery of quality early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The curriculum was refreshed in 2017, strengthening its focus on inclusion for all children. Five years on, ERO sees strong, inclusive practice in many aspects of early childhood education. This report looks at the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled children in English medium early childhood services, and how it can be improved.

ERO is responsible for reviewing and reporting on the performance of early learning services, kura, and schools. As part of this role, ERO looks at how the education system supports learners' outcomes – in this case, we are looking at education for disabled children in early childhood education services.

This report describes what we found about the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled children in early childhood services.[a] It highlights the strengths and weaknesses of education provision, and suggests areas for improvement.

The voices of disabled children's parents and whānau are an important element of this report. We include their experiences of their child's participation, learning and outcomes, and how teaching practices impact on disabled children's learning and lives.

We partnered with experts

For this evaluation, ERO partnered with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) to pool our collective expertise and independent advisory roles.

The Human Rights Commission is Aotearoa New Zealand's national human rights institution. It is independent of Government and monitors the progress Aotearoa New Zealand is making towards the realisation of human rights. The Disability Rights Commissioner sits within the Human Rights Commission, and has a broad mandate to protect and promote the rights of disabled New Zealanders.

The Office for Disability Issues is focused on helping Aotearoa New Zealand work towards being a non-disabling society. It supports the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

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[a] This report uses the term "service" to describe the variety of early childhood education provision, which in this report includes kindergartens, education and care services, home-based providers, and Playcentres.

We also worked closely with an Expert Advisory Group with a range of expertise, including lived experience of disability, academics, practitioners, and agency officials.

ERO regularly evaluates the quality of education for disabled learners

As part of ERO's mandate, we undertake national evaluations on education for disabled learners in schools and early childhood services. Disabled children are a priority group in all of ERO's early childhood evaluations. Our last national report on the quality of provision for disabled children in early childhood education (ECE) was published in 2012. This latest report builds on ERO's previous studies by investigating the quality of provision and outcomes for disabled children in greater detail, and draws on a wider range of voices.

This report is one of two focusing on provision of education for disabled learners, from early childhood through to secondary school

ERO, HRC, and ODI wanted to know if disabled children, from early childhood through to the end of secondary school, are receiving quality education. This report shares what we learnt about provision for children in English medium early childhood education settings. Its companion report shares what we learnt about provision for learners in English medium state and state-integrated schools.

The two companion evaluations have been designed to ask the same big questions, consider similar groups of learners, and are based on the same principles. The definitions for what "good" looks like are also similar.

What we looked at

This evaluation looked at the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled children in ECE. We answered four key questions:

1) How well are disabled children doing?
2) What is the quality and inclusivity of early childhood education provision (including teaching practice) for disabled children?
3) How strong are the system enablers that support more inclusive and higher quality education?
4) What key actions could lead to improved outcomes for disabled children?

This report focuses on education provision. However, although the following areas are important aspects of quality education provision for disabled children, we did not evaluate the quality of:

- needs assessment regarding health support
- early identification
- early intervention programmes
- specialist providers.

Where we looked

We focused our investigation on English medium early childhood services. To ensure we captured a range of experiences across a variety of learning contexts, ERO included kindergartens, education and care services, home-based services, and Playcentres in this evaluation.

How we evaluated education provision

We have taken a robust, mixed-methods approach to deliver breadth and depth in this evaluation.

To understand how good education is for disabled children we gathered information in multiple ways:

- surveys with 118 responses from parents/whānau
- surveys of 130 kaiako[b] and 291 service leaders
- site visits and observations of teaching and learning at nine services
- in-depth interviews with leaders, kaiako, and parents/whānau at 22 services, and with leaders and kaiako at an additional two services
- interviews with eight Governing Organisation[c] leaders
- interviews with key experts, practitioners, and agencies supporting inclusive education.

Further details of the methods we used are in Appendix 1.

How this fits with other work

This report provides up-to-date information on the quality of provision for disabled children in ECE services, and informs future provision, including the Ministry of Education's Highest Needs Review.

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[b] Kaiako includes all teachers, educators and other adults, including parents in parent-led services, who have a responsibility for the care and education of children in an ECE setting. In settings where parents have collective responsibility for the curriculum, it is understood that kaiako will also be parents and whānau. ELS-Te-Whariki-Early-Childhood-Curriculum-ENG-Web.pdf (education.govt.nz)

[c] Governing Organisations are distinct from governing bodies or boards. Governing Organisations contain multiple services, and have significant agency over services' policies and philosophies; leaders spoken to were mostly professional practice leaders.

Report structure

This report has 11 parts.

- Part 1 sets out who disabled learners are, and the system that supports their education.
- Part 2 explains why early childhood education is important for disabled children, and what drives good outcomes.
- Part 3 shares our findings about education experiences and outcomes for disabled children in ECE.
- Part 4 outlines the differences in experiences and outcomes for different groups of disabled children.
- Part 5 describes the quality of education and care provision for disabled children.
- Part 6 details the differences in provision between different types of services.
- Part 7 shares the experiences and quality of provision for Māori disabled children.
- Part 8 shares the experiences and quality of provision for Pacific disabled children.
- Part 9 explores the system that supports provision for disabled children in ECE.
- Part 10 details our key findings, and areas for action.
- Part 11 sets out the next steps to drive improvement for disabled children in ECE.

Part 1: Who are disabled children and what is the system that supports their education?

Participation in high-quality ECE positively impacts education and life outcomes, such as health, wellbeing, and earning potential. High-quality ECE supports children to develop the social, emotional, communication, cognitive, and motor skills which enable them to thrive. This is particularly critical for disabled children as it sets the foundation for their future learning and engagement with others. Research shows that the greater the participation in ECE, the greater its impact.

Early childhood education has traditionally taken an inclusive approach that is welcoming of disabled children. *Te Whāriki – The Early Childhood Curriculum* explicitly describes the expectation to include "children with diversity of ability and learning needs."[1]

In this section, we describe what we mean by "disabled children". We also provide a brief overview of the support they receive for their early childhood education.

Who are disabled children?

Disabled children are defined in this report as all children with significant needs for ongoing support and adaptations or accommodations to enable them to thrive in education.

We use the term "disabled children" as it is consistent with the New Zealand Disability Strategy[d] which defines disability as something that happens when people with impairments face barriers in society. This is referred to as the social model of disability, which is embodied in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Disabled children are a highly diverse group. Examples include children with:

- physical impairments (such as Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy) and have significant challenges, for example, walking or climbing steps

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[d] The NZ Disability Strategy recognises that not all members of their community identify with this language and that each person has a right to choose the terminology they prefer.

- intellectual or cognitive impairments caused by genetic disorders (such as Down Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome, Prader-Willi Syndrome) and have significant challenges, for example, learning things at ECE
- sensory impairments (such as deafblind, blind, low vision, deaf, and hard of hearing) and have significant challenges, for example, seeing or hearing
- neurodiverse learning needs (such as those relating to dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder) and have significant challenges, for example, managing their emotions or relating to others.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, it is estimated that 11 percent of children aged under 15 years are disabled.[2] There is a higher rate of disability amongst Māori; the disability rate for Māori children is estimated to be 14 percent, compared to 11 percent for all children.[3]

There are clear expectations for inclusion for disabled children in ECE

Expectations for inclusion of disabled children are clearly laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Under the UNCRPD, all children, including disabled children, have the right to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. They may not be discriminated against through enrolment or exclusion from learning opportunities or activities. Aotearoa New Zealand ratified the UNCRPD in 2008.

This means the education system must be inclusive. An inclusive education system is one that accommodates all learners, whatever their abilities or requirements, and at all levels, including ECE.

Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum – Te Whāriki (2017) – is explicit about inclusion for children with additional needs or disability.[4]

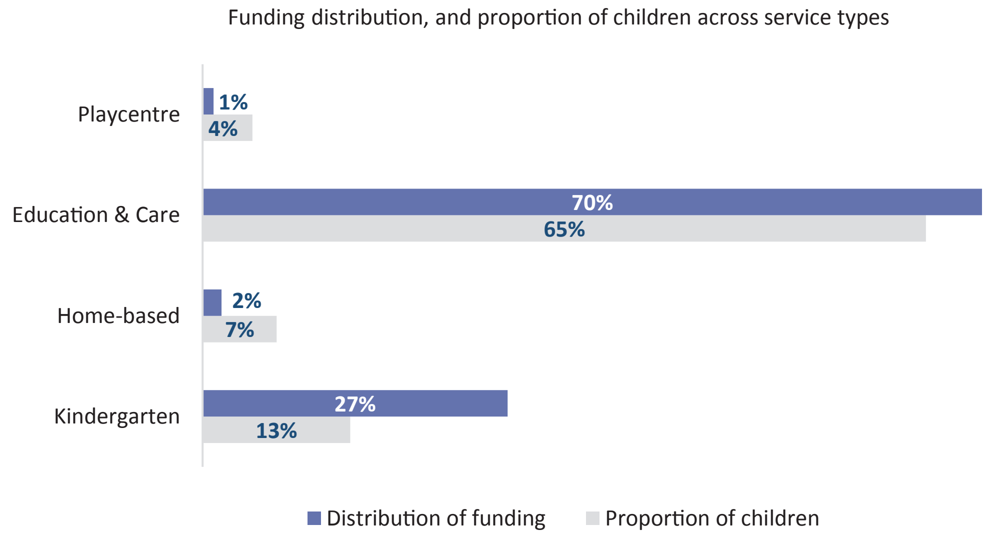
While there are high expectations for disabled children's inclusion, participation is not compulsory – families can choose not to enrol their children in ECE. Many ECE providers are private businesses, and children's attendance at ECE is not fully funded.

There is limited system level information on disabled children in ECE

There is currently very limited data on disabled learners across the education system. This is particularly so for the ECE sector, as there is no national reporting mechanism or requirement to provide information on disabled children. Consequently, we have had to rely on data for those who receive Early Intervention (EI) funding to get some understanding on the participation of these learners.

From this data we know that, of the 190,348 children enrolled in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand, a proportion are assigned 6,252 Early Intervention (EI) funding units. Although this provides some insight into the number of children receiving government support, funding units is not an accurate indication of how many disabled children there are, or how many attend an ECE service. This is because not every disabled child receives EI funding, and for those children who do receive funding, one child may receive several funding units, depending on the complexity and/or intensity of their needs. EI funding is therefore an indication of support needed rather than the number of disabled children enrolled in ECE.[5]

Figure 1: *EI funding distribution, and proportion of children by service type*[e]



Data source: Ministry of Education

Where are disabled children and how do they move between settings?

Disabled children are enrolled in a wide range of services. In this report, we evaluated how well things were going for disabled children across four different service types.

- **Education and care services:** These cover a diverse range of services including standalone services, and services that are part of a large network of services under a single organisation. These may be community-based or private, and include different organising philosophies such as Montessori or Rudolf Steiner.
- **Kindergartens:** These are state funded and run on a non-profit model. Their operating hours typically align with schools, including term breaks. These services use 100 percent qualified teachers, and unqualified teaching assistants or aides. Most kindergartens enrol children aged over two years.
- **Home-based networks:** Early childhood education is provided in a home setting rather than a centre. An educator provides education and care for up to four children aged from birth to five years.
- **Playcentres:** These services run a non-profit model and rely on parent volunteers. This type of service has a special licensing agreement with the Ministry of Education which enables them to run sessions with adults (usually parents) who hold Playcentre-specific qualifications.

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[e] Please note not all figures sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

There is little difference between which service types disabled and non-disabled children attend, although there is a slightly higher proportion of disabled children in centre-based care.[f, 6] Ministry of Education (MoE) data shows around 13 percent of children receiving funding for early intervention services are not in any early childhood service.

How are disabled children supported?

Targeted support

The MoE provides targeted support for disabled children through the Early Intervention Service (EIS).[7] In some areas, Child Development Teams also provide support.[8] This support is available for children who qualify, whether they are enrolled in an ECE service or not. Children do not need a formal diagnosis to access EI support, and parents or kaiako can request it. EIS and Child Development Teams are government funded.

EIS providers work with parents, whānau, and kaiako to develop plans for children's participation and learning. In some cases, this might involve targeted training to give whānau and kaiako strategies to support the child's learning. In others, this might involve an Education Support Worker (ESW) being funded to attend the service to offer on the ground support for the child, and for kaiako, during the day.

General support

For disabled children who do not qualify for Early Intervention support, kaiako work with their parents and whānau to understand their child's strengths, interests, and needs. Kaiako then develop a plan with the disabled child's parents/whānau for how to support the child's learning and development in the service.

ECE services may also apply to the MoE for equity funding to support disabled children under:

- funding for special needs (disabled children)
- funding for languages and cultures other than English (including sign language).[9]

Services may choose how they use their equity funding based on which children and purposes they receive it for. Service leaders must report annually to parents and the community on how they use the equity funding.

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[f] This includes kindergartens, education and care services, and Playcentre.

Part 2 What sort of education provision drives good outcomes for disabled children in ECE?

Participation in high-quality early childhood education positively impacts children – both in their education and longer-term life outcomes. It is critical that disabled children experience a focused, intentional approach to their early learning and development as this sets the foundation for all their future learning and engagement with others.

This section explains the importance of ECE for disabled children, and what learning outcomes matter. We then set out what quality inclusive education looks like for disabled children in ECE based on the best evidence from Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally.

Why is ECE important for disabled children?

International research tells us that participation in quality ECE lays a strong foundation for better education and life outcomes later, particularly for children who experience more challenges.[10] Although all children benefit from ECE's impacts on neurological, linguistic, and social and emotional skills development, benefits are particularly impactful for disabled children.[11] Quality ECE for disabled children supports critical outcomes such as the development of sense of belonging, participation in learning and social activities, and relationships – all of which support academic learning and wellbeing.[12]

What outcomes matter for disabled children?

Te Whāriki sets out the outcomes ECE seeks to achieve for all learners, including disabled children. The 20 learning outcomes sit across five learning area strands:[13]

Strand	Aim
Wellbeing | Mana atua	The health and wellbeing of the child is protected and nurtured.
Belonging | Mana whenua	Children and their families feel a sense of belonging.
Contribution | Mana tangata	Opportunities for learning are equitable, and each child's contribution is valued.
Communication | Mana reo	The languages and symbols of children's own and other cultures are promoted and protected.
Exploration | Mana aotūroa	The child learns through active exploration of the environment.

The full list of outcomes is in Appendix 3.

What are the components of quality ECE for disabled children?

To understand what quality, inclusive education looks like for disabled children, we carried out an extensive review of Aotearoa New Zealand and international literature on best practice evidence. We then worked with an Expert Advisory Group of people with lived experience of disability, academics, practitioners, and agency officials to identify four key components of quality, inclusive education practice.

Components of quality, inclusive education practice
1) Effective leadership and strong expectations for inclusion 2) Quality teaching 3) Inclusive, accessible environments 4) Strong, learning-focused partnerships with parents and whānau

For each component of quality, inclusive practice we used the literature evidence base to define what good looks like, and a four-point scale for judging provision. Indicators for culturally responsive factors like working with whānau and prioritising Te Tiriti o Waitangi, were embedded throughout the components.

Much of the Aotearoa New Zealand literature we drew on was from Māori academics. Our indicators and judgements are therefore also informed by mātauranga Māori concepts of disability.

The next sections explain what each component covers. The full rubric we used to judge quality against each component can be found in Appendix 2.

1) Effective leadership and strong expectations for inclusion of disabled children

Informed and committed leadership is essential. The knowledge and beliefs held by leaders, combined with the culture they promote, have a fundamental influence on how welcomed and valued disabled children and their parents and whānau feel, and on disabled children's education outcomes. Leaders include centre managers, pedagogical leaders and senior teachers/kaiako.

From the evidence base on best practice, we identified the following aspects of leadership as most important.

- **Clear expectations:** Do leaders set clear expectations for equity and inclusion, wellbeing, and achievement for disabled children?
- **Planning for and prioritising disabled children's success:** Do leaders prioritise disabled children's success when making plans for the service?
- **Welcoming culture and values:** Do leaders promote a culture that values disabled children and their whānau?
- **Alignment of policies and practices:** Do leaders ensure policies and practices align, and are underpinned by a vision for inclusion and equity?
- **Information used to strengthen practice:** Do leaders use information effectively to promote better inclusive practices and greater equity of outcomes for disabled children?

2) Quality teaching

Quality, intentional teaching plays a critical role in creating equity in engagement, progress, and achievement for disabled children.

A responsive curriculum in ECE involves both planned and spontaneous learning experiences. Kaiako should draw on up-to-date knowledge of how children learn and develop, and understand the service's philosophy, to bring these to life in their teaching practice. Kaiako are expected to use assessment information and a wide range of teaching strategies to respond effectively to the different ways in which children learn.[14]

We identified the following elements as important when considering the quality of curriculum, teaching, and assessment for disabled children.

- **Responsive curriculum:** Do kaiako adapt the learning programme in response to disabled children's strengths, interests and needs, language, culture, and identity?
- **Intentional teaching practice:** Do kaiako adapt their teaching practice to ensure disabled children are able to fully participate in learning?
- **Culturally responsive teaching for Māori disabled children:** Do kaiako ensure that, while the curriculum is bicultural for all children, they work with Māori children's parents and whānau to understand what success looks like for them?
- **Assessment:** Do kaiako use appropriate assessment to understand what disabled children know and can do, and identify potential next steps for learning?
- **Inclusive social and emotional environment:** Do kaiako support children's social and emotional learning to promote their wellbeing and participation?

3) Inclusive, accessible environments

Physical access to buildings, playgrounds, and excursions is essential for disabled children to feel fully included in the life of the service.

We identified two aspects of the physical environment as being important for ensuring inclusive provision for disabled children.

- **Accessible spaces:** Are physical environments designed to support safe, mana-enhancing, and barrier-free access to learning and social opportunities for disabled children?
- **Specialised resources and adaptations:** Are appropriate resources and equipment available to support full participation of disabled children in all activities and are designated spaces available to support self-regulation?

4) Strong, learning-focused partnerships with parents and whānau

Parents and whānau are a child's first and most important teachers and have a vital role to play in helping them learn. Parents and whānau know their child better than anyone – their strengths, interests and needs, the ways they approach new and different things, and how they learn.[15]

We identified the following learner and parent and whānau engagement practices to be most important for disabled children.

- **Educationally-focused engagement:** Do kaiako, leaders, and parents/whānau have strong relationships, which underpin learning-focused partnerships, to support disabled children's learning and success, including through developing and reviewing their child's individual learning plan?
- **Whānau agency:** Is parent and whānau agency encouraged, for example, through codesigning service policies for disabled children, and providing feedback on provision for disabled children?

What enables services to provide quality, inclusive education for disabled children?

Services need support to provide quality, inclusive education for disabled children. Our analysis identified five key enablers, set out in the following table. For each one we identified themes for what needs to be in place at a structural and/or system level, for quality, inclusive practice for disabled children to occur.

System-level enablers supporting services to provide quality, inclusive education for disabled children

1) High expectations for inclusion and equity for disabled children
2) Workforce capability and capacity
3) Inter-agency collaboration
4) Good transitions
5) System monitoring, evaluation, and accountability

1) High expectations for inclusion and equity for disabled children

Based on comparative international education systems and policy research,[16] and Aotearoa New Zealand's obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, we identified the following aspects of strong system-level expectations.

- → **Clear expectations are set:** Do education legislation, policies, and plans articulate clear expectations for inclusion and equity in education for disabled children?
- → **Expectations are understood:** Do kaiako and leaders have a clear understanding of the expectations and what they mean for their practice?
- → **Expectations are acted on:** Do service leaders and kaiako have a clear understanding of the education system's expectations for inclusion, and enact the expectations?

2) Workforce capability and capacity

Workforce in the ECE context includes kaiako, leaders, education support workers and other specialists involved in designing and delivering support for disabled children.

International research suggests a focus on education for disabled children is required in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), specialist training programmes, and ongoing professional learning. This would support the education workforce to plan responsive learning opportunities to improve disabled children's engagement and learning.

When considering the skills and confidence of the ECE workforce, we explored two areas.

- → **Kaiako confidence and capability:** Do kaiako have the skills and confidence needed to deliver quality and inclusive education for disabled children?
- → **Ongoing learning:** Are kaiako and learning support staff supported to improve their skills in education practice for disabled children?

3) Inter-agency collaboration

Evidence shows countries that report better outcomes for disabled people have system-level alignment of policies across government departments, and agencies work together to achieve the goals of inclusion and equity in education.[17] Sharing information and knowledge for better collaboration and coordination of services improves efficiencies in how support is delivered and optimises the use of available resources.

When evaluating the quality of collaboration to support high-quality provision for disabled children, we considered:

- **Collaboration with support services:** Do services have timely access to support agencies, and do they work well together?
- **Collaboration with other ECE services and schools:** How well do agencies and ECE services work together to provide support for kaiako, children, and their parents/whānau?

4) Good transitions

Transitions are a crucial time for all learners, but for disabled children they are critical to their engagement and success in learning in new environments. Flexible transition plans, responsive to the needs of the individual disabled child and their whānau, need to be developed in partnership with all the agencies and organisations involved.

We explored how well coordinated entry into ECE was, as well as the quality of transitions between ECE and schools.

- **Entry into ECE:** Is disabled children’s entry into ECE well planned, coordinated, and responsive to their individual needs?
- **Through or between ECE services:** Are disabled children's transitions between rooms in a service or between different ECE services well-planned, coordinated, and responsive to individual needs?
- **Transitions from ECE to schools:** Is the transition from ECE to school well planned, coordinated, and responsive to individual disabled learners? Do agencies and educational institutions communicate and work well together to support the learner and their whānau?

5) System monitoring, evaluation, and accountability

The importance of gathering data for this group of learners at a national level has been emphasised in international literature. The Global Education Monitoring Report (2020) identified the shortage of data on disabled learners at a national level, and the impact this has on evidence-informed policy development in the jurisdictions covered. The issue of invisibility of disabled learners, poor benchmarks for monitoring progress or effectiveness of inclusive education programmes, and its link to poor monitoring of outcomes for disabled learners, has been highlighted in multiple international reports.

When identifying the scope of system monitoring, evaluation, and accountability, we considered three key areas.

- **Data is collected:** Is relevant data about participation, engagement, and achievement of all disabled children effectively and systematically collected and analysed nationally?
- **Evidence is used:** Are evidence and insights from data used to inform policies and plans?
- **The system is held accountable:** Are services and agencies held accountable for the inclusion of disabled children and the quality of provision they receive?

Conclusion

Inclusive education for disabled children needs to be planned for and supported. This section set out key elements of quality education for disabled children in ECE. The next section describes the outcomes we found for disabled children in ECE, followed by the elements of provision that led to those outcomes.

Part 3: What are the education experiences and outcomes for disabled children?

Most parents report their disabled child has a sense of belonging at their service and enjoys attending, but not all services are welcoming of disabled children. Unfortunately, a significant number of disabled children are still being discouraged from enrolling, and asked to stay home when their peers participate in certain activities.

This section describes disabled children's experiences of participation, learning, and wellbeing at ECE and what their parents said about their experiences.

How we gathered information

To understand disabled children's experiences and outcomes, we asked parents and whānau about their child's experiences in ECE. In both an online survey and a set of interview questions we asked about their child's:

1) participation
2) learning
3) wellbeing and sense of belonging.

We also visited a selection of ECE centres and observed how these children were supported. More details about the survey and interviews are set out in Appendix 1.

What we found: An overview

Disabled children are still experiencing exclusion. A significant number of parents have been discouraged from enrolling their disabled child. Some parents have been asked to keep their disabled child home when their peers are undertaking specific activities, such as excursions.

It is unclear how well disabled children's learning is progressing. There is a lack of information, both at a service and system level, about how well disabled children are learning and progressing. Assessment tends to show what children have done, rather than what they have learnt.

Disabled children enjoy ECE and feel they belong. The belonging, safety and comfort of most disabled children is effectively supported at the service they are attending, and most children enjoy attending.

1) Participation

This section shares what ERO learnt about:

a) disabled children's experiences enrolling in an ECE service

b) their inclusion once enrolled.

a) Enrolment

Disabled children are being excluded from enrolling in ECE services

ECE services should not discriminate against children with additional learning needs (including disabled children) in their enrolment policies and practices.[18] Despite this, we heard from many parents that not all centres are welcoming of them and their child. They have been discouraged from enrolling, and in many cases, refused enrolment. Over one in four parents we surveyed (26 percent) have been discouraged from enrolling their disabled child at one or more services (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: *Discouraged from enrolling in a service: Parents survey*

When we spoke to parents about their enrolment experiences, we heard they often have to approach a large number of services before they are able to find one that will enrol their child. One parent told us they had either been refused or had limits put on their child's inclusion from an estimated 30 ECE services.

She explained that, even after going through a long enrolment process with her eldest child who also has additional learning needs, she still had significant challenges with her youngest:

> "I had to go through that process again … we've finally found a daycare … we've tried like, I think 30? 30 different daycares and kindies … And as soon as I say, oh he may have ADHD, these are the things that are going on, [he] could possibly have autism as well. As soon as I open up and tell them, they're like, 'oh sorry, actually we don't have space', or, 'oh sorry, uh, I don't think we can manage him, you'll have to find somewhere else', or, 'I don't think this place is right for him'."
>
> **PARENT**

Parents told us services commonly frame their reluctance to enrol a disabled child around the centres' ability to safely care for all children. However, parents reported that this often came in response to hearing about a disability rather than observing the child's behaviours and identifying the support needed.

b) Inclusion of disabled children

Most disabled children are included once they are enrolled, however some disabled children are still excluded from participating fully

Once children are enrolled in ECE, most are included in the centre and are able to fully participate. Two-thirds of parents (66 percent) were satisfied their ECE service supports their child to be included in all aspects of life in the service.

> "[The service] has been amazing in terms of the welcoming and the settling of you know, us. I really enjoyed how I took [my child] there and he was included. If he didn't want to participate in something he wasn't forced to … it was really child-led, I really like that because I think that's [his] style of learning."
>
> **PARENT**

Disabled children have a high number of attendance hours when compared to all children attending ECE. Over half of parents (57 percent) in our survey indicated their child attended ECE for more than 20 hours a week, while less than a third of all children (disabled and nondisabled) aged between three and four attended more than 20 hours a week in 2021 (see Figure 3).[19][g] This is a substantive difference, making experiences of exclusion at the front door more impactful.

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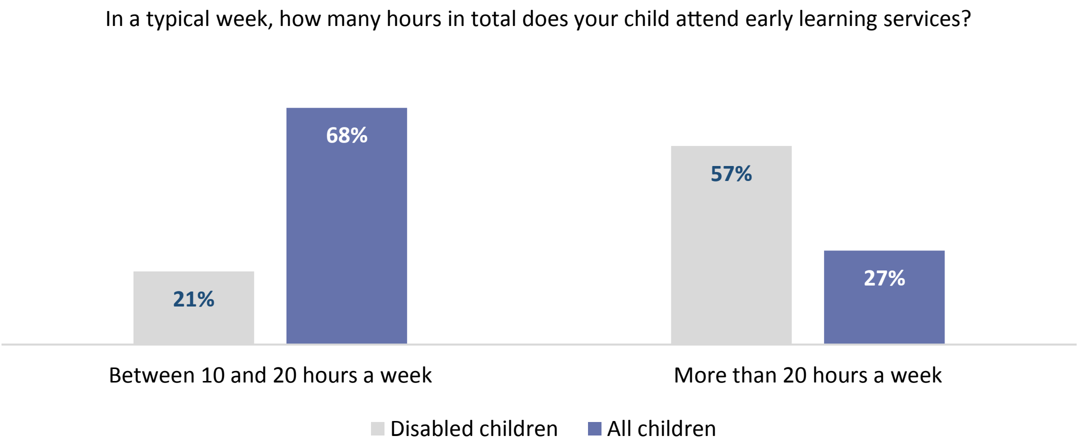
[g] These differences may be due to our specific sample, which consisted of particularly engaged parents.

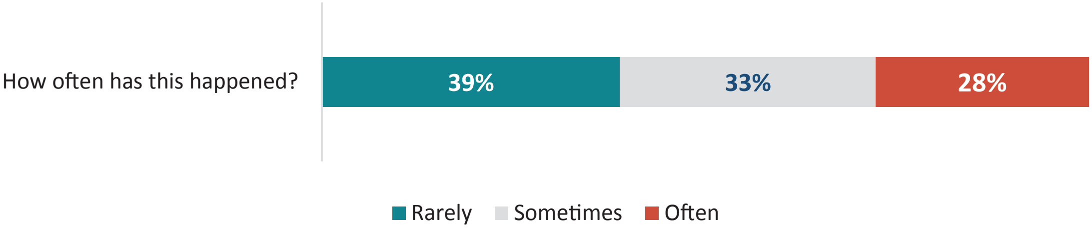
Figure 3: *Hours disabled children attend ECE, compared to all children: Parents survey*



Despite their high attendance and being included once enrolled, disabled children still experience some forms of exclusion. Almost one in five parents (17 percent) have been asked to keep their disabled child at home for reasons not related to Covid-19 (see Figure 4). This occurred often for nearly a third of parents (28 percent) (Figure 5). Even when disabled children overcome barriers of enrolment, many still experience exclusion.

Figure 4: *Asked to keep their child home: Parents survey*

Figure 5: *How often have you been asked to keep your child home: Parents survey*



2) Learning

Learning is not assessed as formally in ECE as it is in schools. Instead, children's learning can be captured in many ways, for example, through narrative assessment. For some disabled children, this tailored approach includes the use of an individual learning plan (ILP).

It is unclear how well disabled children are progressing against their learning goals

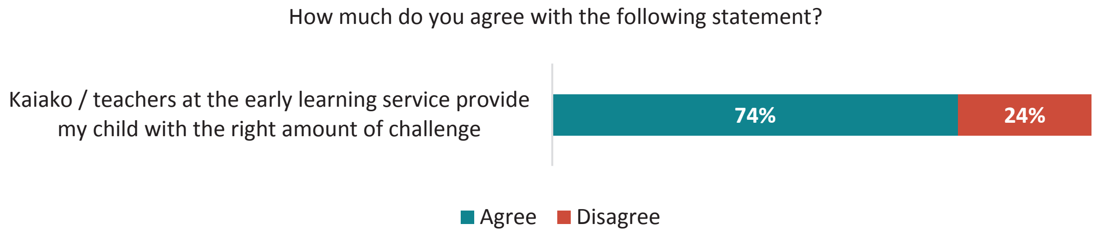
There is no national-level information about how well disabled children are learning in ECE. We also found an absence of information at a service level.

While leaders are very positive about disabled children's learning progression, in interviews we heard that reporting to parents, and assessment in general, often focuses on what children do rather than what they have learnt. Assessment and reporting to parents does not always link to children's learning goals or ILPs.

More information about assessment is in the section about quality teaching. Information about how well kaiako are working with parents and whānau to develop ILPs, learning goals and monitor disabled children's progress is in the section about strong learning-focused partnerships.

Despite a lack of information about how well disabled children are progressing towards their learning goals, most parents (74 percent) agreed kaiako give their child the right amount of challenge (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: *Service providing right amount of challenge: Parents survey*



3) Wellbeing and belonging

Wellbeing | Mana Atua is the strand of *Te Whāriki* which recognises all children have a right to have their health promoted, and to be protected from harm.[20] Promoting and maintaining wellbeing is important as it enables children to manage themselves and express their feelings and needs, which positively impacts their learning.

This section includes:

a) enjoyment and feeling safe

b) being accepted and having a sense of belonging.

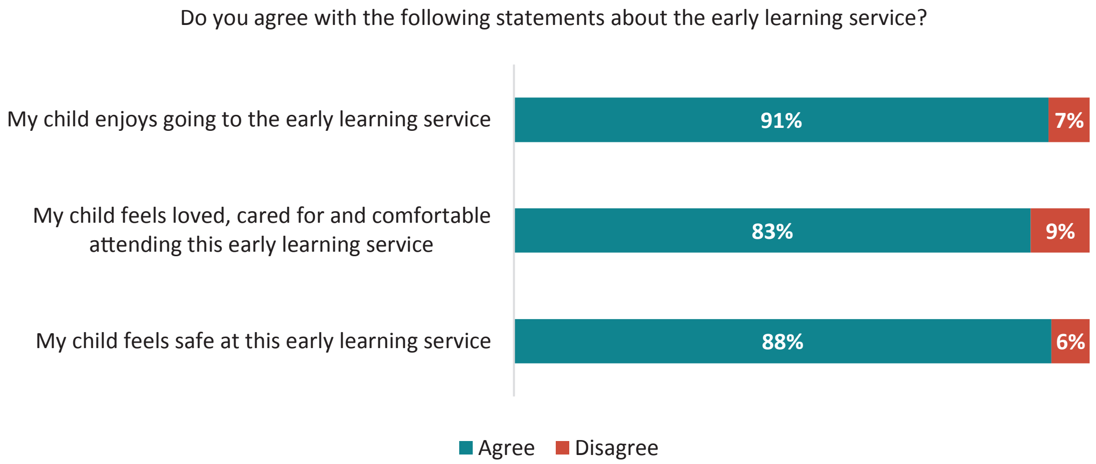
a) Enjoyment and feeling safe

Disabled children largely feel safe and enjoy attending their services

Disabled children not only feel safe at their services, but also enjoy their time there. Nine in 10 parents agreed their child feels safe at their service (88 percent) and enjoys attending their ECE (91 percent). In addition to these important wellbeing aspects, more than four in five parents (83 percent) believe their child feels loved, cared for, and comfortable (see Figure 7).

These positive sentiments may in part be due to the work kaiako do to ensure disabled children are supported, and the care parents take in choosing a service for their child. Almost all parents agreed kaiako are helpful and care about their child's wellbeing (90 percent).

Figure 7: *Child's feelings of safety, comfort, and enjoyment: Parent survey*



b) Being accepted and having a sense of belonging

Most disabled children feel accepted and that they belong

Along with feeling safe and enjoying attending their service, most disabled children also feel accepted and that they belong there. Eighty-one percent of parents agreed their child has a sense of belonging at their service. A further 82 percent agree that their child feels accepted for who they are.

> "We felt welcomed and like we belonged at [the service]. Information was updated regularly, and we knew what they were learning. We had the feeling the team really wanted to take care of our boys. It was effortless. Made me feel like we could trust them."
>
> **PARENT**

> “[My child] has a bit more demands on kaiako than others. Regardless of that I feel really welcome, they treat him as a valued member of the community … They’re always genuinely excited to see him.”
>
> **PARENT**

Practice example 1: Deliberate actions to support a sense of belonging

Emma is a three-year-old girl with high support needs. She is non-verbal, and her support person is her “arms and legs” at the service. Emma has a kaiako, provided by her kindergarten’s governing body for one-to-one support. This ensures she (and others) are included in all early learning opportunities the service provides. Emma’s mother says she has a strong sense of belonging due to the deliberate actions of her kaiako.

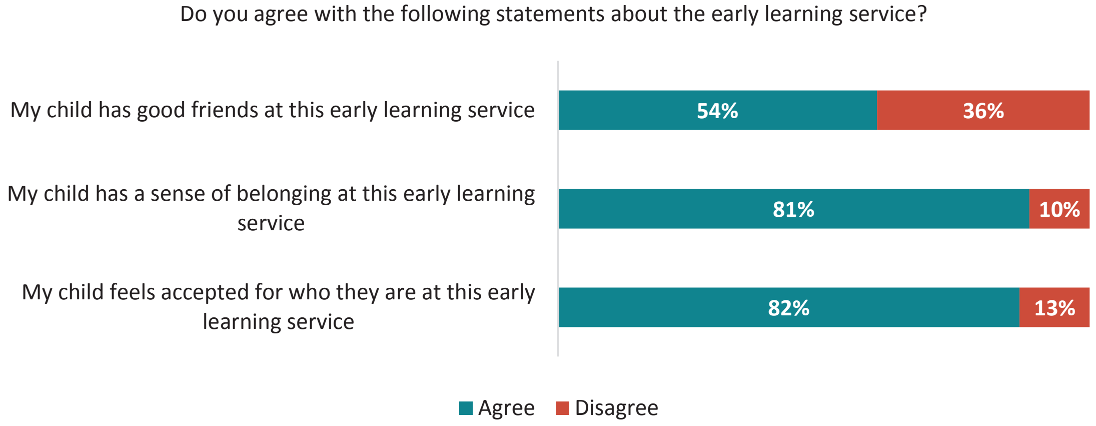
Kaiako knew Emma before she started at the service as her older siblings attended before she started. They made it clear to Emma’s mother that Emma would be welcome whenever she was ready to attend.

Emma’s mother explained her priority for Emma at kindergarten was to have fun and experience a normal childhood. Kaiako focus on this priority, being intentional about making kindergarten a fun and friendly place for her. When she was due to start they talked with the other children about her, her needs, and what she liked. This helped the children welcome Emma.

Emma’s mother and kaiako shared about the friendships Emma had developed at the service. Emma’s mother was enthusiastic about the way kaiako successfully support Emma’s relationships with her peers. Kaiako are clear about their expectations for Emma’s inclusion and support all children, including Emma, to act in line with these expectations.

However, many parents are less positive about their child’s friendships at ECE. Over a third (36 percent) disagreed their child has good friends at their service (see Figure 8). This may impact a child’s sense of belonging, as parents who are less likely to report their child has good friends are also more likely to disagree their child has a sense of belonging at their service.

Figure 8: *Child's friendships, and feelings of belonging: Parents survey*



Conclusion

Overall, the early childhood experiences and outcomes for disabled children are mixed.

Disabled children enjoy, feel safe and that they belong at ECE. However, too many disabled children are excluded from participating in ECE. Some whānau are discouraged from enrolling their child. Once enrolled, some disabled children are excluded from participating in the full range of learning and activities on offer.

How well disabled children are learning and progressing in ECE is also unclear. There is little assessment information, and reporting to parents and whānau often shares what children do, rather than what they are learning.

Part 4: How are different groups of disabled children doing?

Disabled children with complex needs are more likely to experience exclusion. Kaiako are less likely to discuss children's learning with parents and whānau. Parents of disabled children with complex needs are less likely to report their child has a sense of safety and belonging than parents of disabled children with less complex needs.

This section discusses what we found when we compared outcomes and experiences for groups of disabled children.

We focused on four broad groups of disabled children

The term *disabled* includes a wide range of impairments, needs, and complexities. We wanted to understand whether some groups of disabled children are having different experiences to others. From the literature we developed a range of survey questions about the challenges children have with various activities for parents of disabled children to respond to. Our questions fed into five areas:

- sensory challenges
- physical challenges
- communication challenges
- intellectual impairment
- neurodiversity.

We then looked at the level of challenge children had across these areas. Children who have significant challenges across multiple areas were grouped as having complex needs. Following this, children were grouped as having high, moderate, or low needs. More information about how we defined these levels can be found in the following table.

Level of need	How we defined it
Complex	Children who had a lot of difficulty, or could not do something across any three of the five areas
High	Children who had a lot of difficulty, or could not do something across any two of the five areas
Moderate	Children who had a lot of difficulty, or could not do something in one area **or** some difficulty in three or more of the five areas
Low	Children who had some difficulty across one to two of the five areas

More information about how we categorised levels of difficulty can be found in Appendix 1.

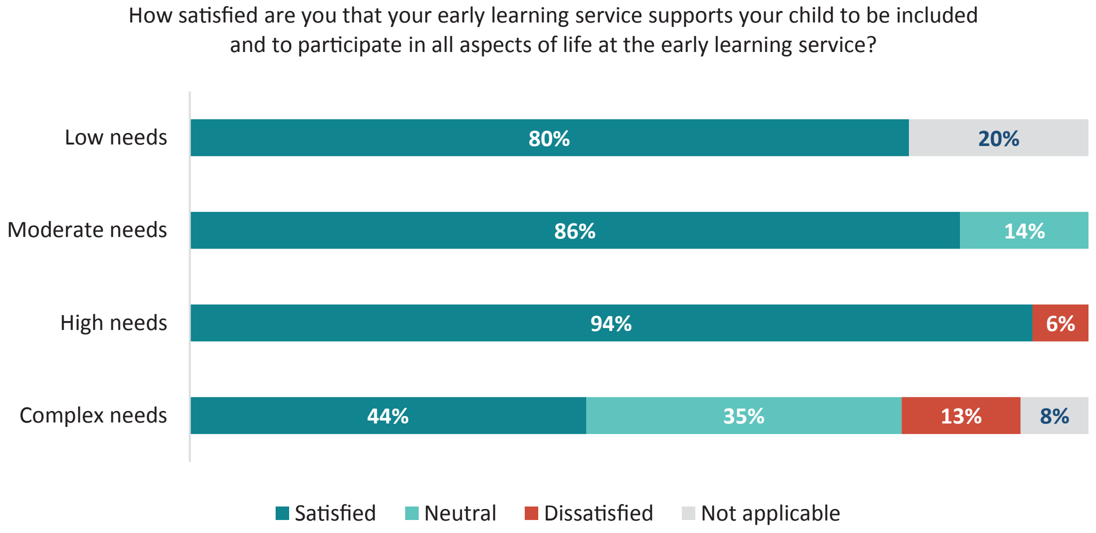
a) Participation

Children with more complex needs experience more exclusion

Disabled children with complex needs typically experience more exclusion. From our survey, fewer than half (43 percent) of parents with children with complex needs reported their service supports their child to be included. In contrast, most of those with high needs (94 percent), moderate needs (86 percent), and low needs (80 percent) reported the same (see Figure 9).

Similarly, about a third (32 percent) of those with complex needs have been discouraged from enrolling in a service.

Figure 9: *Inclusion of children, by complexity of need: Parents survey*



This disproportionate level of exclusion for disabled children with higher needs was also reflected in our interviews. Of the 22 parents we interviewed, three identified as having children with very complex needs. Each of these three parents told us about significant additional challenges faced by their children. These parents told us their child struggles to participate in ECE, and often has limited time when they are able to attend at all.

One parent spoke to us about how their child has limited ability to attend their kindergarten as her hours are closely linked to the availability of specialist support.

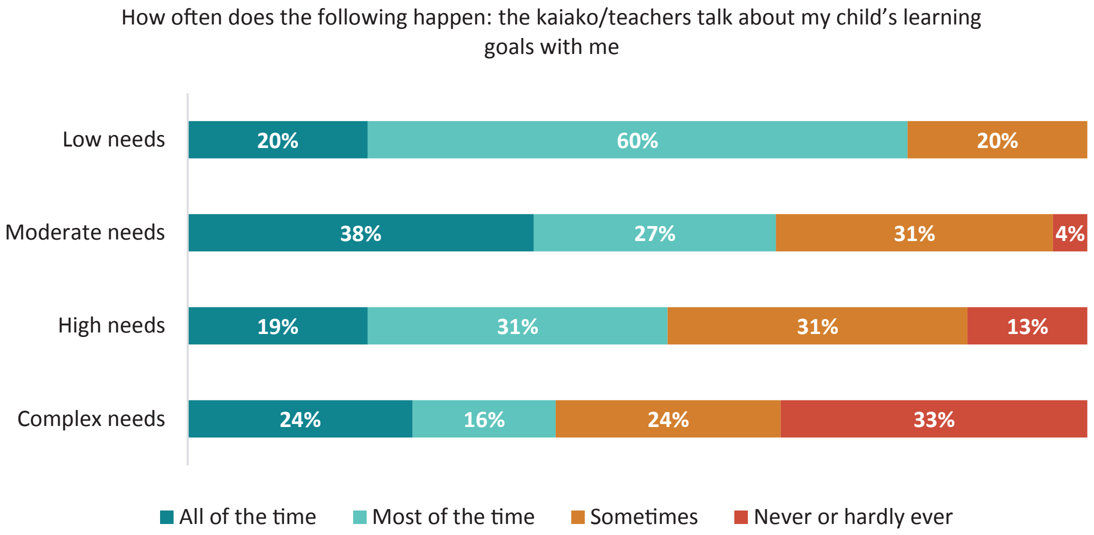
> “[My child] is as disabled as you can get, so she’s in that high to complex bracket … but she only gets 5 hours of funded support a week … how is that inclusive for a child who is so disabled? How is it fine? It’s not … other children can fully attend] but I have this child who is so disabled, it’s not fair. It shouldn’t be this hard.”
>
> **PARENT**

b) Learning

Learning progress for children with complex needs is less clear due to less communication with parents

Parents of children with complex needs are not having as much input into their child’s learning goals and next steps as others. Only about a third (34 percent) of parents of children with complex needs believe kaiako discuss their child’s learning goals with them most or all of the time. This rose to half for those with high needs, nearly two thirds (61 percent) of those with moderate needs, and over three quarters (80 percent) of those with low needs (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: *Frequency of kaiako talking to parents about learning goals, by complexity of need: Parents survey*



We saw similar patterns when parents reported about how often kaiako discuss their child's next learning steps with them. Fewer than one in five parents of children with complex needs (19 percent) agreed that kaiako discuss their child's next steps with them at least most of the time. This compares with one in two of those with high (50 percent) or with moderate needs (54 percent), and four in five (80 percent) of those with low needs.

Through our interviews, some parents of children with complex needs voiced concerns about their child's learning. Specifically, these parents have doubts about kaiako ability to support their children to access the full curriculum.

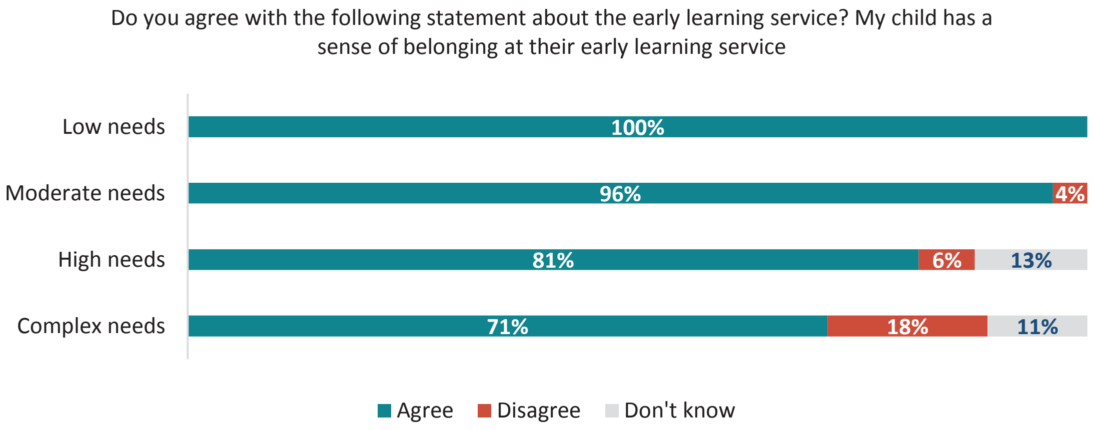
> "When I first went to go look at the [service] to see when we first talked about transition, I had said to them, there's a lot of hazards here that you need to think about for me now. And they said, Oh, but, you know, over here we kind of let them learn by doing for themselves. And I was like, sure, for any other child, sure, that's fine. But for me, I can't do that.
>
> … I think maybe because they haven't had a child with such high needs, they don't really know. So you have to tell them all the time. And by them I mean the teachers in the classroom."
>
> **PARENT**

c) Wellbeing

Children with complex needs feel less safe or accepted, and many feel they do not belong

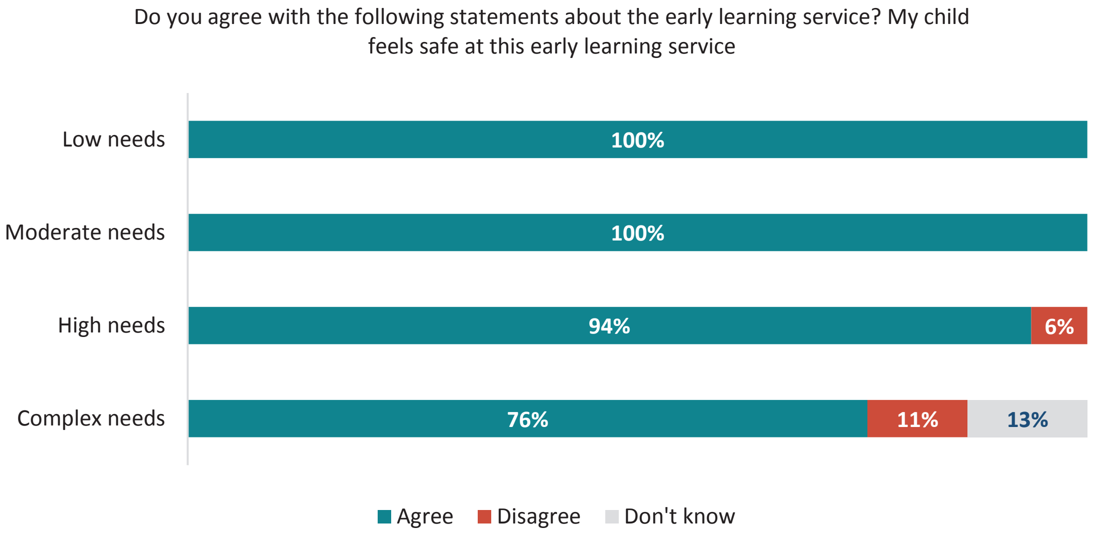
Parents of children with complex needs are consistently less positive about their child's experience at their service. Only 60 percent of parents of children with complex needs agreed their child has a sense of belonging. This compares to 81 percent of those with high needs, 89 percent of those with moderate needs, and *all* of those with low needs (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: *Agreement that disabled children have a sense of belonging at their service, by complexity of need: Parents survey*



Similar patterns arose when we looked at children's sense of safety, and feelings of being accepted. Less than two thirds (64 percent) of parents of children with complex needs agreed their child feels safe at their service, compared to *all* of those parents of children with low needs (see Figure 12). Similarly, over half (57 percent) of parents of children with complex needs agreed their child feels accepted, while *all* parents of children with low needs agreed.

Figure 12: *Agreement that disabled children feel safe at their service, by complexity of need: Parents survey*



This negative sentiment from parents of children with complex needs aligns with what kaiako told us. In our interviews, some kaiako spoke about how they experience fear regarding the day-to-day healthcare requirements for children with complex needs. Their reservations – such as feeding children through feeding tubes, or providing complex medications – may have the potential to impact the quality of care disabled children with more complex needs receive. More about kaiako confidence and its impacts on disabled children's experiences is shared later in the report.

Overall, children with greater needs are experiencing disproportionately worse outcomes in participation, learning, and wellbeing – some of which may be a result of low kaiako confidence and experience. But we still saw some examples of good practice.

Practice example 2: Collaboration and communication to support a girl with complex needs

Zara is a two-year-old girl with a rare genetic disorder that impacts how her brain forms connections – it takes her longer to learn things. At two, she is beginning to pull herself along on furniture, and use a spoon. She attends an urban education and care service.

Kaiako know Zara's family well as her older sibling also attends, and they were eager to support Zara's enrolment. Zara's parents were enthusiastic about the level of support from kaiako, and that they also work with a multidisciplinary team to support her. Kaiako liaise with Zara's parents, nanny, developmental therapist, speech-language therapist, physiotherapist, and other specialists to support Zara to

> “play the best of the hand she's been dealt.”
>
> **ZARA'S PARENT**

Specialists help kaiako understand how they can support Zara and her development, and ensure her programmes are consistently implemented.

A key strength of Zara's support team is communication. Prior to her enrolment, her parents were able to talk with them about her developmental differences. From enrolment to settling, Zara's parents and support team talked a lot about her day-to-day engagement, how she was progressing, and how they could support her. Every day during drop-off and pickup Zara's parents or nanny talk to Zara's kaiako about how she's doing:

> “We keep them informed of what's going on and they keep us informed of how she's going as well, and if there's any concerns or if there's any highlights, you know, all that kind of stuff that comes through.”
>
> **ZARA'S PARENT**

Conclusion

Children with greater or more complex needs are more likely to experience negative outcomes. These children experience more exclusion, less learning progression, and less sense of belonging and safety.

Part 5: How good is education provision for disabled children?

The mixed picture of outcomes for disabled children reflects the quality of education they receive. While some parents of disabled children are very positive about their child's experiences, not all are able to access ECE services or receive a high-quality, inclusive education.

We looked at key components of education practice in ECE services and found examples of good practice. But there are also areas of concern, particularly around kaiako confidence in teaching disabled children.

This section sets out areas of education provision for disabled children that are stronger, as well as the areas of concern. We also share examples of good practice we found in services.

How we gathered information

To understand how good education is for disabled children we gathered the views of disabled children's parents and whānau through interviews and surveys. We also conducted surveys and interviews with service leaders, and to get a deeper understanding of the practice happening in ECE, we analysed service policies, strategic documents, narrative assessments and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) from 24 case study services, and visited nine of those services to observe teaching practice.

What we looked at

To help us unpack how good education is for disabled children, we looked at four components of inclusive education provision, as described in Part 2 of this report. Together these four components define good practice for disabled children:

- effective leadership
- quality teaching
- accessible and inclusive environments
- strong partnerships with parents and whānau.

To evaluate quality of provision (what is going well, and areas of concern) and identify examples of good practice, we used these components to create a rubric. This rubric informed the questions we asked in our interviews and surveys and helped us identify where good practice is shared.

We also looked at whether there are differences in provision based on the characteristics of the service.

What we found: an overview

Services need to have a better understanding of how well they are meeting disabled children's needs. How well services are providing for disabled children is unclear due to the general lack of information providers collect and share about provision for these children. Many services do not have good information about how well they are providing for disabled children, and many lack focus on this important group.

Kaiako lack confidence to adapt the curriculum for disabled children. *Te Whāriki* is designed to enable services to establish their own local curriculum, enabling adaptation for children's strengths, interests, and needs. However, kaiako are not confident about making specific adaptations for disabled children.

Physical environments are fit for the children already enrolled. The physical environments in ECE services are almost always appropriate for the children currently attending, but we found they are not universally accessible. This could be a barrier to enrolment for some children.

Partnerships with whānau need to be more focused on their child's learning. Relationships between parents, kaiako, and leaders are largely positive, but they are not often learning-focused partnerships. A strong, learning-focused partnership between parents and kaiako is particularly important for disabled children.

While the quality of provision does not vary by service type, there are differences in access to support. Kindergartens and other services that are part of a Governing Organisation have better access to resources and guidance than smaller, standalone services. Services in the South Island have better provision than those in the North Island.

1) Effective leadership and strong expectations for inclusion of disabled children

Leadership in ECE services is a critical element in ensuring that disabled children are valued and supported. Effective leadership from governing bodies and leaders instils positive and inclusive attitudes across the whole service by setting goals, priorities and plans, and making resourcing decisions which support disabled children and communicate how important they are to the wider staff.

We identified five key elements of effective leadership for quality provision for disabled children.

a) **Clear expectations:** Do leaders set clear expectations for equity and inclusion, wellbeing, and achievement for disabled children?

b) **Planning for and prioritising disabled children's success:** Do leaders prioritise disabled children's success when making plans for the service?

c) **Welcoming culture and values:** Do leaders promote a culture that values disabled children and their whānau?

d) **Alignment of policies and practices:** Do leaders ensure policies and practices align and are underpinned by a vision for inclusion and equity?

e) **Information used to strengthen practice:** Do leaders use information effectively to promote better inclusive practices and greater equity of outcomes for disabled children?

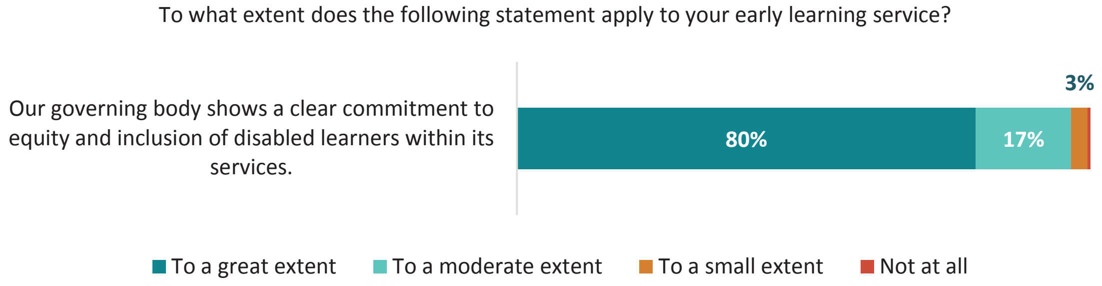
a) Clear expectations about inclusion of disabled children

Aspects that are stronger

Leadership across most services communicates high expectations for inclusion of disabled children

We found many services are actively prioritising support for disabled children. Nearly all (97 percent) leaders said their governing bodies show a commitment to disabled children. Most of these leaders (80 percent) are extremely positive about this, reporting that their governing body's commitment shows to a great extent (see Figure 13). This clearly sets an expectation of inclusion and support for disabled children.

Figure 13: *Extent to which governing body shows commitment to disabled children: Service leaders survey*



One of the key ways governing bodies, particularly those with larger organisational structures, set expectations for inclusivity of disabled children is by embedding targeted support. Through our interviews, we heard many organisations appoint staff into roles focused explicitly on supporting services to provide for disabled children. This communicates to individual services the expectation they should enrol disabled children, and that kaiako will be well supported to provide a quality experience for these children.

Practice example 3: Organisation-wide support for disabled children

A kindergarten association has prioritised the needs of disabled children by establishing a permanent Learning Support Leader (LSL) role to coordinate support across the whole organisation. The LSL liaises with relevant agencies and provides advice, guidance, and professional learning to service leaders and kaiako. Because this is a leadership role, the LSL also contributes to the strategic leadership of the association as whole, for example, working on annual planning. This ensures that inclusive practice is embedded across the entire organisation. The role was developed after organisation leaders had noticed that increasing numbers of children required additional support, and some teachers were feeling overwhelmed or out of their depth when responding to the diverse needs of children with additional needs, including disabled children.

Leaders are very positive about the impact the LSL has on their service, appreciating that there is support readily available:

> “[She] is always there if we have concerns”.

Service leaders described how having dedicated, accessible, professional practice leadership creates a sense that

> “the whole kindergarten network is in support”.

The LSL told us her work focuses on prioritising the tamariki who need it. She has an extensive background in supporting disabled children and children with additional learning needs. She shared that her experiences have equipped her to offer responsive, targeted support to kaiako. Her role has a wide scope, which can include supporting kaiako with referrals, helping provide relevant professional learning, or organising additional resource for services.

Senior leaders are focused on sustainability and building kaiako capability:

> “It’s not just about, ‘Let’s pop a teacher in here’. We want to understand, ‘What are the priorities for this learner, how are you [kaiako] planning to achieve goals for them?’”

The LSL role is funded through the kindergarten association, using its own budget to provide additional resources to empower the LSL role.

Although many organisations may have statements and policies stipulating inclusive practice, genuine commitment will be reflected in what happens at the service level. When we asked parents about how inclusive their child’s service is of disabled children, four out of five (82 percent) agreed their service is inclusive, as their child feels accepted for who they are when they attend.

Areas of concern

Expectations are high, but some services still exclude disabled children

Although disabled children and their whānau feel included at their service, we found a quarter of parents struggle to access a service, and experience exclusion from activities when they are enrolled (see Part 3). When we spoke with leaders to understand what could be driving experiences of exclusion for families, they explained ratios are often a concern when considering enrolling children that need more individual support. However, leaders in more inclusive centres (that already have a significant number of children needing additional support) indicated their focus on inclusion for disabled children means they find a way to make things work if additional disabled children wish to enrol.

If services can enrol disabled children when they already provide significant additional support for this group, this raises concerns about some of the services that use capacity to prevent enrolment. Some services may be presenting issues relating to ratios to parents and whānau as a means of legitimising the exclusion of disabled children.

One parent shared their experiences with us, saying:

> “I was enrolling [my child] at the daycare because the owner said it was fine and she could manage with it, and he'll be good there. And then the head teacher actually came in during the enrolment and was like 'can you stop this enrolment, I don't think he's gonna be OK, I don't think we can manage him, we've already got a child with um, autism, it's too much paperwork just stop the enrolment, we'll have to have a team meeting.”
>
> **PARENT**

b) Planning and prioritising for disabled children's success

Aspects that are stronger

Governing Organisations and policies show disabled children are a priority

We found many services are actively prioritising support for disabled children. Nearly all (97 percent) leaders said their governing bodies show a commitment to disabled children. Policies also showed services' commitment to including disabled children. Further detail about policies and practices is shared below.

To ensure kaiako are equipped to plan for disabled children's learning, leaders most often identify building kaiako capability to teach disabled children as a priority. Professional learning and development is discussed later under Workforce Capability and Capacity.

Areas of concern

While expectations are clear, these do not lead to disabled children being prioritised in services

Many service leaders are not focused on reflecting on, and improving provision for, disabled children. Two out of five (41 percent) of the leaders we surveyed told us provision for disabled children is *never* or *rarely* a focus of internal evaluation, while only one in five reported it is *often* or *always* a focus. Further information about how services use information to strengthen their practice is covered later in this section.

Service leaders are also not planning for the future when it comes to their physical environment. While services are largely accessible for the children currently attending, they are not always designed to be universally accessible. More detail about accessibility and the physical environment is included later in this part, under Inclusive, Accessible Environments.

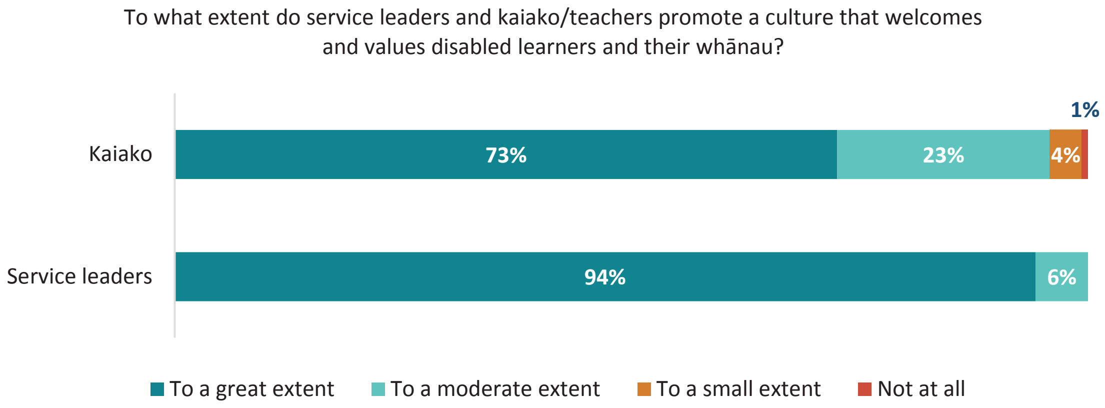
c) Welcoming culture and values

Aspects that are stronger

Many services welcome disabled children and their whānau

We found that welcoming and valuing disabled children is a strength across the majority of ECE services with disabled children enrolled. Nearly all (94 percent) service leaders reported both they and kaiako promote a welcoming culture for disabled children to a great extent. Kaiako are also very positive about this aspect of their provision. Nearly all (96 percent) kaiako told us service leaders promote a welcoming culture to at least a moderate extent, and 73 percent indicated this was to a great extent (as shown in Figure 14).

Figure 14: *Extent to which leaders and kaiako promote a culture that welcomes, and values disabled children and their whānau: Service leaders and kaiako surveys*



Most parents agreed the service their child attends is welcoming of their child. As already noted, 81 percent of parents reported their child has a sense of belonging at their service. This parent shared their experience:

> “The preschool my son attends is incredible. He is autistic. The teachers all did Incredible Years autism, learnt to greet my son in Gujarati, and have taken my son from no language to sentences.”
>
> **PARENT**

Many of the leaders we interviewed have personal experiences with disability, so are especially aware of some of the challenges faced in accessing education. They highlighted the importance of ensuring equitable opportunities for access, which carry through into the culture of their service.

Leaders hire kaiako who value this culture

Some leaders are also very deliberate about fostering a culture of inclusion of disabled children at their service as early as possible. One leader shared with us the importance of hiring staff who align with their commitment to inclusion of disabled children:

> “We would probably start right at interview level, talk about it [the service’s philosophy] with Visiting Teachers and with new educators – it is part of our questions in our interviews, ‘this is our philosophy, this is what we believe, talk to us about how that fits in with your philosophy and what matters to you’ … And then after that, once they’ve been taken on board it’s going through with them and explaining how it works.”
>
> **LEADER**

Areas of concern

Pressure on kaiako time can make maintaining a welcoming culture challenging for some services

Although the overwhelming majority of kaiako and service leaders report being dedicated to creating a welcoming culture, many still identified challenges to welcoming disabled children and their whānau. One of the key issues they discussed is availability of personnel – when staff are under pressure with how many children and the diversity of needs they are supporting, it is much harder to welcome in additional children with high needs.

> “ECE teachers are working incredibly hard to provide inclusive learning spaces and curriculum to support the increasing amount of tamariki with additional learning needs. But we can only do what we can within the ratios of what is 1-10. When there is MULTIPLE tamariki with additional learning needs and only a small amount of support hours this places a huge amount of stress and pressure on teaching teams.”
>
> **KAIAKO**

We found that services which welcome disabled children are likely to become "magnets" for whānau looking for a service to enrol their disabled children. This may put those services under greater pressure – especially when considering how often parents can be turned away by services when they are wanting to enrol their child.

> “We would not change our philosophy – everyone is welcome. Realistically it would be another layer. How do we make this work? We have an absolutely inclusive approach to learning and wouldn’t turn anyone away – but what if we couldn’t meet those extra needs?”
>
> **KAIAKO**

Kaiako confidence limits disabled children’s inclusion

Low kaiako confidence may be a contributing factor to some of the exclusion disabled children experience. Over a third of kaiako (37 percent) told us they are either not confident or only somewhat confident about including disabled children in excursions and/or outings.

In interviews, we also heard about other forms of exclusion that occur due to service and parent reliance on individualised care. While Education Support Workers[h] (ESWs) are intended to support kaiako rather than provide individual support for disabled children, in some cases the ESW or other specialist support hours available influence when kaiako and parents are comfortable for disabled children to attend ECE. For example, some parents feel their child is only safe at their service when this support is available. Kaiako also reported similar concerns about the safety of the disabled child, staff, and other children when individual support is not available. Consequently, because additional support is often only available for a few hours a week, some disabled children are attending very limited hours per week at their service.

d) Alignment of policies and practices

Aspects that are stronger

Most services’ policies are clear about their obligations to disabled children

The enrolment policies we reviewed reflect ECE services’ obligations to not discriminate against disabled children. Some explicitly outline the intent to be inclusive of children with additional learning needs.

Some services also have additional documented policies that outline how they support disabled children that enrol.

Most parents (80 percent) reported that their service deals well with issues that they raise.

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[h] We heard in interviews some ESWs are also trained specialists, such as speech language therapists or occupational therapists.

Practice example 4: Policies are explicit about inclusion of disabled children

Leaders of an urban home-based network told us about how they developed policies that are explicit about the inclusion of children with additional learning needs.

They started by reflecting on their own experiences, as some are parents of neurodiverse children. They also involved their learning community to work out what is needed, and how the policy framework can be strengthened over time. This team frequently revisits their policies to ensure they still meet the needs of their children, asking

> “… is this still who we are? Is this still relevant? Is there anything that’s changed?”

One of these policies is a "Statement on meeting the needs of all tamariki". This document is clear each service will include children who have additional learning needs, and will actively support them to fully participate. It includes statements about:

- appropriate training for educators
- robust information-gathering on individual needs
- ratios that prioritise support for children
- collaboration with outside agencies
- following individualised programmes and plans
- processes for identifying needs in liaison with visiting teachers and experts
- sharing information with parents/whānau.

These clear, explicit statements support all staff to know and understand the importance of inclusive practice. One parent shared the positive impact this focus on inclusion and participation has on her child with additional learning needs.

> “He wouldn’t just be included, he’d be the leader; he’d be up there doing it all!”

Areas of concern

Policies for including disabled children are not always well understood or implemented

Although legal obligations and policies are widely disseminated, there was little evidence that they are widely understood. During our interviews, we noted many ECE leaders and kaiako were not able to talk confidently about their inclusive policies. In many cases we heard these policies had been written by professional policy writers or provided by Governing Organisations.

In services where staff worked to develop their policies as a team, there is more shared understanding.

In addition, some services do not interpret inclusive education in a way that is consistent with legislative guidance or *Te Whāriki*.

Practice example 5: Kaiako working with parents to bring their inclusive values to life

Maia is a young girl with a wheelchair. Maia's mother is positive about kaiako's valuing of inclusion:

> "from the day dot, [kaiako] have given me the impression that [they] are willing, keen and have that inclusive vibe about [them]."

However, she sees that their lack of knowledge and experience with disabled children limits the way they respond to her daughter's needs.

For example, when Maia first started at her service she was seated separately from the other children at mealtimes. The kind of seat she needs did not fit at the table other children sat at, so kaiako sat Maia at a different table. While this meant Maia was able to sit and eat at the same *time* as her peers, she was not included.

Maia's mother understood that kaiako did not know or think about practical ways to include Maia so suggested pushing the tables together so Maia was not separated from the others. Kaiako were happy to do this, and other practical steps she suggested, to support Maia's inclusion.

e) Information used to strengthen practice

Aspects that are stronger

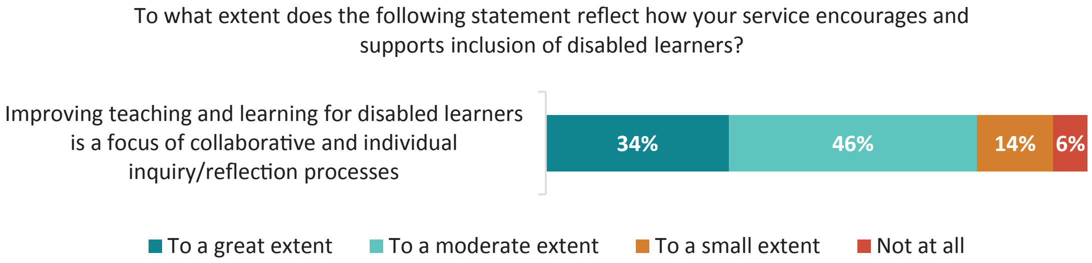
Many kaiako reflect on how well they are providing for disabled children

Kaiako frequently reflect on how well they are providing for disabled children, and what they can do better. Most (80 percent) kaiako reported that improving teaching for disabled children is a focus of their inquiry/reflection processes[i] (as shown in Figure 15). This suggests many kaiako want to make changes to their practice to better cater for the children in front of them, though these changes are undocumented.

---

[i] Inquiry involves identifying an aspect of practice to examine further, asking the right questions, and then seeking evidence and information to be able to better understand the issues involved and respond effectively. (ERO, 2020. Te Ara Poutama: Indicators of quality for early childhood education).

Figure 15: *Extent to which improving teaching and learning for disabled children is a focus of inquiry and reflection: Kaiako survey*



In some services, kaiako and leaders make good use of what they know about children to consider what they can do to improve. When this was going well for all children, we often saw explicit links to outcomes for disabled children as well.

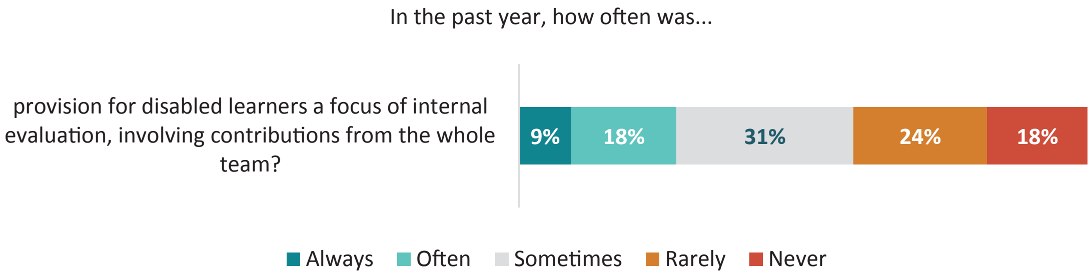
Areas of concern

Provision for disabled children is rarely a focus of evaluation for services

Although we found some good examples of evaluation of teaching practice and service provision, these were not common. Most services are still developing ways to use information about their children to improve teaching and learning.

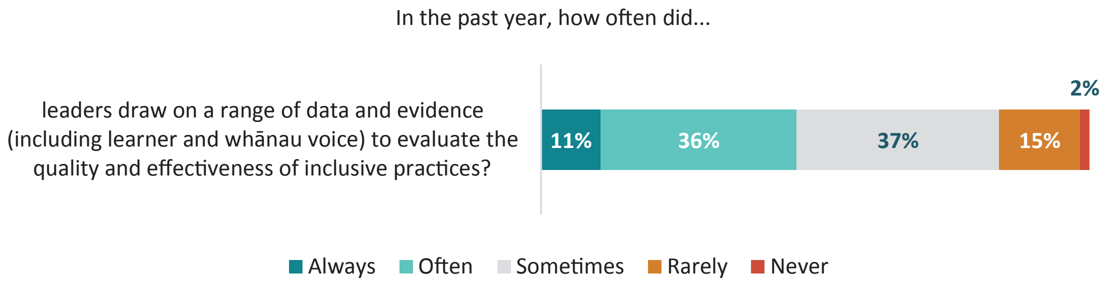
A large number of services lack information about how well they are providing for disabled children. Two out of five (41 percent) of the leaders we surveyed told us provision for disabled children is *never* or *rarely* a focus of internal evaluation, while only one in five reported it is *often* or *always* a focus (see Figure 16). This lack of relevant information likely makes it difficult for leaders to identify changes that will improve their service's provision.

Figure 16: *Frequency of internal evaluation focused on provision for disabled children: Service leaders survey*



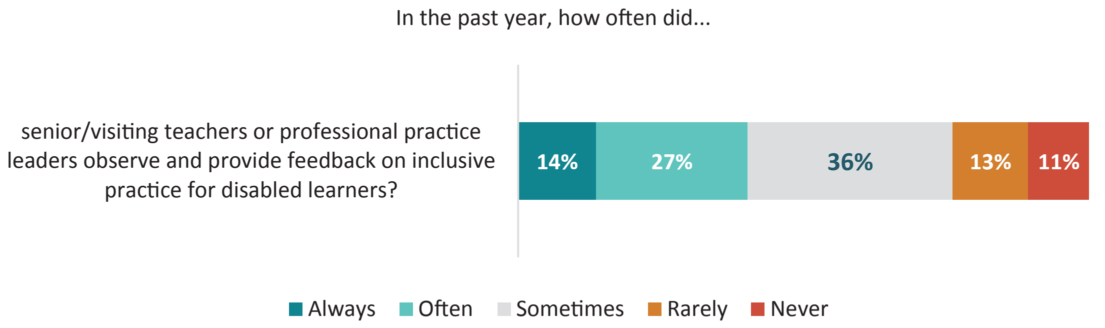
Fewer than half (47 percent) of leaders reported they often or always draw on a range of data, including parent and child voice, to evaluate and improve the quality of their provision for disabled learners (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: *Frequency of service leaders drawing on data and evidence: Service leaders survey*



Leaders are also not always well supported with information and feedback from outside their service. Almost one in four (24 percent) service leaders reported external experts *never* or *rarely* provide feedback on provision for disabled learners (see Figure 18).

Figure 18: *Frequency of senior/visiting teachers or professional practice leaders observing and providing feedback on inclusive practices for disabled children: Service leaders survey*



2) Quality teaching

A well adapted curriculum, effective teaching, and supportive learning environments are key contributors to how inclusive and equitable learning in early childhood education is for disabled children. We looked at teaching strategies, curriculum, and assessment adaptations, and what accommodations were being made to support disabled children to fully participate in learning activities with their peers.

We identified five key elements that contribute to the quality of the local curriculum and teaching practice for disabled children.

a) **Responsive curriculum:** Do kaiako adapt the learning programme in response to disabled children's strengths, interests and needs language, culture, and identity?

b) **Intentional teaching practice:** Do kaiako adapt their teaching practice to ensure disabled children are able to fully participate in learning?

c) **Culturally responsive teaching for Māori disabled children:** Do kaiako ensure that, while the curriculum is bicultural for all children, they work with Māori children's parents and whānau to understand what success looks like for them?

d) **Assessment:** Do kaiako use appropriate assessment to understand what disabled children know and can do, and identify potential next steps for learning?

e) **Inclusive social and emotional environment:** Do kaiako support children's social and emotional learning to promote their wellbeing and participation?

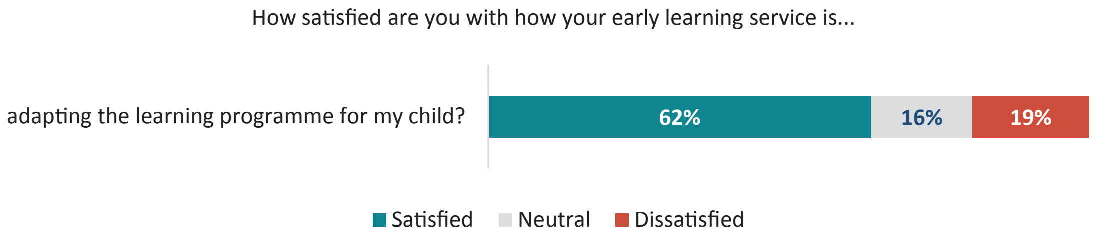
a) Responsive curriculum

Aspects that are stronger

The learning programme is often adapted for disabled children

Te Whāriki is designed so kaiako can (and are expected to) develop a local curriculum to cater to the needs of their communities. It is also expected that leaders and kaiako make targeted adaptations to their curriculum to ensure all children can engage with the full range of learning opportunities on offer. Nearly all (96%) service leaders reported kaiako adapt the daily curriculum to respond to disabled children to a moderate to great extent (see Figure 20). The majority of parents agreed and reported they are satisfied with how their service adapts the learning programme for their child (see Figure 19).

Figure 19: *Satisfaction with kaiako adapting the learning programme for disabled children: Parents survey*

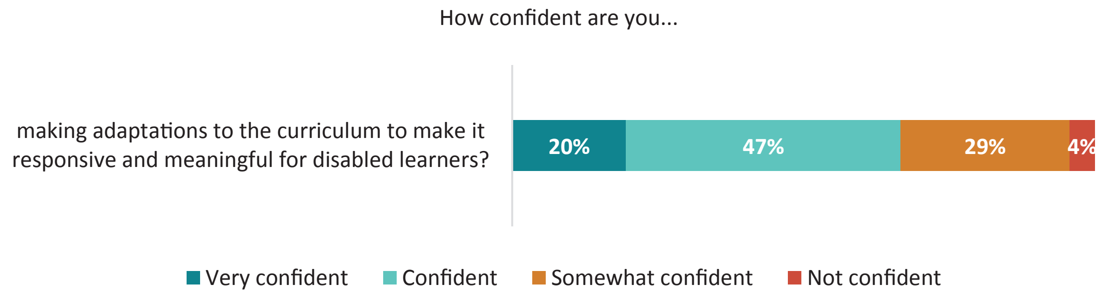


Areas of concern

Some kaiako are not confident to adapt the curriculum for disabled children

While the majority of parents are satisfied with the adaptations made to the curriculum, a third (33 percent) of kaiako reported that they are only somewhat confident, or not confident at all, in making adaptations to the curriculum for disabled children (see Figure 20). As kaiako need to tailor their approach to support disabled children to learn, lack of confidence in this area may be a contributor to the lack of information parents receive about their disabled child's learning.

Figure 20: *Confidence adapting the curriculum: Kaiako survey*



Practice example 6: Challenges around including a disabled child

Zara is a three-year-old girl with complex needs. Kaiako at Zara's service want her to participate fully. They understand her needs and create opportunities for her to be involved. Zara has a "give it a go" disposition, wants to be involved to the best of her abilities, and watches intently when she cannot be included.

Zara's parents recognise the environment and activities at the service are largely inclusive. Zara can access all areas, including the sandpit and climbing frame. She participates in activities she enjoys, like painting and play dough. However, Zara's inclusion is also limited because of staff numbers, and their ability to adapt the curriculum to enable her participation. For example, when children are dancing or participating in a group activity, unless there is a teacher who is physically able to help her, Zara is not able to join in. When there is a structured activity, she often observes from the sidelines as she requires more support to participate than kaiako can give her.

The family have a long relationship with the service and see kaiako trying hard for their daughter, but also see Zara's opportunities to learn and develop are hindered by her need for more support. They are considering other service options, where Zara could be part of a smaller group of children, or with lower ratios, to better support Zara on her learning journey.

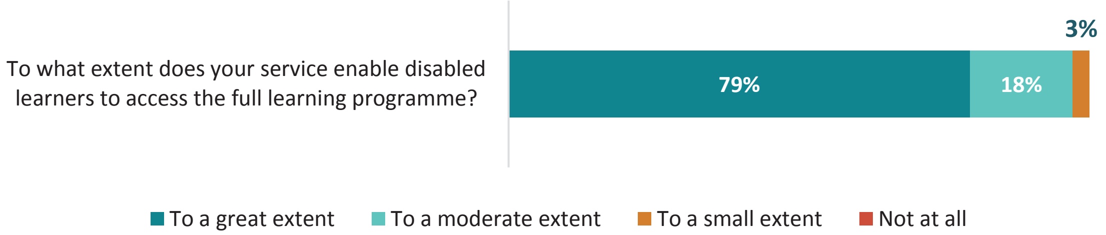
b) Intentional teaching practice

Aspects that are stronger

ECE services include disabled children in learning opportunities

Nearly all (97 percent) service leaders told us their service enables disabled children to access the full learning programme from a moderate to a great extent (see Figure 21).

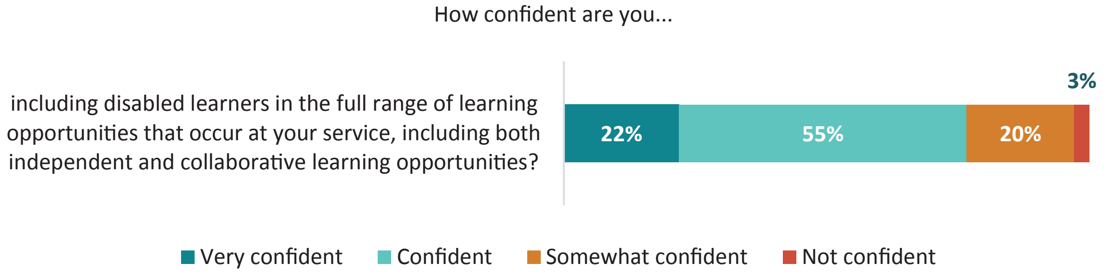
Figure 21: *The extent to which disabled children access the full learning program: Service leaders survey*



While not quite as positive as leaders, the majority (77 percent) of kaiako reported they are confident, or very confident including disabled children in the full range of learning opportunities (see Figure 22).

> “We’ve built a culture of accepting [all children, especially disabled children] for who they are, and then respecting them. Respecting them for their needs, respecting who they are – and what they bring with them, their mana … We include them in every individual activity. We know they are capable of doing so many things.”
>
> **KAIAKO**

Figure 22: *Confidence including disabled children in the full range of learning: Kaiako survey*



When we interviewed kaiako we found they are able to utilise many different strategies for including disabled learners in the full range of learning opportunities. A few added that they feel this is due to their length of teaching experience and the diversity of their work with disabled learners.

One kaiako shared a whakatauki that helps guide their practice:

> “Kaua e takahia te mana o te tamaiti – do not trample on the dignity of the child, you know, their spirit; their mana. Because they don’t have the voice; we are their words, we’re here to help them.”
>
> **KAIAKO**

As discussed elsewhere in this report, the majority of parents are satisfied with how their service supports their child’s inclusion.

Practice example 7: Effective strategy to support disabled child’s engagement

Noah is a young disabled boy attending an education and care service. A strength of this service is how they develop good relationships with parents, and disabled children are involved in all activities and participate with other children. Noah’s learning portfolio and plan reflects his parents’ aspirations for him.

One of the goals in his learning plan is about managing his social interactions. Kaiako told us Noah finds it much easier to take turns and share when an egg timer is sets the length of the turn – a strategy they successfully introduced with Noah. Prior to using the egg timer, Noah was frustrated when he could not do what he wanted and struggled to share with other children. With the egg timer, Noah is able to let people take turns and is supported to be confident when it is his turn. He can feel in control and understand what is going on.

We observed Noah use the timer to set boundaries in play with other children. When talking to us, Noah was confident and comfortable. He set us a task of building a paper boat within one turn of the egg timer. This strategy allows Noah to be a leader in activities and engage in cooperative play with others.

Kaiako are more confident in their intentional teaching practice when they have disability-specific experience or training

Both parents and kaiako identified PLD as a key ingredient in building confidence and capability. Kaiako reported notably more confidence teaching disabled children when they have access to additional training. Similarly, kaiako who have experience teaching disabled learners are more confident – the more experience, the better their confidence. When kaiako were confident in their ability to target their teaching for disabled children, we saw they also adapted and created new resources to cater to specific needs. Further discussion of kaiako confidence and capability is later in this report.

Practice example 8: Services created resources to cater to individual needs

Leaders of an urban kindergarten told ERO about the impact of high-level capability-building, research, and training on teaching practices. Their knowledge-building supports them to be responsive to emerging needs – for example, creating their own resources to support physical strength-building, resilience, and regulation for some children.

> “[When we needed resources] we would make our own here, [like] a tyre and a rope on it so that they can pull it, you know, heavy things that allow them to really, to stop, and to manage themselves. And when they can pull it, add one more tyre [in a] string, pull it further and further… it’s [been] good for their self-regulation.”

A parent at this kindergarten told us her child with additional learning needs is particularly energetic, and is interested in

> “anything about using his imagination and his body to do things”.

She saw that kaiako continually seeking ways to support this.

She also observed them using strategies with her child they had learnt on a PLD course, for example, mentoring him during social interactions. She feels that this is really paying off for her child – his time at kindergarten has clear positive impacts, which he tells her about at home:

> “He loves the kindy teachers, he’s started coming home with really positive language. Lots of positivity being fed into him. [It’s] been really heart-warming, especially hearing him saying nice things at home.”

Areas of concern

Kaiako are setting learning goals for disabled children without parent input

Although many services include all children in the learning opportunities kaiako provide, parents of disabled children are not consistently engaged about their child's learning goals. As noted earlier in the report, nearly half of the parents we surveyed reported they do not get to discuss their child’s learning goals with kaiako often.

This may mean that some kaiako are setting learning goals that reflect the group of children they are teaching, rather than individual goals for disabled children. Parents are key knowledge holders about their children - particularly for disabled children. Kaiako need to work alongside parents to provide opportunities for them to share their knowledge, and to help the service set goals that support their aspirations for their child.

Parents are concerned about the impact of poor kaiako confidence and capability

Lack of training and/or experience is evident to some parents. When we spoke with parents and whānau some told us about areas where kaiako need to develop their capability for supporting disabled children. A lack of knowledge and experience can have significant impacts on both quality of care their disabled child receives, and how safe they are when attending a service.

As one parent explained:

> “I don’t think they’re bad teachers, I just think they don’t have the knowledge, an understanding of those [disabled] children, you know, [kaiako don’t know] how to support them … [There needs to be more] … education for teachers around special needs. That would be my number one thing. Because if they have got the knowledge, then they can actually go back and re-plan, and evaluate, and see what needs changing, yeah, from the perspective of being more inclusive for the child with special needs, and being more able to help them – because they have the knowledge.”
>
> **PARENT**

c) Culturally responsive teaching for Māori disabled children

Te Whāriki expresses the aim that all children grow up in New Zealand strong in their identity, language, and culture. It places a strong emphasis on our bicultural foundation in Aotearoa New Zealand, and has been designed as a bicultural curriculum.

Strengthening this intent, priorities three and five in the National Education and Learning Priorities (NELPs)[21] outline the importance of incorporating te reo me ngā tikanga Māori in the learning environment.

Teaching practices in ECE for Māori disabled children should reflect that bicultural framework and enable children to succeed *as Māori*.

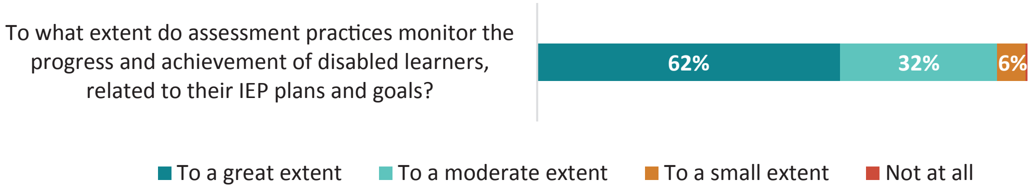
We found some aspects that were stronger, such as how kaiako work with whānau to support their disabled children. We also found some areas of concern, such as kaiako confidence in delivering culturally responsive practice for Māori disabled children. These are discussed in detail in Part 7 of this report.

d) Assessment

Aspects that were stronger

Leaders are confident in the assessment happening in their service. Nearly all (94 percent) service leaders believe their assessment practices monitor the progress and achievement of disabled children from a moderate to a great extent (see Figure 23).

Figure 23: *Extent to which assessment monitors progress in relation to IEP plans and goals: Service leaders survey*



Practice example 9: Narrative assessments for disabled children

High quality narrative assessments (such as learning stories) link directly to children's individual learning goals and place these in the context of the learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki*. (Effective assessment practice is set out in ERO's quality indicators – see page 22 of *Te Ara Poutama*.)

According to research carried out by Massey University, good practice, particularly for disabled children, includes: "Assessment that values the learning potential of the individual and that identifies, in real terms, what the child can do, holds value in terms of reliably supporting further learning outcomes."[22]

This means being clear and explicit about what the story tells us about children's developing capabilities, so that the story can usefully inform next steps in their learning.

During a site visit at an urban kindergarten, ERO sampled learning stories for two of the disabled children attending the service. For each of these children, parent aspirations were clearly documented in each of their individual learning story portfolios. Narratives were consistently and explicitly linked back to these aspirations – it was clear what kaiako were doing to deliberately promote this learning, and each child's progress was clearly evident through rich stories that clearly demonstrated meaningful learning progress.

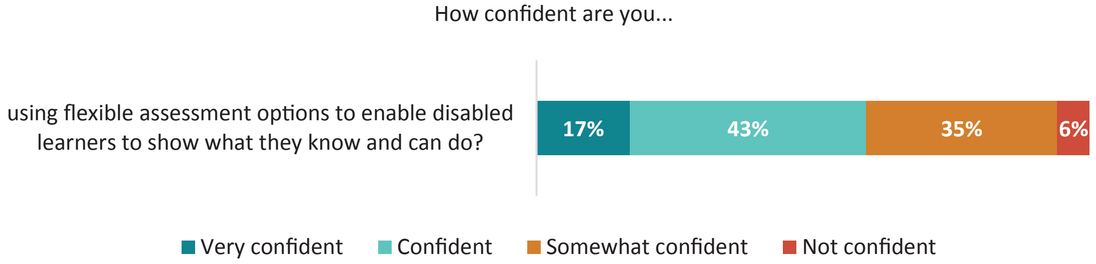
For example, one aspiration was around developing and extending the child's verbal language capabilities. Learning stories captured the intentional teaching strategies that kaiako used to promote verbal language development, gave explicit evidence of how the child was progressing in response to these strategies, and also identified what they would do next to extend learning. Narratives consistently celebrated and affirmed the child's progress, particularly highlighting where they had positive, increasingly verbal interactions with their peers.

Areas of concern

Assessment did not consistently show disabled children's progress

Assessment is an important way of noticing, recording, and communicating children's learning and progress. It is a key tool through which kaiako can identify next steps for learning. However, 40 percent of kaiako reported that they are not at all or only somewhat confident using flexible assessment options to assess disabled children's learning (see Figure 24). Being able to assess learning in different ways is a critical competency for kaiako, but is especially vital for this group of learners as it gives disabled children opportunities to show their strengths. When we looked at specific assessment practice, it was often focused on what children are doing, rather than what they are learning.

Figure 24: *Confidence using flexible assessment options: Kaiako survey*



Assessment rarely identified next steps toward learning goals

Over half of parents (55 percent) reported kaiako never or only sometimes discuss their child's next steps towards learning goals with them. More concerningly, almost half (46 percent) of parents reported kaiako never or only sometimes discuss their child's learning goals with them *at all*. Consequently, we do not know if disabled children are meeting or progressing towards their overall learning goals. We share more detail about how kaiako partner with parents and whānau around disabled children's learning later in the report.

Though individual learning plans often have clear progression goals built in, assessments rarely identify next steps that would build towards those goals. We also heard from a few kaiako that some of these ILP documents are not up to date with where the learner has progressed to, leading them to develop their own plans for those learners.

Overall, the lack of kaiako confidence, paired with parents' reports of kaiako not discussing their child's learning with them, shows a lack of awareness as to how well disabled children are learning and progressing.

e) Inclusive social and emotional environments

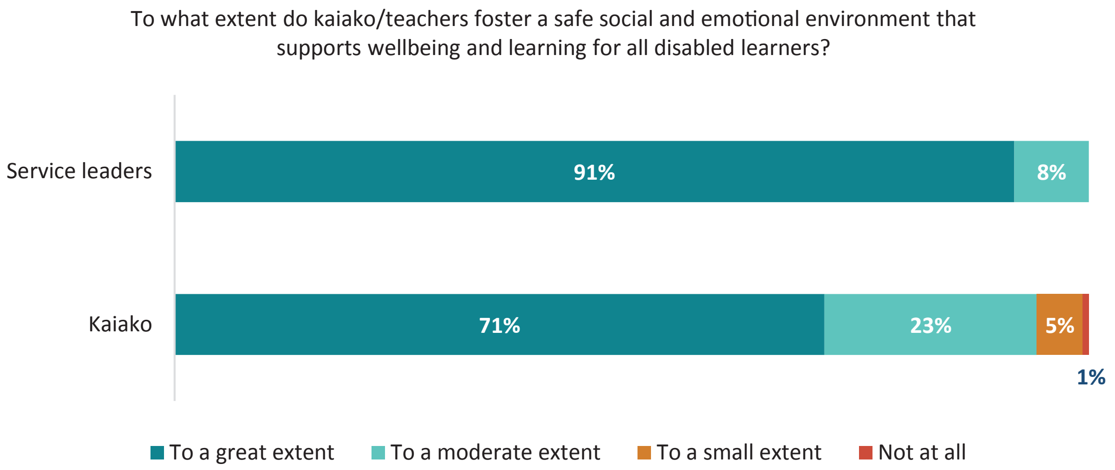
Aspects that were stronger

ECE services have a strong focus on ensuring the social and emotional environment is supportive of disabled children

Disabled children's enjoyment of ECE reflects kaiako focus on wellbeing for disabled children. Nearly all service leaders and 94 percent of kaiako believe kaiako foster safe social and emotional environments in their service to at least a moderate extent. Of these responses, 91 percent of service leaders, and 71 percent of kaiako believe so to a *great* extent. These safe environments in turn are thought to increase the wellbeing and learning for disabled children (see Figure 25).

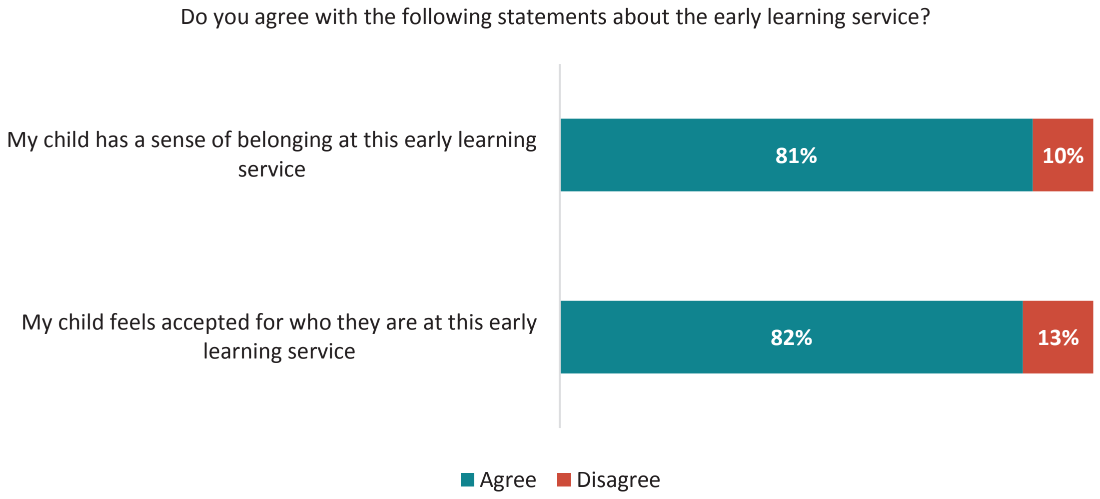
> “Our focus on emotional and social coaching is helping all children at [our kindergarten] regulate and understand their emotions. This, we feel, has had a very positive impact on inclusion.”
>
> **SERVICE LEADER**

Figure 25: *Extent of fostering safe social and emotional environments: Kaiako and service leaders surveys*



Parents agree with this. As discussed in Part 3, parents reported they are happy with how the social and emotional environment impacts their child, indicating their child feels a sense of belonging and acceptance for who they are (see Figure 26).

Figure 26: *Disabled child's feelings of belonging and acceptance: Parents survey*



Parents recognise inclusive social and emotional environments as an area ECE services are focused on when it comes to supporting the disabled children who attend. Parents often want this, as they observe this could be highly beneficial to their development.

One parent told us that what they looked for was a service that could help develop their child's social and emotional competencies:

> “Because he really wants to make friends, but [his earlier ways of interacting] were holding him back, he couldn't initiate friendships properly. I think he was really struggling with being able to control his body in a way that was friendly to people. I really wanted him to have social interactions with kids his age, and for them to go really smoothly. And for him to feel like he could be in control of that situation.”
>
> **PARENT**

Some kaiako talked to us about how they deliberately foster peer relationships and reinforce them over time, by:

> “Introducing all of the children to [a child with complex needs]. Inviting children to join in with activities with her; [she] loves dancing, you love dancing too – making those connections, and getting the children involved in activities that children enjoy and [she] enjoys. Children can see that their contributions are valued ... they are able to see each other as friends.”
>
> **KAIAKO**

Many of the ILPs developed for disabled children we saw include goals for developing social and emotional competencies. Some services take the goals parents help set and link them to learning outcomes in *Te Whāriki*.

Areas of concern

While social and emotional environments are largely well supported for those disabled children who are enrolled in ECE services, we do not have the same information about those who are not enrolled. In interviews with MoE, we heard more than one in 10 children who receive EI funding are not enrolled in an ECE service. This means some disabled children may be missing opportunities to develop their social and emotional competencies alongside their peers.

3) Inclusive, accessible environments

The physical environment of the service is critical for enabling disabled children access to all learning opportunities, areas, and facilities available in early childhood education.

We identified two key elements that contribute to highly accessible and inclusive environments for disabled children.

a) **Accessible spaces:** Are physical environments designed to support safe, mana-enhancing, and barrier free access to learning and social opportunities for disabled children?

b) **Specialised resources and adaptations:** Are appropriate resources and equipment available to support full participation of disabled children in all activities, and are designated spaces available to support self-regulation?

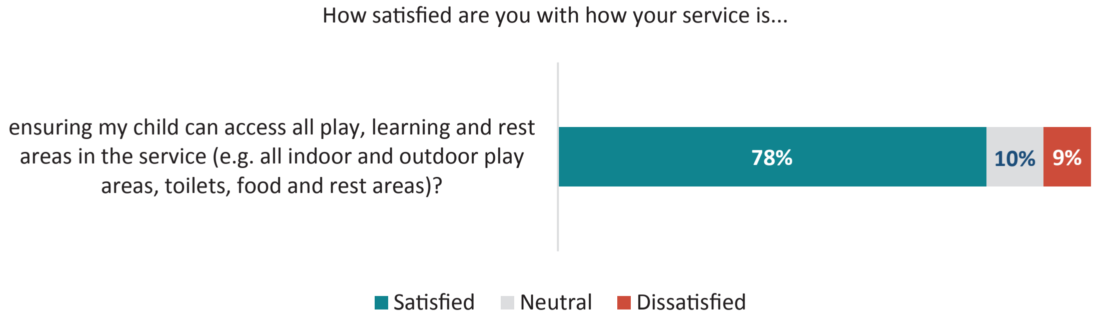
a) Accessible spaces

Aspects that were stronger

Most services adapt their physical environment for disabled children who enrol

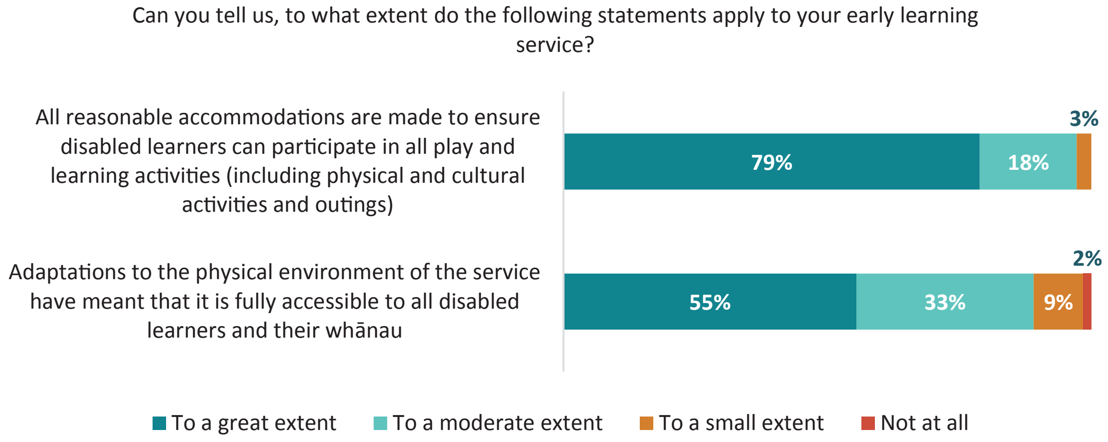
Overall, we found a significant proportion of ECE services disabled children attend are accessible for those children. Most parents (78 percent) are satisfied their child can access all areas of the service, and only a small number are dissatisfied (see Figure 27).

Figure 27: *Satisfaction with how disabled child can access all areas of their service: Parents survey*



Most leaders (89 percent) reported (to either a moderate or great extent) their service is fully physically accessible, and nearly all leaders (97 percent) believe (to either a moderate or great extent) that all reasonable accommodations are made to ensure their service is fully accessible (see Figure 28).

Figure 28: *Physical accessibility of service: Service leaders survey*



In interviews, most leaders we spoke to indicated they would make substantial adaptations to ensure disabled children have good access. We heard that, in some cases, service leaders have a budget allocated to them by their Governing Organisation to make smaller changes as needed, and a fund that can be accessed through an application to implement larger accommodations, such as ramps.

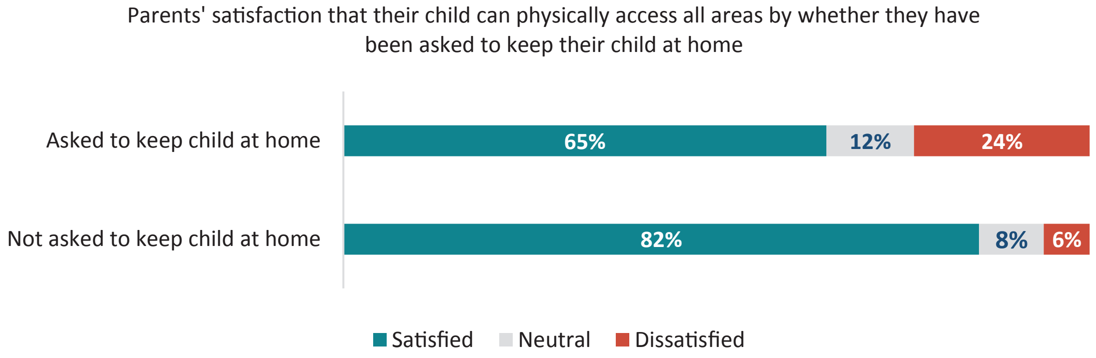
Areas of concern

Many ECE services are not universally accessible

While services are largely accessible for the children that currently attend, they are not always designed to be universally accessible. We observed some services that have significant numbers of steps, large lips into play spaces, or very tight interior layouts. Although many leaders and kaiako are willing to make the necessary changes to mitigate these issues, physical accessibility may act as a barrier for enrolment for some children. Parents visiting services that are not accessible for their child may see the service as not appropriate for their child.

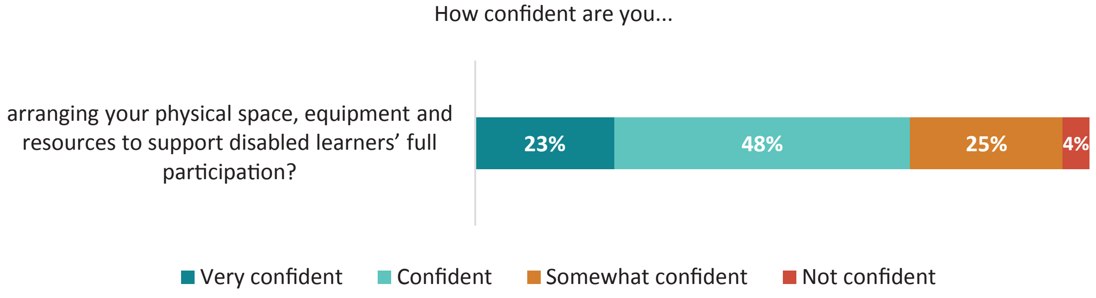
Parents who have not been discouraged from enrolling their child at a service are more satisfied with their child's physical access (88 percent), than those who have been discouraged (56 percent). Parents who have been asked to keep their child at home are less satisfied with their child's physical access (65 percent) than those who have not (82 percent) (see Figure 29). This suggests physical accessibility may still be an issue for some disabled children, particularly those with significant mobility challenges.

Figure 29: *Satisfaction about disabled child's physical access, by whether parent has been asked to keep their child at home: Parents survey*



Nearly a third (29 percent) of kaiako are not fully confident arranging the space to support full participation of disabled learners (see Figure 30). This indicates that specific accommodations may be more challenging to achieve.

Figure 30: *Confidence arranging physical space to ensure full participation: Kaiako survey*



b) Specialised resources and adaptations

Aspects that were stronger

The importance of spaces that support self-regulation is recognised

We found good awareness of the importance of having specially designated spaces for children to access to self-regulate. Some services have specially set up areas which they resource deliberately. Resources commonly mentioned include weighted blankets or teddies, and a range of sensory materials.

One group of kaiako talked to ERO about a specific resource they have in their service which they call "heavy cat" a weighted cat which supports self-regulation:

> "[This neurodiverse child] absolutely adores heavy cat. … the other children will find it and bring it to her, so it works really well for her. If she's struggling to regulate, just to sit the cat on her knee, for her to cuddle the cat. Sitting on the swing with the cat on her knee really just helps her get back into that space where she can learn … she identifies that as a tool to regulate herself."
>
> **KAIAKO**

Another kaiako told us:

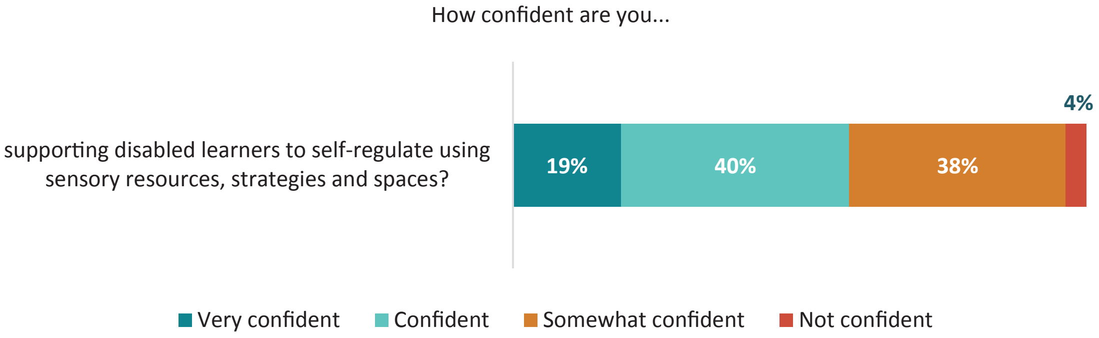
> "We adapt what we put out each day. Really it depends on who is there, how sensory they may be … looking at who we have in, and what really appeals to them – making sure we capture what fills their bucket."
>
> **KAIAKO**

Areas of concern

Many kaiako are not yet confident in effectively using sensory spaces

While there is good awareness of the role of sensory spaces, it is more common for services to designate an area rather than design a specific space with self-regulation in mind. A significant portion of kaiako (41 percent) reported they are only somewhat confident or not confident at all that they support children's self-regulation with sensory spaces and resources (see Figure 31).

Figure 31: *Confidence supporting disabled children to self-regulate using resources, strategies and spaces: Kaiako survey*



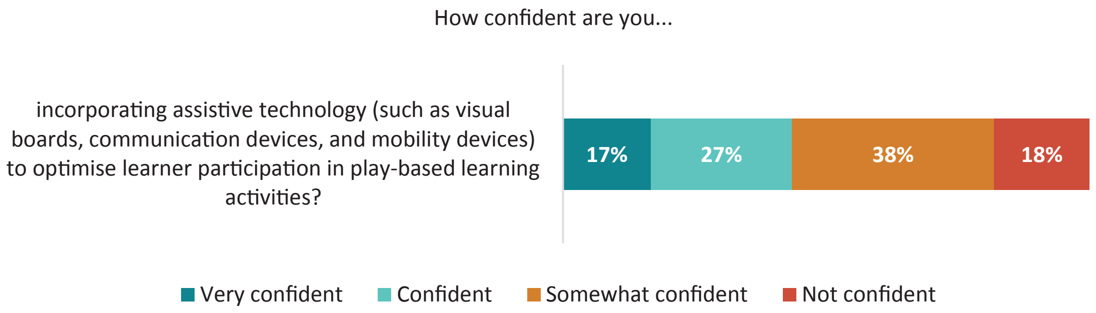
When we spoke to kaiako we heard that, for some services, it is difficult to find both the space and the resources to effectively create self-regulation areas. Some kaiako also lack the specialised knowledge to properly set up the space, and to communicate its use to children.

Another challenge kaiako have to overcome is moderating behaviour in these spaces. By their nature, many of these sensory spaces are enclosed so the child can effectively limit outside input to avoid overstimulation. However, we heard this can mean the child is not directly visible. Some kaiako feel this encourages poor behaviour in some children, and misuse of the space, and consequently they are concerned about managing children's health and safety.

Kaiako lack confidence in using special resources

Resources form an important part of the learning environment. Most services reported having access to a good range of resources, however, some issues were raised where disabled children require specialised equipment. More than half (57 percent) of kaiako said they lacked confidence incorporating assistive technology, which is often essential for the inclusion of disabled children (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: *Confidence incorporating assistive technology: Kaiako survey*



When we interviewed kaiako, we heard it was rare for them to receive targeted training when assistive technology is needed. They told us this often means they feel less confident about how to use it, which may impact on the quality of provision the child in need receives.

> “[We] have had occasions where children have come in with communication devices, but we have had limited training. It’s hard to feel like we have been using them effectively.”
>
> **TEACHER**

4) Strong learning-focused partnerships with parents and whānau

Parents and whānau are a child’s first and most important teachers, and have a vital role to play in helping them learn. They know their child better than anyone – their strengths, interests and needs; the ways they approach new and different things; and how they learn.[23]

We identified the following parent and whānau engagement practices to be most effective for disabled children.

a) **Educationally focused engagement:** Do kaiako, leaders and parents/whānau have strong relationships which underpin learning-focused partnerships to support disabled children’s learning and success, including through developing and reviewing their child’s ILP?

b) **Whānau agency:** Is parent and whānau agency encouraged, for example, through codesigning service policies for disabled children, and providing feedback on provision for disabled children?

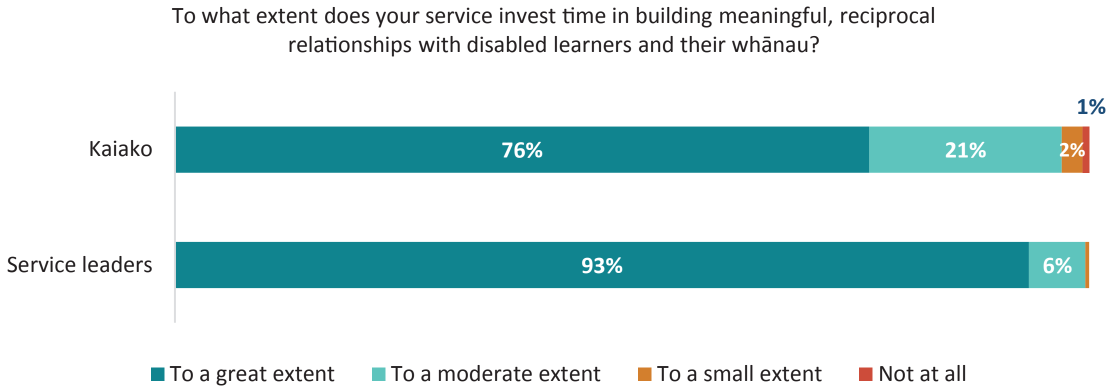
a) Educationally focused engagement

Aspects that were stronger

Parents, kaiako and leaders have strong relationships

Service leaders and kaiako have a strong focus on building meaningful, reciprocal relationships with parents and whānau of disabled children. All (100 percent) leaders, and nearly all (97 percent) kaiako believe their service invests time in building relationships to a moderate or great extent (as shown in Figure 33).

Figure 33: *Extent to which service invests time in building relationships with disabled children and their whānau: Kaiako and service leader surveys*

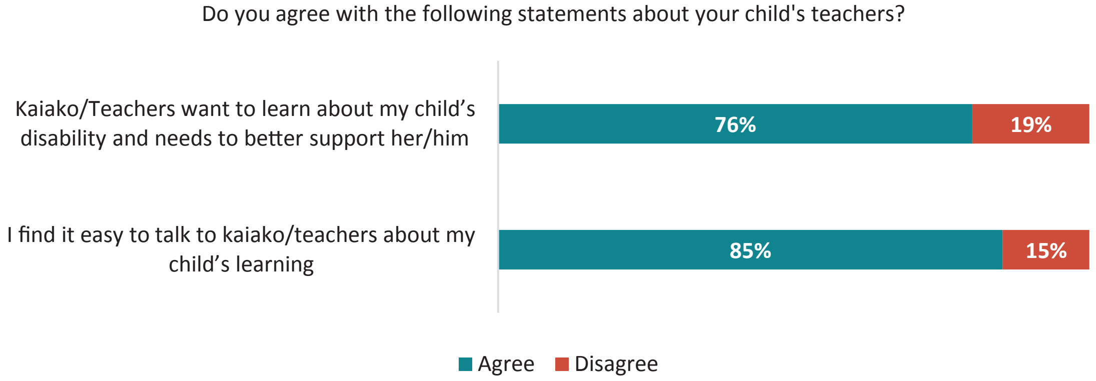


> “I was expecting a growling from the service because of his bad behaviour. I felt so supported when they called me and said these are the things we are doing, can we help? Let’s sit down and talk about what you would like to see in [your son]? These are things we could do or provide if you are comfortable? They went over and above what I thought they would do. I felt so guilty thinking they must be exhausting themselves with the pour out of energy and love and positivity and was thinking this is amazing. I was really grateful to them for all the help they gave me and [my son].”
>
> **PARENT**

Parents and whānau find kaiako are approachable, and are happy with their engagement

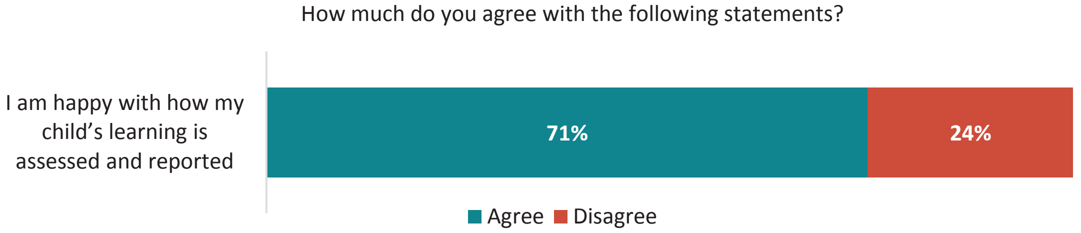
Eighty-five percent of parents agreed they find it easy to talk to their child’s kaiako about learning. Most (76 percent) parents agreed kaiako want to learn about their child’s disability (see Figure 34).

Figure 34: *Agreement that kaiako wanted to learn about child's disability, and that it was easy to talk to kaiako about disabled child's learning: Parents survey*



Most (71 percent) parents are satisfied with how their child's learning is assessed and reported (see Figure 35).

Figure 35: *Happiness with how disabled child's learning is being assessed: Parents survey*



Service leaders also see kaiako engagement with parents and whānau is going well. Ninety-eight percent of leaders reported assessment is shared with parents to either a moderate or great extent (see Figure 36).

Figure 36: *Extent to which assessment information is shared with parents: Service leaders survey*

Practice example 10: Relationships becoming partnerships

At an urban kindergarten, kaiako recognise that positive, collaborative partnerships make a difference – and that this means much more than just getting along. After initial relationship-building, positive and friendly conversations are deliberately deepened to include informal discussions about learning, strategies, and plans. Discussions are focused on what really happens, where everyone can share what is working, and how it can be better for the child. Kaiako recognise that families hold rich knowledge that will support their teaching:

> “When we have a meeting with our whānau, we have a proper sit down and say, what do you think, what do you do at home that could work here too? And we swap ideas.”

Whānau find this collaborative approach to working together on children’s learning plans is a positive experience, even when behaviours are challenging.

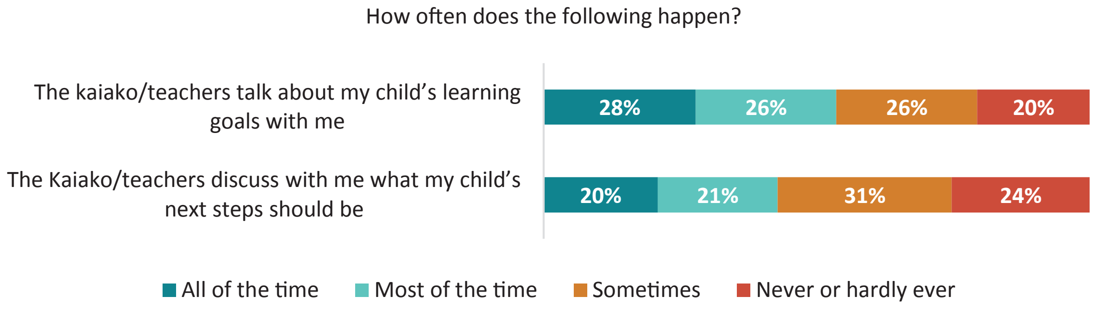
Talking about the learning and strategies occurring in both the service and home setting means kaiako and whānau can take a team approach and implement consistent strategies to support the child’s learning and wellbeing – to find solutions together.

Areas of concern

Positive relationships with parents do not consistently transfer into partnerships that focus on working together to support learning

Despite having built good relationships with parents, many services are not using these to drive learning-focused partnerships. Forty-six percent of parents reported kaiako never or only sometimes discuss their child’s learning goals with them, and over half (55 percent) reported kaiako never or only sometimes discuss their child’s next steps (see Figure 37).

Figure 37: *Frequency kaiako discuss children’s learning goals and next steps with parents: Parents survey*

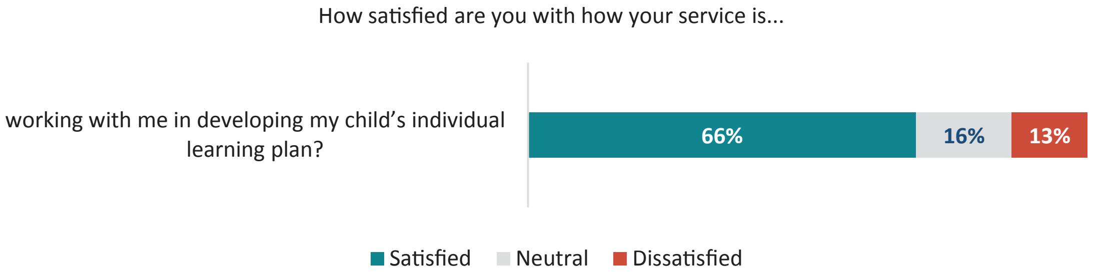


One parent shared:

> “I’ve got two learning stories for [my disabled child], and for [my child who is not disabled] I’ve got one, two, three, four, five. Five stories [in the same time…] Even the way that [my disabled child’s] story is written compared to the other ones felt like it was very transactional, whereas the other ones are really nice stories, you know?”
>
> **PARENT**

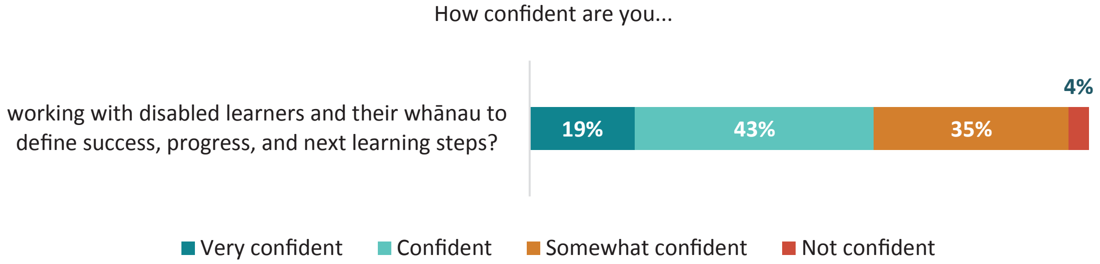
Only two thirds of parents are satisfied with their involvement in developing and reviewing their child’s ILP (as shown in Figure 38).

Figure 38: *Satisfaction with how the service has worked with parents in developing disabled child’s individual learning plan: Parents survey*



Many kaiako do not feel well-equipped to have learning-focused conversations with parents and whānau. A large proportion (38 percent) of kaiako are not confident or are only somewhat confident to work with whānau to define what success looks like for their disabled children (as shown in Figure 39).

Figure 39: *Confidence to work with disabled children and their whānau to define success, progress, and next learning steps: Kaiako survey*



During our interviews, we heard it can be difficult to get parents to engage about education. Parents and whānau often have busy lives, or their desired outcomes for ECE are not necessarily education focused. Kaiako experience the most success when they are able to offer flexibility on when and how they engage with parents. When it works well kaiako and parents are positive about the power of the partnership.

> “There is a great collaboration between whānau and kaiako to understand and extend education for disabled learners.”
>
> **KAIAKO**

b) Whānau agency

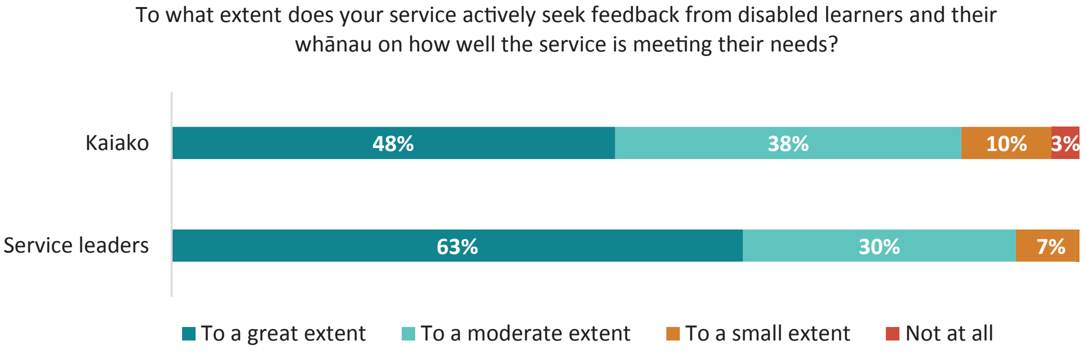
Almost all leaders and kaiako actively seek feedback from parents and whānau

Ninety-three percent of service leaders actively seek feedback from parents of disabled children to a moderate or great extent. Eighty-six percent of kaiako reported the same (see Figure 40). In interviews, we heard services often act on parent or whānau feedback about how to support their children. They recognise the importance of working with whānau to strengthen provision for disabled children.

> “We build relationships with the whānau and communicate with the whānau about their child’s progress. We use the strategies that are recommended to us.”
>
> **KAIAKO**

> “Some families, everyone is really involved, from granddad down, you know it is a really tight-knit family. Then, when we see that happening, that it is a tight clan, or a tight family, we make sure that we share things with them, and that we listen to them. Like in our learning stories for example, we will have stories about, for example, one of the children who has additional needs … mum, or grandma was always commenting in [the learning story], and I realised that they’d been staying with grandma a lot … and you can share these stories with extended families … I found that they have 10 or 15 extended family members involved in the child’s learning story, and everyone was pitching in, into that. And I think it’s a good thing to see.”
>
> **LEADER**

Figure 40: *Extent to which service leaders and kaiako seek feedback from disabled children and their families: Kaiako and service leaders surveys*



Conclusion

Across the key components of inclusive education, strengths include kaiako and leaders building good relationships with parents and whānau, and fostering safe social and emotional environments. However, there are areas that are concerning and need to be improved. This includes low kaiako confidence in many aspects of teaching disabled children, and ensuring that ECE has a clear learning focus. Aspects of leadership, expectations, and assessment practice should be strengthened in many services to improve the quality of provision for disabled children.

Part 6: How does provision vary between services?

Kaiako in kindergartens are more critical of their practice, but parents in these services are more positive about provision for their disabled child. Services located in the South Island are more connected with supports for disabled children than those in the North Island, possibly due to relationships built during crises.

This section describes how provision for disabled children varies between services.

What we looked at

This section looks at variations in provision between services based on two aspects.

a) **Service type:** Are different types of service better placed to provide quality inclusive education for disabled learners?

b) **Service location:** Does the location of the service impact what they provide for disabled learners?

The service leaders and kaiako in our sample were broadly representative of the proportion of kindergarten and education and care services nationally. Parents who responded from kindergarten were overrepresented, but were all evenly spread across the different locations we investigated.

a) Service type

What do we mean by service type?

Of the four types of services represented in this project, all were in English medium. Education and care services are the largest group of services, and they provide care across a wide variety of communities' needs. Kindergartens are the second largest group of services. Home-based networks and Playcentres round out the four service types and are a smaller proportion of services. Further detail about these service types is in Part 1.

Due to response rates, our survey findings represent responses about education and care and kindergarten only.

Kaiako in kindergartens are less confident than those in education and care services, but parents are more positive about their quality of provision

When compared with kaiako at education and care services, fewer kaiako at kindergartens reported their service as providing quality inclusive education compared with kaiako at education and care services (see Figures 41, and 42).

Leaders were also less likely to report their service is providing quality inclusive education if they are from a kindergarten.

Figure 41: *Overall inclusivity of their service by kindergarten and education and care services: Kaiako survey*

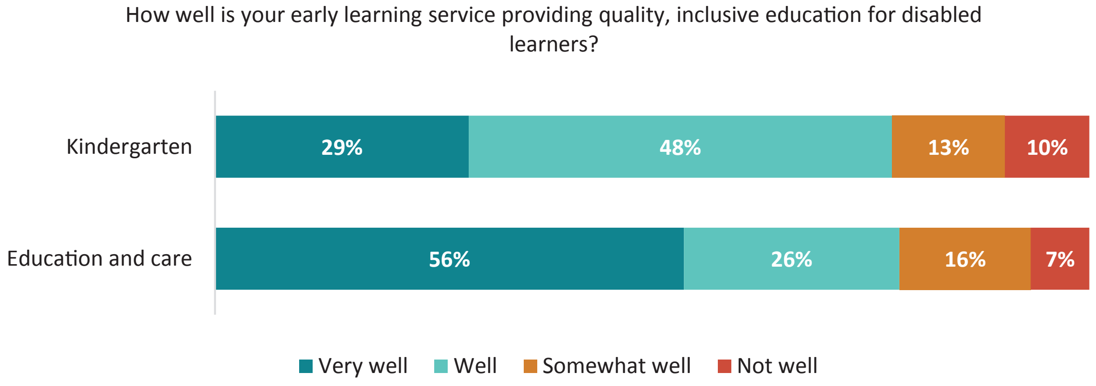
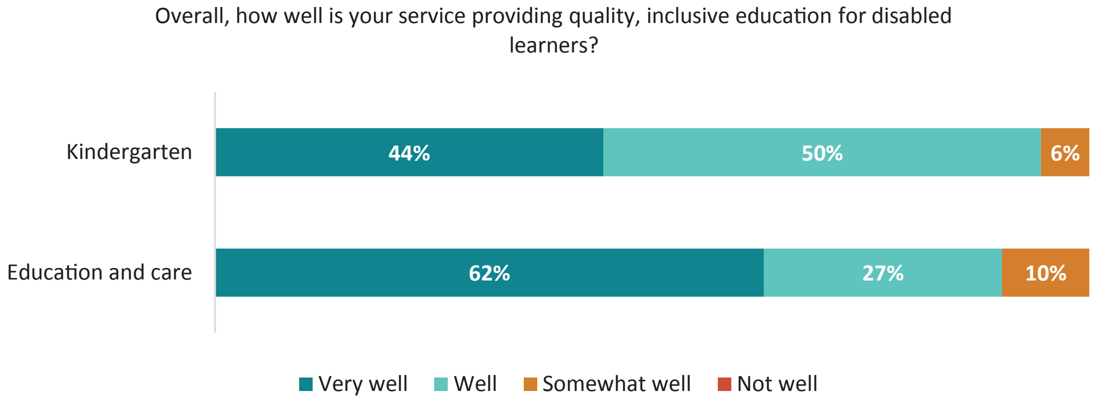
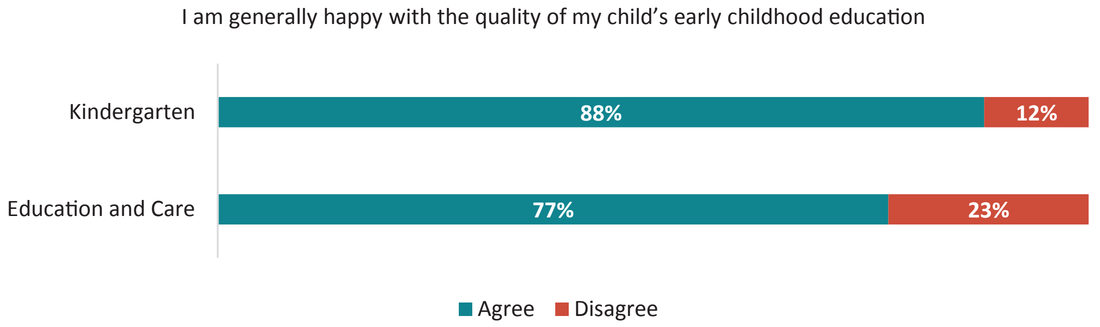


Figure 42: *Beliefs about quality and inclusivity of service for disabled children by kindergarten and education and care services: Service leaders survey*



In contrast, parents of disabled children at kindergartens are generally more positive about the quality of their child's education (compared with parents of children in education and care services – see Figure 43).

Figure 43: *Happiness with the quality of service by kindergarten and education and care services: Parents survey*



From our data it is not clear why parents and kaiako hold seemingly opposing perspectives from within different types of service. It may be due to the composition of kaiako in different service types – highly experienced, knowledgeable teachers may be more aware of further improvements that can be made, and may therefore be more critical of their current practice. Because kaiako in kindergarten are all required to be fully qualified, this group may be skewing the sentiment of responses.

Strong support from Governing Organisations

Through interviews we heard some Governing Organisations can be sources of support, being well-placed to enable quality education for disabled children. Some organisations help with policies, training, expert advice, and resources. In some places, they are able to specifically dedicate personnel to supporting disabled children across multiple services. Governing Organisations also play a significant role in supporting many kindergartens to provide quality, inclusive education for disabled children.

While many standalone ECE services are doing well, their smaller size limits the resources and supports they can provide at an organisational level.

A strong Governing Organisation committed to supporting disabled children is highly beneficial for the children and families that attend those services. However, this suggests smaller standalone services may find it harder.

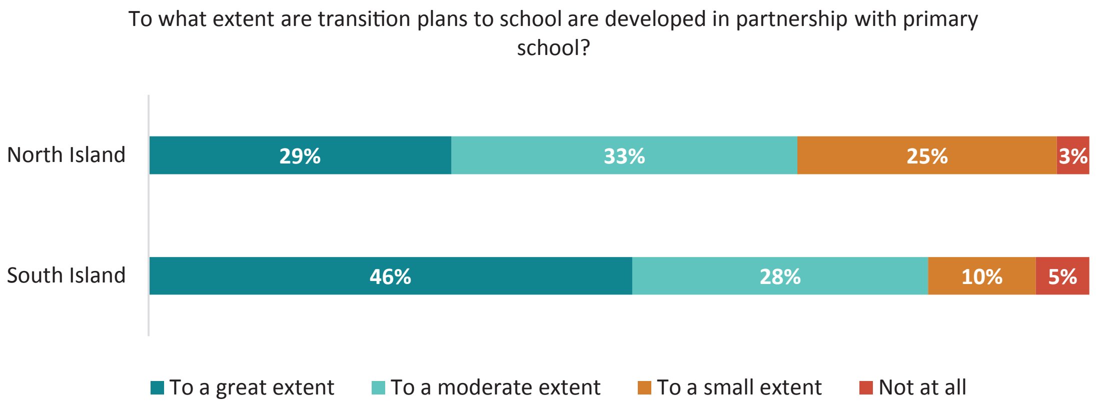
Our sample was too small to identify differences in the quality of provision for disabled children between standalone services and those operating under a Governing Organisation.

b) Service location

Services in the South Island are doing better than those in the North Island

Kaiako in the South Island are consistently more confident about their teaching practice, and about disabled children’s transitions. More kaiako in the South Island reported working regularly with other services and schools around transitions (see Figure 44).

Figure 44: *Extent to which transition plans to school are developed in partnership, by North and South Island: Kaiako survey*



Parents with disabled children attending a service in the South Island are also more positive. They were more likely to report kaiako discuss their child's learning with them, and their next steps for learning (see Figure 45, and Figure 46).

Figure 45: *Frequency at which kaiako discuss child's learning with parents by North and South Island: Parents survey*

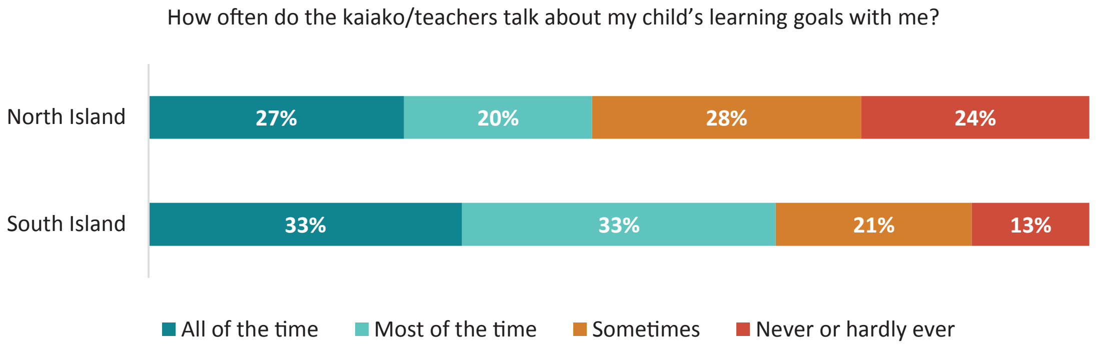
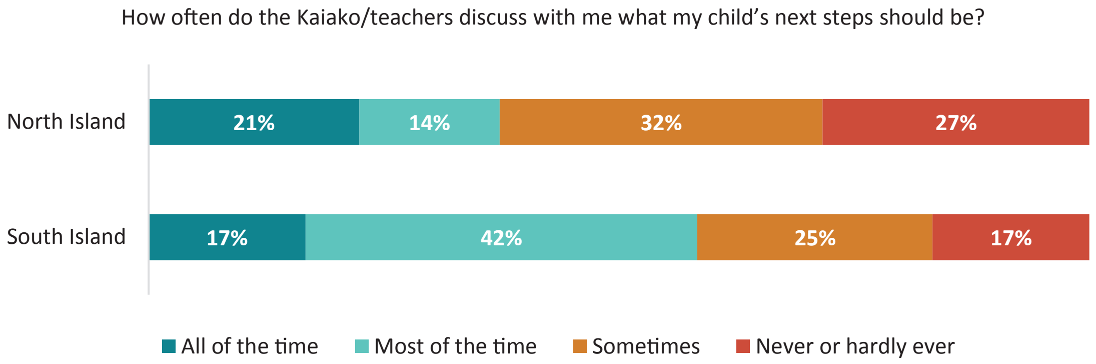


Figure 46: *Frequency at which kaiako discuss child's next steps with parents by North and South Island: Parents survey*



While it is unclear what is driving this difference, some possibilities were suggested in interviews. We heard the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquakes and Christchurch terror attack has led to much greater connection between services and the MoE, as well as other support networks. This is not the first time this has been reported to us – we also had a similar finding when ERO interviewed ECE services during the *Learning in Lockdown*[24] report series. The evidence we have suggests these positive and productive connections have a direct flow-on effect for the quality of ECE provision parents experience.

Services based in urban areas are less likely to collaborate across education settings than those in provincial or rural areas

The other notable difference is that leaders in urban areas are less likely to report regular collaboration with other services and schools. This may be because ECE services in urban spaces are in competition with more services, and feed into more schools than services in provincial or rural areas where there may only be a handful of ECE services.

Practice example 11: Leader described challenges faced by urban ECE services

One service leader from in an urban setting told us they find it challenging engaging with schools to help support children's transitions. They felt the spread of services in their area is leading to significant numbers of ECE services feeding into one school, making it very difficult for that school's new entrant teachers to have contact with all of them. To add to this complexity, those same ECE services often feed into multiple different schools.

Conclusion

While we cannot judge whether outcomes for disabled children vary across service types or location, we found differences in parent, kaiako, and leader views about the quality of provision. Parents of disabled children in kindergartens are happier with the provision for their disabled child than those with children in education and care services. Services in the South Island are giving better quality provision for disabled children than those in the North Island, possibly due to the strength of relationships with other services, schools, and support agencies they developed.

Part 7: How well are Māori disabled children doing?

Overall, Māori disabled children feel accepted, safe, and comfortable at their services. However, many have significant experiences of exclusion from enrolment. Kaiako continue to lack confidence in ensuring Māori disabled children succeed as Māori, which may ultimately impact their learning progress.

This section describes Māori disabled children's experiences and education provision for them at ECE.

How we gathered information

We first looked at Māori education research to identify what high quality education looks like for Māori disabled children and their whānau. We then worked closely with Māori education experts to help us understand relevant lines of investigation to ensure that we were framing our evaluation in a culturally relevant way. The services we engaged with were intentionally selected so ECE services with high Māori roll had good representation, and whānau had opportunities to share with us.

In total, we:

- ***surveyed*** 25 parents of Māori disabled children (26 percent of total respondents)
- ***interviewed*** whānau of Māori disabled children
- ***interviewed*** seven services with greater than 30 percent Māori roll.

This section looks at:

1) Māori disabled children's experiences and outcomes
2) quality of ECE provision for Māori disabled children.

Given the small sample size of parents of Māori children, we cannot make a robust comparison of the survey responses to parents of non-Māori children.

Whānau hauā signifies the wind that propels whānau with members who have a disability. This perspective positions disability within a person's background, coming to the forefront when ability to achieve is compromised. Valuing these concepts, as well as children's culture in general, enhances learning and wellbeing.[25]

What we found: An overview

Parents of Māori disabled children are often discouraged from enrolling their child. Over one third of parents of Māori disabled children have been turned away from at least one service, with many being told this is due to safety concerns. Once Māori disabled children find a service that welcomes them, they usually have good experiences with wellbeing and participation, but their learning is not identified and shared with parents.

Māori disabled children enjoy going to their service and feel safe and accepted. Almost all parents of Māori disabled children are positive about outcomes for their children. From parents' perspective, the majority of Māori disabled children feel safe and accepted, and enjoy their time at their service.

Kaiako lack the confidence needed to work in a culturally responsive way with Māori disabled children and their whānau. While leaders thought kaiako did this well, kaiako and parents are not confident Māori disabled children are learning in a culturally responsive way.

1) What are their experiences?

This section discusses:

a) participation

b) learning

c) wellbeing.

a) Participation

Some Māori disabled children experience significant exclusion from enrolment

From our survey, we found over a third of parents (36 percent) of Māori disabled children have been discouraged from enrolling their child (see Figure 47). Over half (56 percent) of parents of Māori disabled children who have been discouraged from enrolling their child shared they were told enrolling their child would result in safety concerns, or that there were not enough staff to care for them.

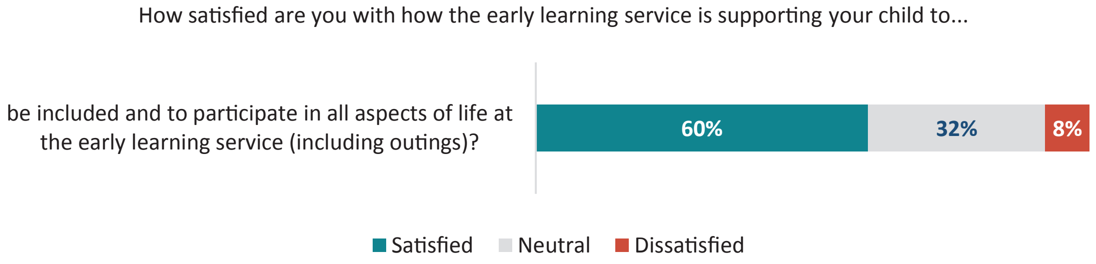
> “Multiple daycares have indicated they do not have the staff, resource or knowledge to have my child attend, that it would cause disruption to other children without adequate teacher support numbers and that unless MoE can provide a support worker, they wouldn't be able to manage.”
>
> **PARENT**

Figure 47: *Parents of Māori disabled children discouraged from enrolling their child: Parents survey*

Once Māori disabled children are attending, they are mostly included

More than four in five parents of Māori disabled children (84 percent) have never been asked to keep their child home, for reasons unrelated to Covid-19. Three in five parents (60 percent) are satisfied with how their child is included in all aspects of life at their service (see Figure 48). This indicates that, once enrolled, exclusion is less prevalent.

Figure 48: *Parents of Māori disabled children's satisfaction with their services inclusion of disabled children: Parents survey*



b) Learning

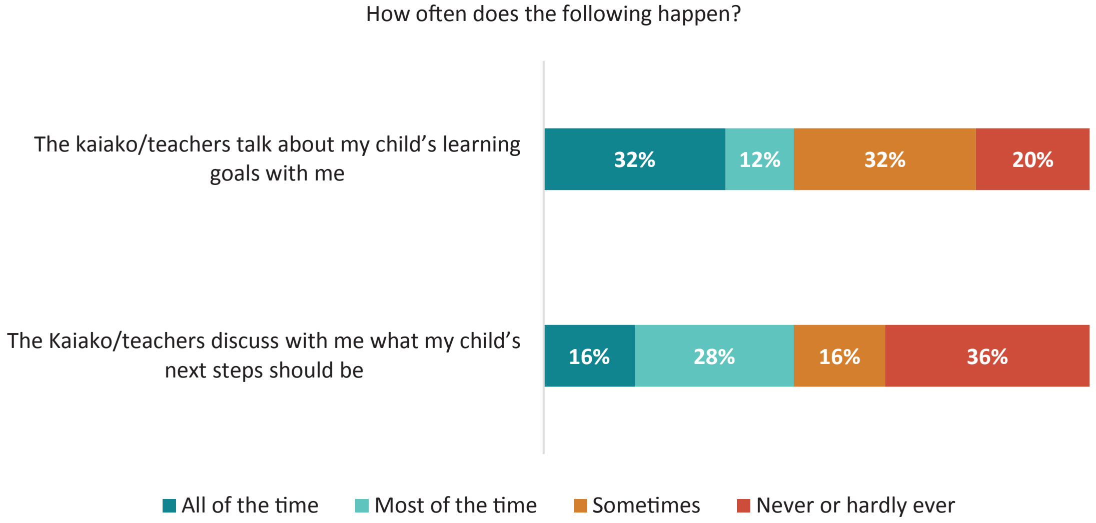
Parents are satisfied with the content of their child's learning

Four in five parents of Māori disabled children (80 percent) agreed their child is learning something of interest to them. Positively, the content these children are receive may often include learning about their culture. Over two thirds of parents of Māori disabled children (68 percent) believe kaiako help their child learn about their culture.

However, how their progress is reported is a concern

Over half of parents of Māori disabled children (52 percent) believe kaiako never or only sometimes discuss their child's next learning steps with them. The same number of parents believe kaiako never or hardly ever talk to them about their child's learning goals (see Figure 49). Taken together, these responses indicate a lack of reported learning progression for Māori disabled children, and a possible absence of understanding of how Māori disabled children are meeting their learning goals.

Figure 49: *Parents of Māori disabled children reports of how often kaiako discuss their child's learning goals, and next steps with them: Parents survey*

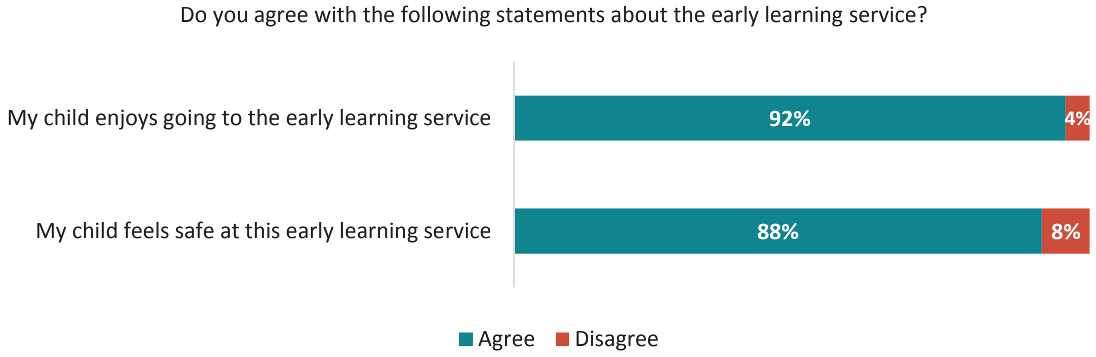


c) Wellbeing

Māori disabled children feel safe, comfortable, and accepted at their services

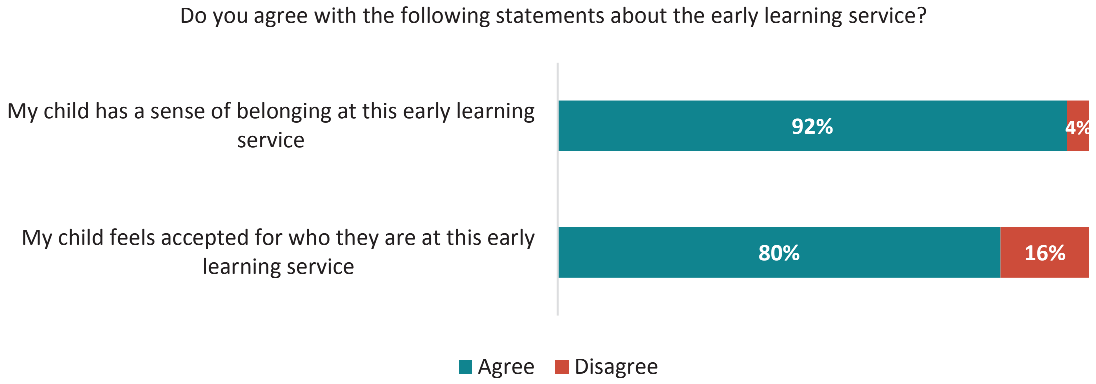
Parents of Māori disabled children are positive about their child's feelings of enjoyment and safety. Almost all parents agreed their child enjoys attending their service (92 percent) and feel safe at their service (88 percent) (see Figure 50). Nearly all leaders (95 percent) told us they work with whānau to enhance learning and wellbeing for Māori children.

Figure 50: *Parents of Māori disabled children agreement that their child feels safe, and enjoys attending their service: Parents survey*



Alongside their feelings of safety and enjoyment, Māori disabled children experience strong feelings of acceptance and belonging. Almost all parents (92 percent) told us their child has a sense of belonging at their service. Eighty percent agreed their child feels accepted for who they are at their service (see Figure 51). This means that, overall, the wellbeing related outcomes of feeling safe, accepted, and having a sense of belonging are strong for Māori disabled children.

Figure 51: *Parents of Māori disabled children's reports on their child's sense of belonging and acceptance: Parents survey*



2) How good is provision for these children?

Education research shows that one-size-fits-all education disadvantages most children. Each child has a unique learning context, culture, and community. *Te Whāriki* sets out expectations for an inclusive and responsive curriculum. Culturally responsive practice is *part* of quality teaching, not an add-on to it.[26] It involves kaiako making deliberate choices to understand and incorporate elements of children's culture in the day-to-day activities of a service.

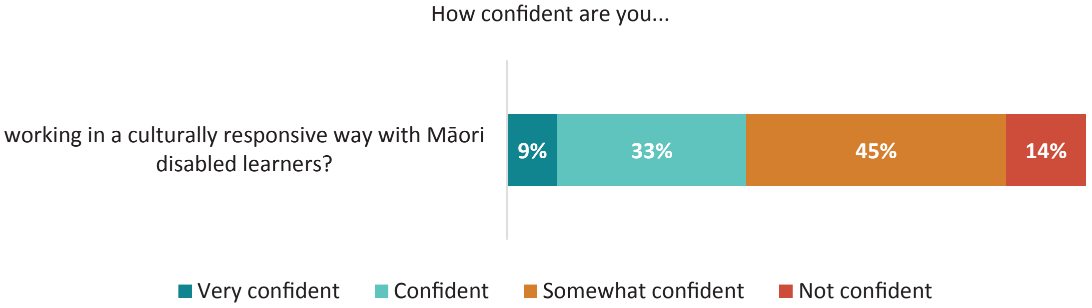
This section discusses culturally responsive provision for disabled Māori children.

Kaiako lack confidence in culturally responsive practice for Māori disabled children

Nearly all (90 percent) service leaders reported their service plans for Māori disabled children to specifically support them as Māori from a moderate to great extent.

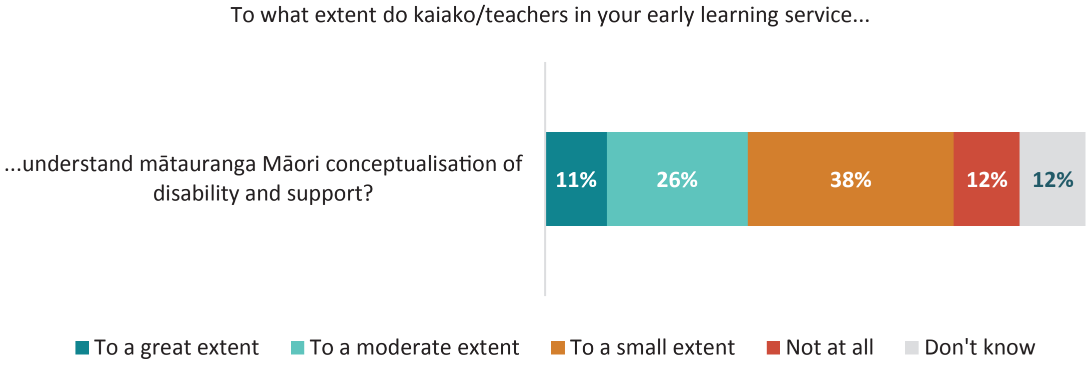
While planning for Māori disabled children may be in place at a leadership level, many kaiako do not feel equipped to work with them in a culturally responsive way. We found six out of 10 (59 percent) kaiako are not confident or are only somewhat confident working in a culturally responsive way with Māori disabled children (see Figure 52).

Figure 52: *Confidence working in a culturally responsive way: Kaiako survey*



We also found kaiako have a limited understanding of what disability looks like from a Māori perspective. Half of kaiako reported teachers and kaiako at their service do not understand Māori conceptualisation of disability at all, or only do so to a small extent (see Figure 53). This is likely a key contributor to the lack of kaiako confidence in supporting Māori disabled children to succeed as Māori.

Figure 53: *Understanding of mātauranga Māori concepts of disability: Kaiako survey*



Relationships with whānau Māori are strong, but there is still room for improvement

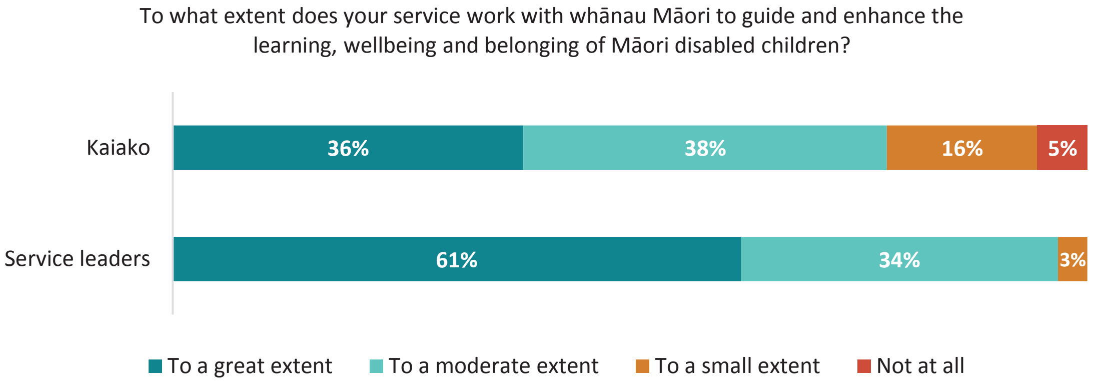
Almost all service leaders (95 percent) believe they work with whānau to enhance learning and wellbeing for Māori disabled children to at least a moderate extent. Similarly, almost three in four kaiako (74 percent) reported a working relationship with whānau Māori (see Figure 54).

One kaiako explained some of the importance of working with whānau:

> “With no whanaungatanga, there is no relationship with the child. Building this is essential.”
>
> **KAIAKO**

While most respondents were positive, a remaining one in five kaiako (21 percent) are not confident or are only somewhat confident in these relationships (see Figure 54). Ultimately, relationships with whānau Māori are a strength, but could be further developed.

Figure 54: *Extent to which their service works with whānau Māori: Kaiako and service leaders surveys*



Overall, while services are continuing to evolve their inclusive practices for disabled children to succeed, it is a challenge for many to develop confidence and skills to support Māori disabled children, and disabled children generally. The lack of confidence reported by kaiako indicates they are early on their journey of supporting Māori disabled children in a culturally responsive way. As a result, Māori disabled children are missing out on important culturally responsive learning.

Conclusion

Māori disabled children experience significant barriers to enrolment. However, when they are enrolled, they are mostly included, with few parents reporting they have been asked to keep their child at home. Further, Māori disabled children are believed to feel safe, comfortable, and accepted when they are attending.

Parents of Māori disabled children are happy with the content of their child's learning but are less satisfied with how their learning is reported. Māori disabled children are interested in their learning, and have opportunities to learn in contexts that reflect their culture. However, parents of Māori children believe kaiako are rarely communicating with them about their child's learning goals and next steps.

Despite service leader opinion, kaiako are not confident working in culturally responsive ways. While there is room for improvement, kaiako and service leaders report strong working relationships with whānau Māori. Culturally responsive provision is an area in need of continuous development.

Part 8: How well are Pacific disabled children doing?

Pacific disabled children have a sense of belonging at their service, but often experience exclusion. Relationships between kaiako and Pacific families need to be established to minimise barriers and strengthen education provision.

This section describes Pacific disabled children's experiences and education provision for them at ECE.

How we gathered information

To find out how well Pacific disabled children are doing, we worked closely with Pacific education experts when reaching out and hearing from Pacific disabled children's families, and engaging with ECE services with high proportions of Pacific children on their rolls.

In total, we:

- ***surveyed*** 16 parents of Pacific disabled children (16 percent of total respondents). The respondents consist of 8 Samoan parents, 6 Tongan parents, 1 Cook Island Māori parent, and 1 Niuean parent
- ***interviewed*** parents of at least three Pacific disabled children
- ***interviewed*** kaiako and leaders at five services with greater than 20 percent Pacific roll.

We then reviewed the findings with Pacific education experts to help us understand and contextualise what we heard.

This section looks at:

1) experiences and outcomes of Pacific disabled children
2) quality of ECE provision for Pacific disabled children.

Given the small sample size of parents of Pacific children, we cannot make a robust comparison of the survey responses to parents of non-Pacific children. These findings should be read accordingly.

What we found: An Overview

Pacific disabled children often struggle to find a service that will enrol them. Parents of Pacific disabled children experience exclusion from enrolling at services. Once enrolled, they are satisfied with how their child is included in learning and activities at their service. However, parents of Pacific disabled children are often not aware of how well their child is progressing, their child's learning goals or next steps.

Pacific disabled children enjoy attending their service and feel safe and accepted. Almost all parents of Pacific disabled children are positive about outcomes for their children. From their parents' perspective, the majority of Pacific disabled children feel accepted, have a sense of belonging and enjoy their time at the service. All parents agreed their child feels safe at their service.

Kaiako and parents report a gap in kaiako capability around culturally responsive practice for Pacific disabled children. While service leaders are positive about the nature of the relationships between kaiako and Pacific families, kaiako and Pacific parents are less confident Pacific disabled children are learning in culturally responsive ways.

1. What are their experiences?

This section discusses:

a) participation

b) learning

c) wellbeing.

a) Participation

Pacific disabled children experience exclusion, and may be experiencing less specialist support

Parents of Pacific disabled children reported greater experience of exclusion from enrolment. In our survey, *half* of parents of Pacific disabled children have been discouraged from enrolling in a service (see Figure 55).

Figure 55: *Parents of Pacific disabled children discouraged from enrolling their child: Parents survey*

Pacific disabled children are twice as likely as other disabled children to be enrolled in home-based services. Seven percent of all disabled children, and 13 percent of Pacific disabled children are enrolled in home-based services.[27, j] In our interviews we heard it is more difficult to access support for those in home-based services, with educational support workers being prioritised to other service types. As a result, Pacific disabled children may experience less access to support through their service than their non-Pacific disabled peers.

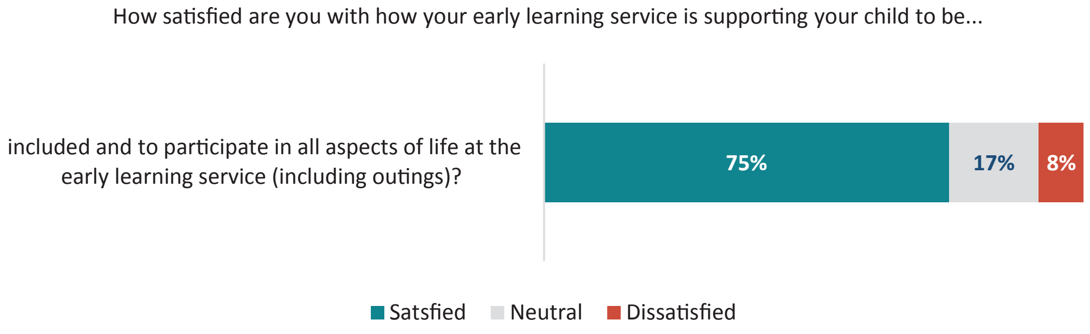
From our interviews we heard there is a cultural stigma around disability in some Pacific communities. This stigma may prevent some parents of Pacific disabled children from reaching out and receiving necessary support.

> “ASD within the Pasifika community is pretty much taboo … So, [talking] to our whānau about it, Pasifika whānau; because a lot of the time, we were brought up, no, it’s … they’re naughty. You know they’re … there’s [nothing] wrong with them [disabled children], they’re naughty, they’re just not … they don’t wanna listen … You will get a lot of, in the Pasifika community, ‘No, there’s nothing wrong with them’ [disabled children].”
>
> **KAIAKO**

Once Pacific disabled children are enrolled, they are included

When Pacific disabled children attend, we found that most are included in all areas. More than four in five parents (82 percent) reported their child attends their ECE for more than 20 hours a week. Three in four parents (75 percent) are satisfied their child is included in all aspects of life at their service (see Figure 56). Only two parents (17 percent) have been asked by their service to keep their child at home. Once they overcome barriers to enrolment and access to support, Pacific disabled children experience strong inclusion.

Figure 56: *Parents of Pacific disabled children satisfaction with how their service includes their child: Parents survey*



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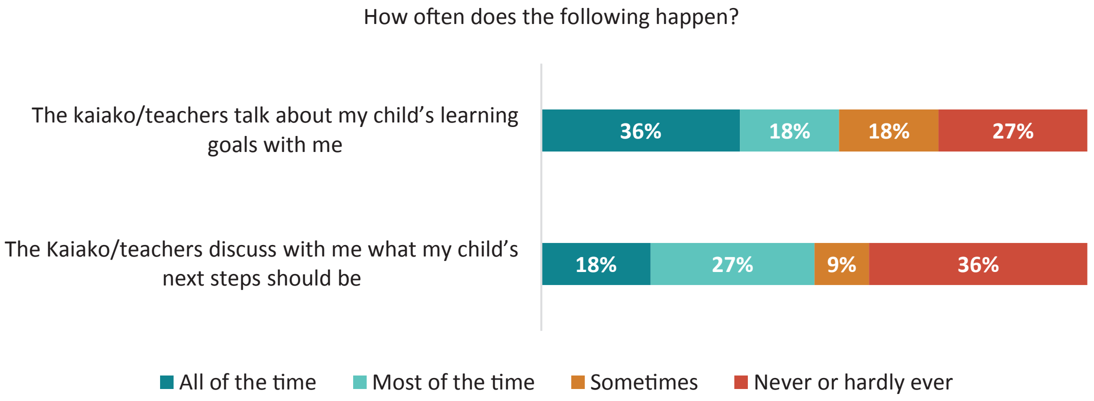
[j] Comparisons drawn from ECE directory, 2021

b) Learning

Parents of Pacific disabled children are not sure of their child's learning progression

Almost half (45 percent) of parents of Pacific disabled children believe kaiako never, hardly ever, or only sometimes discuss their child's next learning steps with them. Similarly, almost half (45 percent) of parents believe kaiako never, hardly ever, or only sometimes talk about their child's learning goals with them (see Figure 57). This indicates a lack of understanding about how Pacific learners are progressing toward their learning goals.

Figure 57: *Parents of Pacific disabled children's reports on how often kaiako discuss their child's next steps and learning goals with them: Parents survey*



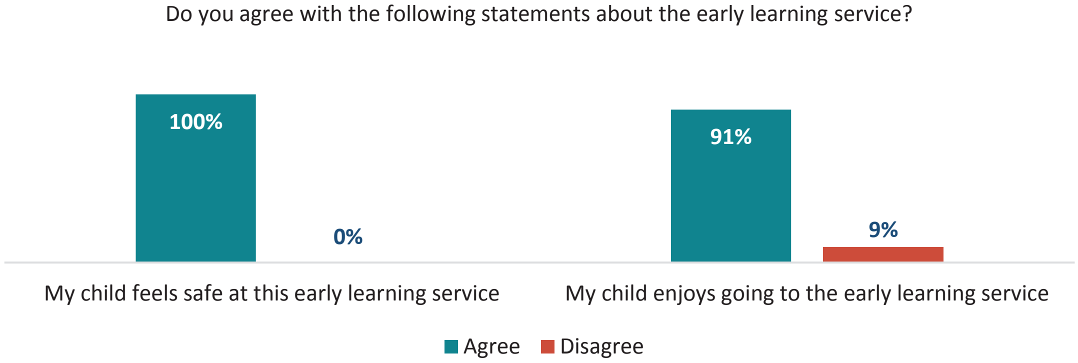
Despite this lack of communication about their child's learning, parents of Pacific disabled children are positive about their child's interest in their learning, and kaiako support for learning. Over four in five parents (83 percent) believe their child is learning things that are of interest to them. Nearly four in five parents (73 percent) also commended kaiako for believing in their child and helping them to build their confidence. While parents of Pacific disabled children are critical of how their children's learning is progressing, they remain positive about their child's experience and the encouragement they receive from kaiako.

c) Wellbeing

Pacific disabled children feel comfortable, safe, and that they belong at their service

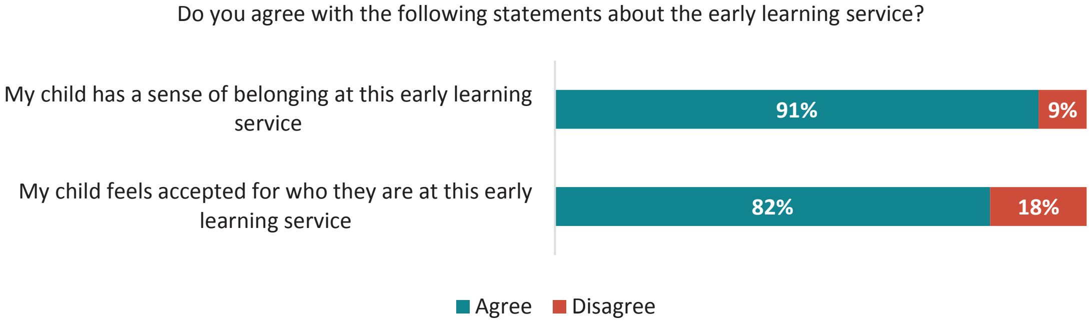
Parents of Pacific disabled children are positive about their child's feelings of enjoyment and safety at their service. *All* parents agreed their child feels safe at their learning service. A further 91 percent reported their child enjoys attending their service (see Figure 58).

Figure 58: *Parents of Pacific disabled children's agreement that their child feels safe, and enjoys attending their service: Parents survey*



Alongside feeling safe and accepted, Pacific disabled children have strong feelings of being accepted and of belonging at their service. Nearly all parents (91 percent) believe their Pacific disabled child has a sense of belonging at their service. Over four in five parents believe their child feels accepted for who they are at their service (see Figure 59). These reports of safety, enjoyment, feeling accepted, and belonging indicate very positive outcomes for Pacific disabled children.

Figure 59: *Parents of Pacific disabled children's reports on their child's sense of belonging and acceptance: Parents survey*



In our interviews, two Pacific parents talked about some of the ways kaiako worked to establish a sense of family. One Pacific parent shared that a kaiako in the service their disabled children attends has learnt simple words and phrases in Samoan, which they share with other kaiako. Another parent told us they are grateful for the amount of support offered by kaiako, even outside of hours. This parent recollected the kaiako telling them *"We are teachers, but we are also family too"*. These kinds of relationships likely build important feelings of acceptance and belonging for the disabled children involved.

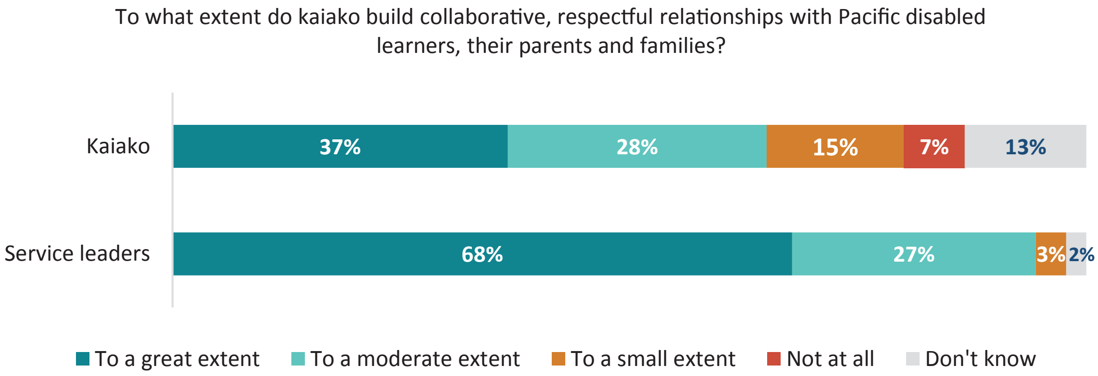
2) How good is provision for these children?

This section discusses culturally responsive provision for disabled Pacific children.

Positive relationships between kaiako, Pacific disabled children, and their family need strengthening

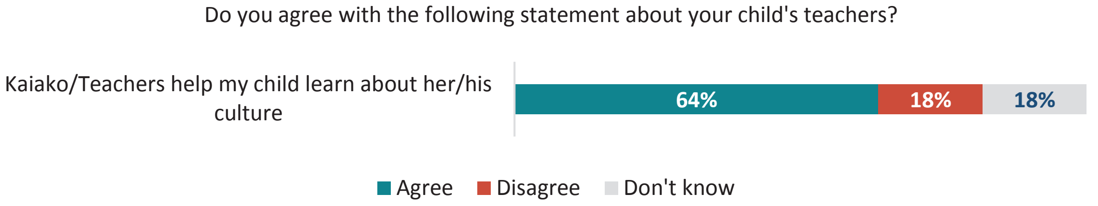
Service leaders and kaiako have different experiences of working with Pacific disabled children and their families. While almost all service leaders believe their service builds collaborative, respectful partnerships with Pacific disabled children and their families to a moderate to great extent (94 percent), kaiako themselves are more critical. Only 65 percent of kaiako reported they build these partnerships from a moderate to a great extent (see Figure 60).

Figure 60: *Kaiako build collaborative, respectful partnerships with Pacific disabled children and their families: Kaiako and service leaders surveys*



Parents' perspectives mirror those of kaiako. While parents of Pacific disabled children responded positively about the learning support their child receives, they are more critical of culturally responsive practice provided by kaiako. In our survey, almost one in five parents of Pacific disabled children (18 percent) disagreed that kaiako help their child learn about their culture, and a further one in five (18 percent) do not know (see Figure 61).

Figure 61: *Parents of Pacific disabled children's agreement that Kaiako help their child learn about their culture: Parents survey*



Negative responses from kaiako and parents suggest that capability to engage with Pacific families in a culturally responsive way needs developing. This could potentially occur through development of kaiako use of talanoa[28, k] with Pacific children and their families.

Through our interviews we found that language is an important part of linking children and their whānau.[29] Though it is heavily dependent on specific knowledge, we saw that incrementally building in the use of home languages (as kaiako capability grows) helps create more of a sense of community.

Linking with Pacific communities can also help develop support networks for parents. Through community connections, barriers regarding disabled terminology may be overcome. During our interviews/observations, we noted that when positive relationships are built with Pacific disabled children and their families, they are characterised by trust and a sense of family.

One Pacific kaiako shared with us:

> “Sometimes it really helps when another parent is able to come in and share, if their child is autistic. And we’ve noticed that with another child, and that parent doesn’t want to talk about it, or doesn’t want anything to do with it, sometimes it helps when another parent comes through and shares their knowledge. Tryna break that ice.”
>
> **KAIAKO**

Conclusion

Pacific disabled children experience exclusion from enrolment and may be accessing less support. Despite this, when Pacific disabled children are enrolled, they have high attendance and strong inclusion. Parents of Pacific disabled children are positive about their child’s belonging, safety, and enjoyment of their services, and some liken kaiako to family.

It is not clear how well Pacific disabled children are learning and progressing. Parents of Pacific children believe kaiako are rarely communicating with them about their child’s learning goals and next steps, yet parents believe their children are interested in their learning, and are supported by kaiako to build their confidence about learning.

Despite service leaders’ opinions and the experiences of some Pacific parents, kaiako and parents reported relationships between kaiako and Pacific disabled children and their families need strengthening. This may help improve education provision for Pacific disabled children, decrease stigma about disability for Pacific families, and ultimately reduce barriers to support.

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[k] Talanoa is “a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities, and aspirations”. Talanoa covers how Pasifika individuals can communicate with others, and can be used to strengthen relationships with learners and their communities, and know and engage with children.

Part 9: How strong are the supports for good education provision?

Good education provision for disabled children requires support. This includes people and agencies working together, clear expectations for inclusion and equity, monitoring and evaluation of how well expectations are being met, a skilled and confident workforce, and coordinated pathways for transitions. We looked at how well these key enablers are supporting quality education. We found there are areas that could work better to support disabled children's education.

In this section, we report our findings on what is supporting services to provide quality inclusive education for disabled children and what needs strengthening.

Enablers that support good education provision

To understand how strong the enablers are that support services to provide quality, inclusive education for disabled children, we looked at the following five components in the ECE system:

1) high expectations for inclusion and equity for disabled children
2) workforce capability and capacity
3) inter-agency collaboration
4) good transitions
5) system monitoring, evaluation, and accountability.

How we gathered information

We gathered information through multiple sources to make judgements about how these enablers are working. The evidence for the findings came from surveys and interviews with disabled children's parents and whānau, kaiako, and ECE service leaders. We also interviewed specialists in ECE who work to support disabled children. We analysed key documents such as *Te Whāriki*, and public data sources.

What we found: An overview

Having identified five key enablers of the system that have a strong impact on the quality of experiences and outcomes for disabled children in ECE, we evaluated them for quality and inclusion.

System expectations are clear, but there is no systematic monitoring of how well they are being met. We found expectations for disabled children's inclusion in ECE services, for example in *Te Whāriki* and held by Governing Organisations, are robust and well communicated, but there is no systematic monitoring of how well these expectations are being met. These strong expectations for inclusion are also inconsistently translated into enrolment and practice.

Kaiako confidence is worryingly low. One third of kaiako reported a lack of confidence in supporting disabled children's learning. Experience and training opportunities improve their confidence, but these are not always accessible.

Services are not effectively collaborating with others to support disabled children's success. Many kaiako and parents are dissatisfied with the way their service collaborates with other services, schools, or agencies. There is very limited inter-service collaboration (outside of Governing Organisations).

Transitions from ECE to schools are not working as well as entry into ECE. Entry into ECE is generally a positive experience for disabled children and their whānau, but transitions from ECE into school settings are not working well. Communication and information sharing are the key areas of concern.

There is a lack of system-level information about disabled children and their experiences. System-level information about disabled children in ECE is limited to funding information. We do not know about disabled children's patterns of attendance and enrolment, and the lack of information means it cannot be used to monitor and improve outcomes for disabled children.

1) High expectations for inclusion and equity for disabled children

This section shares our findings in relation to three aspects of expectations for inclusion and equity.

a) **Clear expectations are set:** Do education legislation, policies and plans articulate clear expectations for inclusion and equity in education for disabled children?

b) **Expectations are understood:** Do kaiako and leaders have a clear understanding of the expectations and what they mean for their practice?

c) **Expectations are acted on:** Do service leaders and kaiako have a clear understanding of the education system's expectations for inclusion, and enact these expectations?

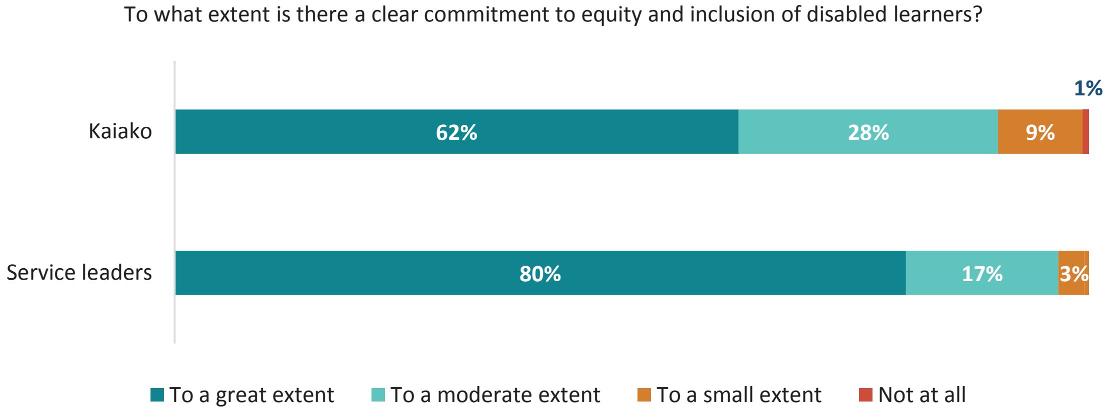
a) Clear expectations are set

Equity and inclusion of disabled children are clearly evident in national and Governing Organisation expectations

The concept of inclusion is woven throughout *Te Whāriki*, both explicitly and implicitly. When the curriculum was updated in 2017, there was a focus on strengthening inclusion for all children.[30] In our interviews with kaiako, leaders, and others, they expressed their confidence that *Te Whāriki*, the National Education and Learning Priorities[31] (NELPs), and communications from MoE all communicate high expectations for disabled children's inclusion.

We asked kaiako and service leaders about how well these expectations are communicated at the service level, and they are positive there is an expectation of equity and inclusion of disabled children, both in their service and in their Governing Organisation (where applicable). Almost all (97 percent) of service leaders believe their Governing Organisation shows a clear commitment to equity and inclusion from a moderate to great extent. Ninety percent of kaiako also believe this, as shown in Figure 62.

Figure 62: *There is a clear commitment to equity and inclusion of disabled children: Kaiako and service leaders surveys*



b) Expectations are understood

Kaiako and leaders are not clear about what the expectations mean for them in their service.

In interviews, kaiako and leaders were not able to confidently explain what the policies and processes mean for their practice with disabled children. Leader and kaiako actions, such as discouraging enrolments or not being fully inclusive of disabled children also demonstrate many have a poor understanding of the expectations for disabled children's inclusion, and how they should implement these. As discussed elsewhere in this report, some services are discouraging enrolment and inclusion of children due to their disability.

c) Expectations are acted on

There is more work to do to ensure expectations of equity and inclusion are acted on.

In interviews we heard that, while policies have high expectations for inclusion of disabled children, some services do not enrol disabled children. While it is a breach of the Human Rights Act (1993) to discriminate on the grounds of disability, we heard some services tell parents they cannot enrol a disabled child as the service cannot ensure their safety.

Seventeen percent of parents also reported their child has been asked to stay home, for example, when there is an excursion. This is despite ECE regulations explicitly stating a service's curriculum must "enable children with special needs to be actively engaged in learning with and alongside the other children in the service."[32]

One parent told us:

> "We transferred to [the current service] with our oldest child when the centre he was previously enrolled at excluded him from a trip out of the centre. We were told he would have to stay home."
>
> **PARENT**

2) Workforce capability and capacity

When considering the skills and confidence of the ECE workforce, we explored two areas.

a) **Kaiako confidence and capability:** Do kaiako have the skills and confidence needed to deliver quality and inclusive education for disabled children?

b) **Ongoing learning:** Are teachers and learning support staff supported to improve their skills in education practice for disabled children?

a) Kaiako confidence and capability

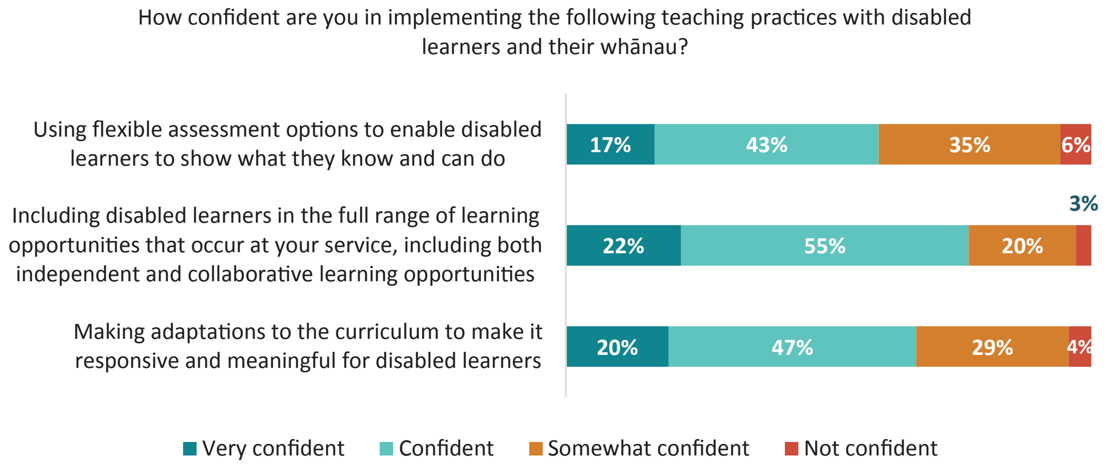
Low kaiako confidence is concerning

One of the key benefits of *Te Whāriki* is its broad, flexible framework that can be integrated with a wide range of philosophies and approaches. It is inclusive and can be adapted for all children's interests and needs. It should provide a strong framework to support disabled children's learning across a variety of areas and be a key resource of support for kaiako to deliver a curriculum for disabled children.

Service leaders are much more confident about kaiako capability to deliver an inclusive curriculum than kaiako themselves. Almost all (97 percent) leaders believe their service enables disabled children to access the full learning program. However, one third of kaiako reported they are either not confident or only somewhat confident about making adaptations to the curriculum for disabled learners. Additionally, 23 percent of kaiako are either not or only somewhat confident including disabled children in the full range of learning opportunities.

Forty percent of kaiako are either not or only somewhat confident in using flexible assessment to track disabled children's learning progress. Kaiako confidence across these three areas is shown in Figure 63.

Figure 63: *Confidence to support disabled children's learning: Kaiako survey*



When it came to understanding and acting on *Te Whāriki*'s expectations for children's learning, we seldom saw the curriculum being used effectively to support planning for disabled children's learning. This may be due to kaiako lacking awareness of available resources to support this, and confidence to do so. Only 42 percent of kaiako were aware of MoE's inclusive practice resource,[33] and less than a one in four (23 percent) were aware of Universal Design for Learning – a pedagogical approach to support learning and inclusion of disabled children.[34]

Kaiako are not confident to work in culturally responsive ways with Māori or Pacific disabled children

Over half (59 percent) of kaiako reported they are either not or only somewhat confident to work in a culturally responsive way with Māori disabled children. Only 64 percent of Pacific parents believe kaiako help their child learn about their culture, suggesting kaiako lack of confidence (and PLD support) may be having discernable impacts on their teaching practice.

Taken together, these findings reflect a general lack of kaiako confidence in differentiating the curriculum to support specific groups of disabled children.

Initial teacher education and early teaching experiences may not be supporting kaiako to work with disabled children

Given how comprehensive *Te Whāriki* is in its expectations for inclusive teaching, we wanted to understand the drivers for a lack of kaiako confidence. When we interviewed kaiako, leaders, and others, we heard there is a gap in Initial Teacher Education when it comes to strategies and approaches for working with disabled children.

In addition, 75 percent of kaiako reported they have not been mentored to teach disabled children during their beginning teacher experience. These two gaps in education and support mean kaiako may need to upskill on the job and through quality professional learning and development (PLD).

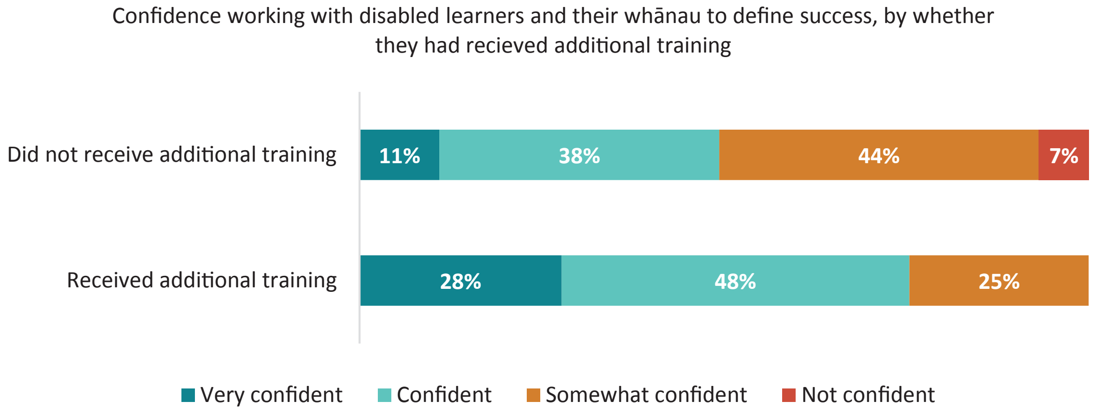
> “We’re not taught, back in study, about our tamariki with disabilities, or strategies [to use]. We’re not taught that. So I was having a hard time in my old centre; how can I support my nephew [who is autistic], what are the tools? Because we’re not taught, you know, what are the avenues? I wasn’t given anything. So coming to do my last year of practicum here was really an eye-opener on the way this whare, this home of ours provides for the tamariki here … I even looked into it, and tried to get my old centre into it, like, to try and find the strategies and the tools, to help our children because we’re forever learning – kaiako are forever learning on the go, there’s not a time where you just sit and you think, ‘oh, I’ve got all the knowledge.”
>
> **KAIAKO**

b) Ongoing learning

Ongoing learning improved kaiako confidence

Confidence teaching disabled children is closely linked with professional learning and development (PLD) and experience working with disabled learners. We found kaiako with more experience are more likely to have undertaken some additional training or to have worked alongside disability specialists, and are more likely to be confident about their ability to support disabled children’s learning (see Figure 64).

Figure 64: *Kaiako experience, and confidence to work with disabled children: Kaiako survey*



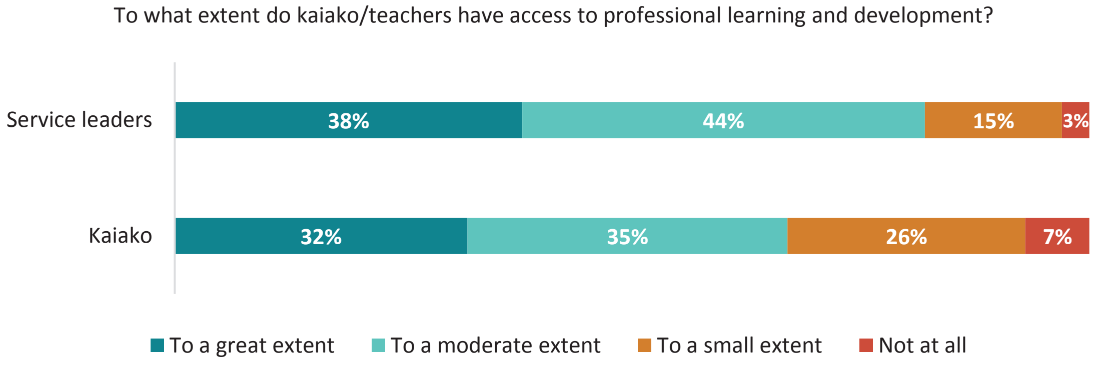
Kaiako have barriers to accessing PLD for disabled children

While leaders reported PLD is a priority for kaiako, not all kaiako reported they have good opportunities to access it (see Figure 65).

> “[Without training or experience] people don’t or can’t understand what the child is trying to do, how they are thinking.”
>
> **KAIAKO**

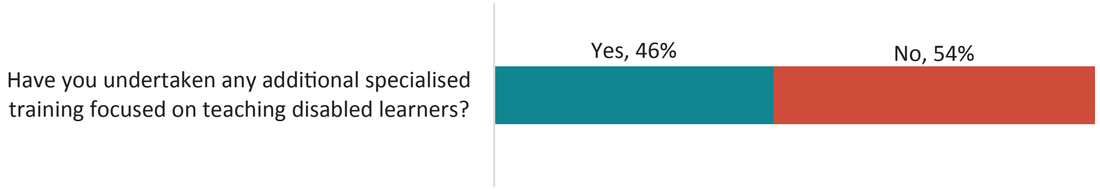
One in three kaiako reported limited access to PLD focused on supporting disabled children. When we spoke to them, we heard timing and resourcing are the key barriers. Given the importance of PLD for kaiako confidence and ability to provide quality support for disabled children, this difference in perception between kaiako and leaders about access to professional learning is a concern.

Figure 65: *Extent to which kaiako have access to professional learning and development: Kaiako and service leaders surveys*



Leaders are more positive than kaiako about the level of support for kaiako to access ongoing PLD. Eighty-two percent of leaders reported kaiako in their service have access to PLD relating to disabled children to a moderate or great extent. However, one third of kaiako reported no or only a small amount of support to access PLD. Over half (54 percent) of kaiako have not accessed PLD relating to disabled children at all (as shown in Figure 66).

Figure 66: *Experience of professional learning development on disabled learners: Kaiako survey*



Kaiako said it is difficult to find PLD when they need to access it. Cost is also a prohibitive factor. Kaiako and leaders told us some whānau and specialists support kaiako capability-building, but time and access to this support is unevenly spread across services. There are limited specialists available, and the time they have to support kaiako capability-building is also limited, making this a compounding problem.

Governing Organisations play a role in supporting ongoing learning

Some Governing Organisations step in to provide professional learning and development for their kaiako. They provide additional capability-building opportunities, for example, through creating a teaching role within the organisation to provide kaiako with targeted support for disabled children. Smaller organisations and standalone services are unlikely to be able to resource this kind of role to fill the gaps in quality support and PLD.

3) Inter-agency collaboration

This section covers two aspects of collaboration.

a) **Collaboration with support services:** Do services have timely access to support agencies, and do they work well together?

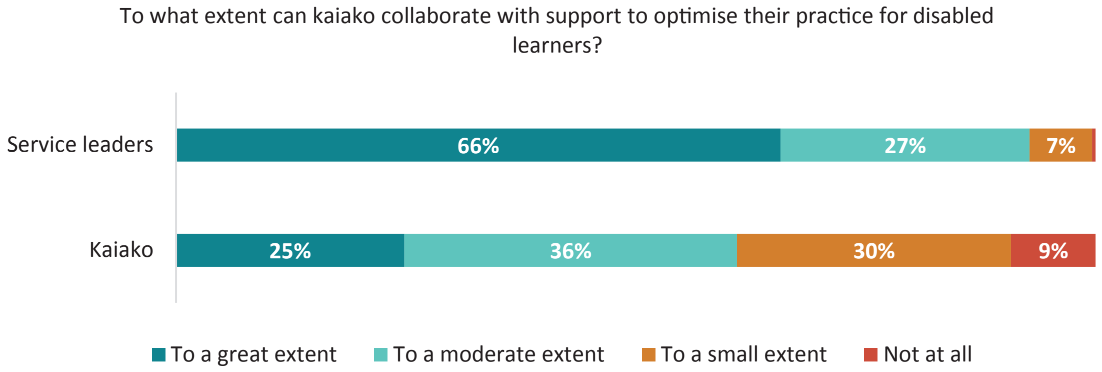
b) **Collaboration with other ECE services and schools:** How well do agencies and ECE services work together to provide support for kaiako, children, and their parents/whānau?

a) Collaboration with support services

Many kaiako, parents and leaders are dissatisfied with their access to support

While 93 percent of leaders believe kaiako can coordinate with support agencies from a moderate to a great extent, nearly two in five kaiako (39 percent) believe they have no or only limited access to specialists and learning support leaders (see Figure 67). Twenty-seven percent of kaiako reported time during the paid workday for them to work with specialists is either not available or available to only a small extent.

Figure 67: *Collaboration with support to optimise disabled children's engagement and learning: Kaiako and service leaders surveys*



Thirty seven percent of parents were not satisfied with how their child's ECE collaborates with external agencies.

> "I feel that it [the child's ILP] doesn't necessarily value all spaces the child spends time in. I don't really see kindy in it to be honest."
>
> **SERVICE LEADER**

Some of this dissatisfaction may be due to parents', kaiako, and leaders' expectations of what kind of support they want, versus what is available. In interviews, we heard that MoE support has shifted from mainly supporting individual children to having a greater emphasis on upskilling kaiako to better help children. The implementation of this adjustment seems to be poorly understood as, in some services, ESWs are still primarily providing individual support to disabled children.

Through interviews we heard organisations and agencies in some regions have developed strong relationships and processes to enable timely and responsive support for children and kaiako, but this is not a common experience.

> "There is a long wait – once we have parents on board and we make a referral, but I know we are lucky. We have a close relationship with the early intervention teacher who tends to pick up most of our referrals, so I think because of that – for example we put through recently three or four speech language referrals and because they see our service name and kaiako name they know us and what we do. We still have to wait awhile but the communication is quite strong. Or we will phone the early intervention teacher and go over a hypothetical situation. She will give us advice and guide us on what to do. We then put in the referral and wait."
>
> **SERVICE LEADER**

b) Collaboration with other services and schools

There is an opportunity to strengthen collaboration.

When it comes to collaboration more broadly, more than half of service leaders (54 percent) said they and kaiako either never or rarely ever collaborate with ECE networks and/or schools to improve education for disabled learners.

Some Kindergarten Associations work with other Kindergarten Associations to share knowledge and resources. When looking at collaboration among ECE services across different Governing Organisations, we found it is rare. We heard some ECE services are working with others in their Kāhui Ako[l] to support disabled children, however, this is not widespread.

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[l] Kāhui Ako | Communities of Learning are groups of education settings across the learning pathway that work together to help learners achieve. They can include settings across both English and Māori medium, and early learning services through to secondary schools.

> “We are part of the Kāhui Ako, and one of the things we did last year, we accessed – because I’m one of the ECE reps … we got a series of five modules on ASD which we put out to [the greater area], and we just invite everyone in the area to our PD’s (professional developments). We put them on, different centres host them once a month, and anyone that’s interested can come along. Those sessions were amazing.”
>
> **LEADER**

4) Good transitions

We explored how well coordinated entry into ECE is, as well as the quality of transitions between ECE and schools.

a) **Entry into ECE:** Is disabled children’s entry into ECE well-planned and coordinated, and responsive to their individual needs?

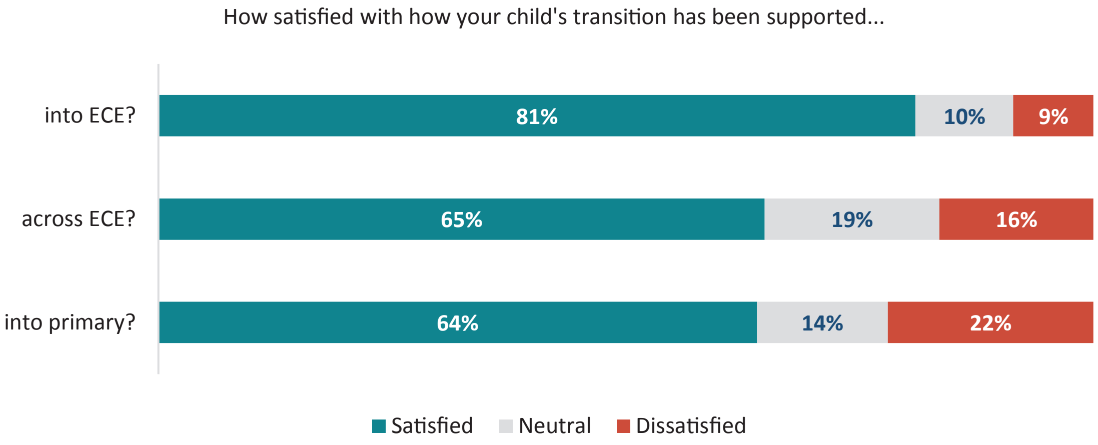
b) **Through or between ECE services:** Are disabled children’s transitions between rooms within a service, or between different ECE services, well planned, coordinated and responsive to their individual needs?

c) **Transition from ECE to school:** Is the transition from ECE to school well planned, coordinated and responsive to individual needs? Do agencies and educational institutions communicate and work well together to support the learner and their whānau?

While entry into ECE is going well, the quality of transitions declines as disabled children progress through the system

While transitions into ECE look very positive, we found that transitions from ECE into school settings are not working as well (see Figure 68). Communication and information-sharing are the key areas of concern.

Figure 68: *Satisfaction with support for disabled child’s transitions: Parents survey*

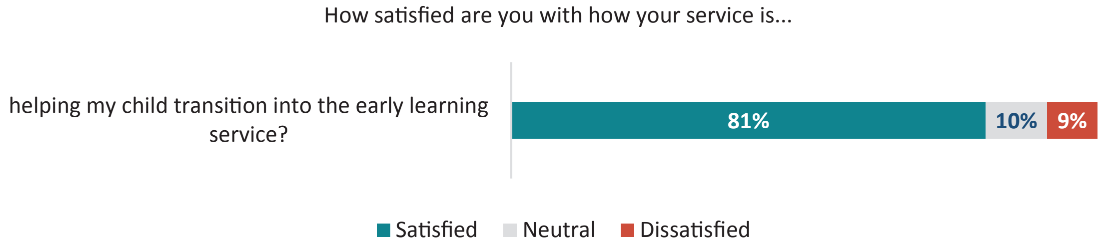


a) Entry into ECE

Parents are generally positive about their disabled child's entry into ECE

A strong, positive start in ECE sets disabled children and their whānau up for ongoing positive experiences and expectations of the education system. In our parent survey we found the majority of parents (81 percent) are satisfied with how their child is supported to start ECE (see Figure 69). Services actively seek to engage parents and learn how they want their child to be supported in the service.

Figure 69: *Satisfaction with their disabled child's entry into ECE: Parents survey*



Through interviews with kaiako, parents, and leaders, we also learnt that, when it comes to enrolling and supporting disabled learners, services are largely reactive. They only make adaptations to the environment when concerns are raised about suitability when enrolling disabled children. This may mean delays in starting for disabled children, as they may have to wait for the service to complete the necessary accessibility adaptations.

Practice example 12: Challenge with information sharing around transitions

Anna is a three-year-old girl with global developmental delay and cerebral palsy. She has a wheelchair, and has to take regular breaks from it. She is supported by an early intervention teacher, speech therapist and other specialists, and has one hour a day of one-to-one support from a support worker. Anna attends an education and care service that caters for children from zero to six years. Her mother sees she is excited to go, loves her nursery and support worker, and has a strong sense of belonging at her service.

When Anna started at the service, her mother explained Anna's needs to the kaiako – she must not be left alone if she is in her wheelchair. If kaiako are unable to closely supervise Anna, she can have time on the floor (out of her wheelchair). As staff left or got sick, Anna's primary kaiako changed too, and the message was lost – Anna needs close supervision.

When Anna was in the process of transitioning from the younger children's room to the older children's room at her service, she had an accident. She fell down some stairs in her wheelchair. Her mother immediately put a pause on the transition as she was concerned about Anna's safety.

Anna's kaiako and mother realised Anna needs one-to-one support to be safe and included, and decided Anna can only go to the next room with her support worker for the one hour per day she has that support, or if a teacher is able to give her one-to-one support. Otherwise, she stays in the room with the younger children. Kaiako are also looking for other ways to enable Anna to participate full time, including funding to cover more one-to-one support.

Anna's mother is concerned about the learning opportunities Anna is missing while being held back with the younger children. She also misses learning opportunities when taking breaks from her wheelchair – Anna can only be in her wheelchair for around 45 minutes at a time. After that, she needs a break where she is either held or lays on the floor on her back. Anna's mother does not know what kaiako do to keep Anna included during her breaks.

Despite the accident, Anna's mother appreciates how much kaiako care for her child:

> “They have been amazing. Don't get me wrong. They have been amazing. They do love my girls. They do give the girls the support that they need. [Anna] is happy to go there.”

b) Through or between ECE services

Disabled children's transitions through or between ECE services are not as well coordinated

For parents who reported their child has transitioned across ECE settings, it was generally not as positive as their entry into the ECE they currently attend. Only 65 percent of parents were satisfied. We heard that information-sharing and communication across ECE services do not support this process well.

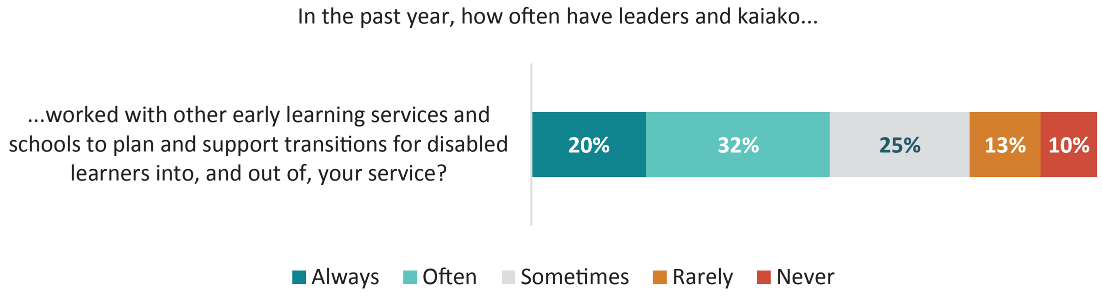
c) Transitions from ECE to schools

Kaiako and leaders in ECE are proactive in supporting transitions

Kaiako and service learners reported they are proactive when it came to supporting transitions to school (see Figure 70). They reported they planned for and supported transitions well (82 percent of leaders, 74 percent of kaiako).

> “Children deserve a really thoughtful, helpful and respectful transition to school – I feel really strongly about this.”
>
> **LEADER**

Figure 70: *How often service leaders and kaiako worked with other services and schools to support transitions: Service leaders survey*



Kaiako and service leaders are less positive about engaging with schools. They told us schools prefer to work with specialists or MoE early intervention staff rather than ECE leaders or kaiako. This is a lost opportunity to improve transitions for families, particularly in the area of information sharing.

Transitions from ECE to school are not working as well as entry to ECE

Parents find the transition to school challenging

When we looked at transitioning from ECE to school, parent satisfaction dropped to 64 percent. About one in five parents reported they are not satisfied with their child’s transition to school, more than twice that of entry into ECE (see Figure 68). They told us that working through funding entitlements can be a traumatic experience because of the way they have to present their child when applying for ORS funding[m] and communicating their child’s disability and needs. In interviews, we heard some of this may be a consequence of moving from an ECE strengths-based approach to, more often, a medical model when entering the school context.

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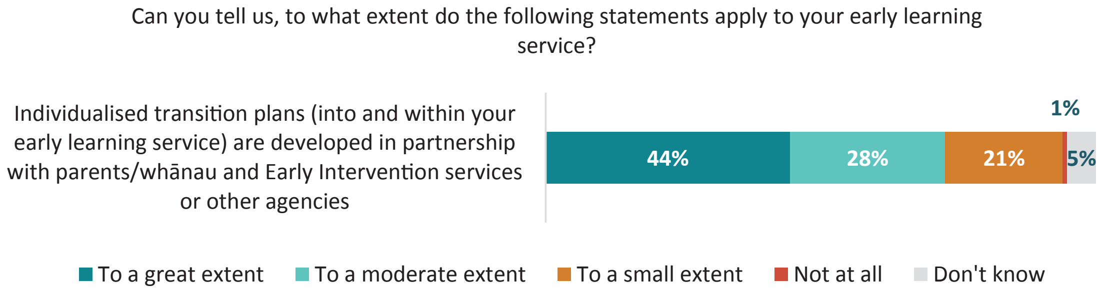
[m] The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) provides funding and support for students with the highest levels of ongoing need (Ministry of Education, 2021. Ongoing Resourcing Scheme).

The quality of transitions for disabled children into school is also discussed in the school report, *Thriving at School? Education for Disabled Learners in Schools*. Data collected for that report also included a survey of parents with school-aged disabled learners, using a separate group to those in this report. Parents reported similarly regarding transitions into primary school (see Figure 68). However, they found that disabled children's experiences of entering school are much better than when they are leaving school.

Transition plans are not always well developed or communicated

When we surveyed kaiako, about one in five reported individualised transition plans for children are either not developed with families and support agencies, or are developed in partnership to only a small extent (see Figure 71).

Figure 71: *Extent to which transition plans are developed in partnership: Kaiako survey*



In interviews, we heard that maintaining a flow of information from ECE kaiako and support services to teachers and support services working in schools is challenging. Parents struggle with the need to re-establish the case for their child's need for support. They find it challenging having to explain to new people who their child is, and their strengths, interests, and needs.

Navigating the different models of provision and ways of thinking about learning is difficult for whānau. Some parents are concerned about the big difference in ratios between kaiako and children. In their ECE service, they have relatively small ratios, whereas classrooms in schools have many more children per teacher. Whānau worry this will mean less support for their child. Whānau of disabled children may need more support to understand the different world of school.

> “It would be nice to know earlier what to look out for. I have in my mind, like, a sheet of paper that says 'you are here, you're going to here'. What's the process, who is everyone going to talk to? Because it can be quite overwhelming. Because I'm not quite sure – I don't know what the transition to school looks like.”
>
> **PARENT**

5) System monitoring, evaluation, and accountability

This section covers three areas.

a) **Data is collected:** Is relevant data about participation, engagement, and achievement of all disabled children effectively and systematically collected and analysed nationally?

b) **Evidence is used:** Are evidence and insights from data used to inform policies and plans?

c) **The system is held accountable:** Are services and agencies held accountable for the inclusion of disabled children and the quality of provision they receive?

a) Data is collected

There is an absence of system-level data about disabled children in ECE

Some Governing Organisations and agencies in some regions collect data on the disabled children they work with. However, there is a lack of system-level data about disabled children. A key challenge in resolving this issue is the absence of an agreed way of defining and identifying this group of children in ECE.

Practice example 13: Organisations collecting data for internal use

ERO spoke with the Learning Support Teacher of a Kindergarten Association who coordinates learning support across the Association. She told us they have developed a "Learning support register" which logs information about the types of support children need, and what they were receiving. This practice of collecting systematic data on the additional learning needs children might have is one her contacts at other organisations also find useful.

> “[I] made connections with other Kindergarten Associations around NZ, talked to people with a similar role – we network and share our practice.”

She told ERO that having a centralised way to track this information helps her advocate for services and for children – to the MoE, to specialists, and to the Kindergarten Association itself. She said it “gives solid statistical data” she can take to the Association and its board and use it to make informed decisions. She said it helps to have an understanding of where children with additional learning needs are, what their needs are, what support they are getting, and what still needs to be put in place. This way

> “children don’t just go on the register and stay there forever.”

They get the support they need. Kaiako are asked to log children when they identify they might need extra support, not just those that will be referred. This might be a child they are doing a little bit extra with – they record where they are at, what support is in place, by who, and what the kaiako deem the level of need to be.

We reviewed the range of data available and interviewed a wide variety of people about system-level data on disabled children, the support they receive, and the outcomes they experience. We found that, although the MoE holds funding information, there is also no direct monitoring of disabled children as not all disabled children receive funded support. There is also no national data providing a clear view of how many disabled children are enrolled, and the kinds of support they and their families receive.

b) Evidence is used

The absence of system-level data means the use of evidence and evaluation is ad hoc

Through interviews, it was not clear how consistent expectations and practice is ensured across the different support services and agencies as there is no system-level data suitable to support an evaluation of inclusion of disabled children. This may be contributing to the varied practices ECE leaders and kaiako reported, as they have few points of reference against which to improve.

In some regions, agencies use the data they collect about disabled children to inform meaningful change, for example, reducing wait times by changing their referral process. This demonstrates the value of using data to monitor and evaluate practices as it can drive substantive change for disabled learners at the service level.

However, the lack of system-level data on education for disabled children means there is currently a lack of meaningful information about this cohort of learners – information that is necessary if there is to be whole-of-system improvement.

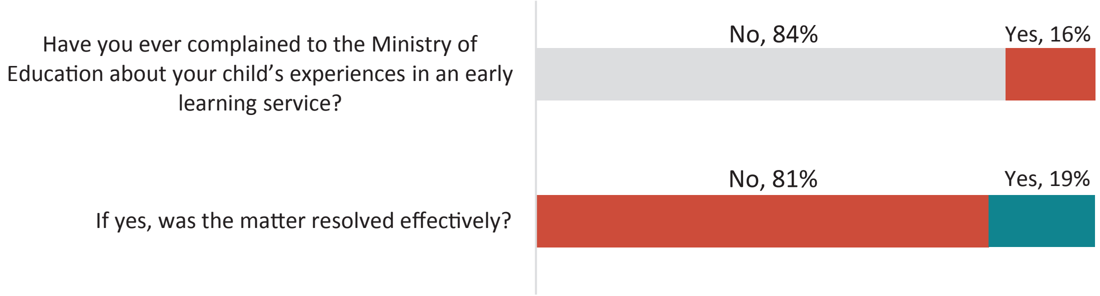
c) The system is held accountable

The mechanisms for parents to hold the system accountable are not working well

In the past, the MoE has attempted to engage with parents and whānau about their experiences and to hear their ideas for improvement, but many parents (57 percent) were unaware of MoE's consultations on education for disabled learners (for example, Kōrero Mātauranga and draft Learning Support Action Plan in 2018).

One in six parents (16 percent) who responded to our survey reported they have complained to MoE about provision for their child, and 81 percent of those parents indicated they are not satisfied with how their complaint was resolved (see Figure 72). This evidence suggests that whānau and parents are either unaware of how to achieve changes or are unsuccessful in getting the change they seek.

Figure 72: *Complaints to Ministry of Education, and whether they were resolved effectively: Parents survey*



Conclusion

While there are clear expectations for disabled children's inclusion and quality education provision in ECE, the lack of monitoring and accountability means it is unclear how well these expectations are being met. This means some services are able to turn away disabled children, without consequence.

Kaiako confidence and capability is a concern, as this is a strong determinant of the quality of learning opportunities disabled children receive. Reassuringly, increased experience and participation in ongoing professional learning and development strengthens kaiako confidence.

There is variability in the access to and quality of collaboration between ECE services, and between services and support agencies. This impacts the quality of wrap-around support children receive.

Disabled children generally have positive experiences entering ECE. Their parents are less positive about their transitions between services, and between ECE and schools. This is a key point of tension for parents and whānau, with several describing it as "traumatic".

As a result, we are making recommendations across three areas:

1) strengthening prioritisation and accountability for disabled children
2) building leaders' and teachers' capability to teach disabled children
3) empowering disabled children and their whānau.

The next section provides detail on our recommendations.

Part 10: Findings and areas for action – how can we improve education outcomes for disabled children?

The three questions we asked for this evaluation led to 12 key findings that sit across this work. Based on these findings, we have identified four areas for action which have the potential to strengthen education for these priority learners. This section sets out the findings, areas for action, and our recommendations for improvement.

In this evaluation of the quality and inclusiveness of education provision for disabled children in English medium early childhood education, we answered three key questions.

1) How well are disabled children doing?
2) What is the quality and inclusiveness of education provision (including teaching and learning practice)?
3) How strong are the system enablers that support more inclusive and higher quality education?

ERO's evaluation found 12 key findings:

Finding 1: National expectations for disabled children's inclusion in ECE are robust and well communicated, but there is not yet systematic, system-level monitoring of how well these expectations are being met.

Finding 2: Strong expectations for inclusion are not consistently translated into enrolment and practice. Disabled children with complex needs are much more likely to be turned away from a service than those with low needs.

Finding 3: The wellbeing of disabled children is generally well-supported, with most parents reporting their child has a sense of belonging at their service. However, disabled children are not fully included in their service.

Finding 4: There is a lack of information showing how well disabled children are learning and progressing towards their learning goals.

Finding 5: Children with more complex needs find it harder to access ECE and have poorer experiences when they are enrolled.

Finding 6: Parents of Māori disabled children are satisfied with their child's experience, but kaiako report a lack of confidence in ensuring Māori disabled children succeed as Māori.

Finding 7: Many services do not have good information about how well they are providing for disabled children.

Finding 8: *Te Whāriki* is designed to be flexible and inclusive, enabling adaptation to children's strengths, interests, and needs. However, kaiako are not confident adapting their service's curriculum for disabled children.

Finding 9: Services' physical environments are almost always appropriate for the children currently attending, however, they are not universally accessible. This may be a barrier to enrolment for those children who need additional adaptations, such as specialist changing facilities or wheelchair access.

Finding 10: Parents, kaiako, and leaders have strong, positive relationships, but they are often not working together to support disabled children's learning. A strong learning-focused partnership between parents and kaiako is particularly important for disabled children's success.

Finding 11: Many services are not working collaboratively with other services, schools, and specialists to improve education for disabled children. Kaiako and parents are not satisfied with their access to, or collaboration with, others.

Finding 12: Transitions from ECE into school settings are not working well. Communication and information-sharing between ECE and school are the key areas of concern.

In this section we summarise the evidence across the report that supports these findings, and identify areas for action to address them.

Twelve key findings

Finding 1: National expectations for disabled children's inclusion in ECE are robust and well communicated, but there is not yet systematic, system-level monitoring of how well these expectations are being met.

While system expectations are clear (for example, as articulated in *Te Whāriki*, and Governing Organisations' documents) there is no systematic monitoring of how well those expectations are met. We cannot identify disabled children or track their progress and experiences, which severely limits Government's ability to drive improvement.

Finding 2: Strong expectations for inclusion are not consistently translated into enrolment and practice. Disabled children with complex needs are much more likely to be turned away from a service than those with low needs.

A significant proportion of parents of disabled children reported not all services are welcoming, and they have been discouraged from enrolling their child in a service. One quarter (26 percent) of parents of disabled children have been discouraged from enrolling their child at one or more services. Nearly one in five parents have been asked to keep their child at home at least once (not related to government Covid-19 restrictions).

Finding 3: The wellbeing of disabled children is generally well-supported, with most parents reporting their child has a sense of belonging at their service. However, disabled children are not fully included in their service.

Most parents of disabled children report their child's wellbeing is strongly supported in the service they attend. They feel loved, cared for and comfortable. However, only two thirds of parents are satisfied their child is included in all aspects of life at the service. Over a third disagree their child has good friends at the service.

Finding 4: There is a lack of information showing how well disabled children are learning and progressing towards their learning goals.

It is unclear how well disabled learners are progressing against their learning goals because assessment does not consistently show learning or progress. Approximately half of kaiako are not sharing children's learning with parents or identifying their next steps for learning.

Forty percent of kaiako are either not, or only somewhat, confident to use flexible assessment to show disabled children's learning. Assessment documentation focuses on what children have done, rather than what they have learnt.

Finding 5: Children with more complex needs find it harder to access ECE and have poorer experiences when they are enrolled.

Children with more complex needs are more likely to experience exclusion. One third of parents of children with complex needs have been discouraged from enrolling their child at one or more ECE services, compared to no parents of disabled children with low needs. Fewer than half of parents of children with complex needs reported their service supports their child to be included, and only one third of parents of children with complex needs are often included in learning conversations with their child's kaiako.

Finding 6: Parents of Māori disabled children are satisfied with their child's experience, but kaiako report a lack of confidence in ensuring Māori disabled children succeed as Māori.

Almost all parents of Māori disabled children reported their child enjoys going to their service, and agree their child feels loved, cared for, and comfortable attending.

While 68 percent of parents of Māori disabled children feel that kaiako help support their child to learn about their culture, nearly two-thirds of kaiako have limited confidence in working in a culturally responsive way with Māori disabled children, and around one fifth believe kaiako in their service do not work with whānau to enhance learning and wellbeing for Māori disabled children.

Finding 7: Many services do not have good information about how well they are providing for disabled children.

Services often lack focus on disabled children. Forty-one percent of leaders reported provision for disabled children is rarely or never a focus of internal evaluation. Across almost all questions, and in interviews, service leaders were much more positive about the quality of provision for disabled children than parents or kaiako.

For example:

- ninety-eight percent of service leaders believe their service enables disabled children access to the full learning programme
- sixty-six percent of parents are satisfied their child is included in all aspects of life in the service
- seventy-seven percent of kaiako are confident to include disabled children in the full range of learning opportunities.

Finding 8: *Te Whāriki* is designed to be flexible and inclusive, enabling adaptation to children's strengths, interests, and needs. However, kaiako are not confident adapting their service's curriculum for disabled children.

Nearly two-thirds of parents are satisfied with how kaiako adapt the learning programme for their child. However, 33 percent of kaiako reported a lack of confidence in making adaptations to the curriculum for disabled children.

Kaiako indicated a lack of confidence when using specialised resources/adaptations where required.

Finding 9: Services' physical environments are almost always appropriate for the children currently attending, however, they are not universally accessible. This may be a barrier to enrolment for those children who need additional adaptations, such as specialist changing facilities or wheelchair access.

Most leaders and parents reported the physical environment of their ECE service is fully accessible for disabled learners.

Through observations, we found spaces are accessible for the children currently attending, but some areas would not be suitable for children with different types of disability. In interviews, we heard some service leaders have to make adaptations to their service when children with different types of disability enrol. This may mean parents choose to enrol their child at a different service, so they do not have to wait for a fully accessible ECE environment.

Finding 10: Parents, kaiako, and leaders have strong, positive relationships, but they are often not working together to support disabled children's learning. A strong learning-focused partnership between parents and kaiako is particularly important for disabled children's success.

Almost all kaiako, leaders, and parents are positive about the relationships they develop. However, 46 percent of parents feel kaiako never or only sometimes discuss their child's learning goals with them, and 55 percent said kaiako never or only sometimes discuss their child's next steps.

Only 66 percent of parents are satisfied with how their service works with them around their child's individual learning plan. One third (38 percent) of kaiako lack confidence to work with whānau to define success.

Finding 11: Many services are not working collaboratively with other services, schools, and specialists to improve education for disabled children. Kaiako and parents are not satisfied with their access to, or collaboration with, others.

More than half (54 percent) service leaders said they either never or rarely ever collaborate with ECE networks and/or schools to improve education for disabled learners.

Two in five kaiako believe they have no or only limited access to specialists and learning support leaders. Twenty-seven percent of kaiako reported that paid leave to work with specialists is either not available, or available to only a small extent.

Only 63 percent of parents are satisfied with how their child's ECE collaborates with external agencies.

Finding 12: Transitions from ECE into school settings are not working well. Communication and information sharing between ECE and school are the key areas of concern.

Transitions from ECE to school are an area of challenge. While 9 percent of parents are dissatisfied with their child's entry into ECE, 22 percent are dissatisfied with how their child's transition from ECE to school is supported. In interviews, we heard the process of applying for funding, and sharing documents and information with schools and the support systems at schools, is a difficult and sometimes traumatic process for parents.

Four areas for action

Based on this evaluation, we have identified four areas to raise the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled children.

Area 1: Strengthening prioritisation and accountability for disabled children.

Area 2: Building leaders' and teachers' capability to teach disabled children.

Area 3: Empowering disabled children and their whānau.

Area 4: Better coordination and collaboration.

Action Area 1: Strengthen prioritisation and accountability for disabled children

To increase the prioritisation of disabled children in early education, and visibility of how well they are doing in terms of learning and progress, ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education and ERO work together to develop and implement the following five recommendations.

- **Recommendation 1:** Develop with services ways to better identify and track the enrolment and participation of disabled children in ECE at a national level (MoE).
- **Recommendation 2:** Provide guidance to services on expectations for inclusion and provision of education for disabled children, and what needs to be in place in all services (MoE).

- **Recommendation 3:** Provide support for service leaders and Governing Organisations on understanding how well their service is meeting the needs of disabled children (ERO).
- **Recommendation 4:** Include provision and outcomes for disabled children as a focus in all ECE evaluations (ERO).
- **Recommendation 5:** Explore policy options to support services to reduce the barriers to enrolment and participation for disabled children in high quality ECE (MoE).

Implementing these recommendations will provide greater visibility at a national level of how well disabled children are doing in terms learning and progress, and improve support and accountability for service leaders on their legislative obligations and how these should be enacted.

Action Area 2: Building leaders' and teachers' capability to teach disabled children

To increase disabled children's sense of belonging and acceptance in early education, and kaiako confidence in teaching disabled children, we recommend that the Ministry of Education, ERO, and the Teaching Council work together to develop and implement the following recommendations.

- **Recommendation 6:** Continue to strengthen initial teacher education's focus on teaching disabled children (Teaching Council).
- **Recommendation 7:** Strengthen beginner teacher induction and mentoring (MoE, Teaching Council).
- **Recommendation 8:** Ensure guidance and other supports around the professional standards for teachers (*Our Code, Our Standards*) make explicit the expectations for inclusion of disabled children (Teaching Council, MoE).
- **Recommendation 9:** Include disability as a priority in professional learning and development provision for kaiako and encourage uptake of disability specific training (MoE).
- **Recommendation 10:** Review the quality of disability-specific PLD provision for ECE leaders and kaiako and provide services with guidance on how to identify quality, targeted PLD and support to improve their practice (MoE, ERO).
- **Recommendation 11:** Ensure guidelines, resources, and supports (assessment, curriculum, scaffolding etc.) for teaching disabled children are in place, including supports to notice, recognise, and respond to progressions for disabled children, and support awareness and use of these (MoE).

Together, these recommendations will build service leader and kaiako knowledge and capability to teach disabled children and, in doing so, improve disabled children's experience of, and outcomes at, early education.

Action area 3: Empowering disabled children and their whānau

To increase disabled children's whānau's understanding of their education rights, how to raise concerns or make a complaint about their experience at ECE, or how to get someone to advocate on their behalf, we recommend that the Ministry of Education develops and implements the following recommendation.

- **Recommendation 12:** Ensure there is support for parents and whānau to understand education rights, what they should expect from a service, how to raise concerns and complaints, and how to access to advocacy support if they need it (MoE).

Implementing this recommendation will ensure disabled children and their whānau are informed of their education rights, have access to independent advocacy if they need it, and provide greater visibility and accountability of complaints at a national level.

Action area 4: Better coordination and collaboration

To improve the coordination of supports for disabled children, and pathways from ECE to school, we recommend that the Ministry of Education lead a programme of work with Whaikaha | Ministry of Disabled People to develop and implement the following recommendations.

- **Recommendation 13:** Ensure that tools and guidance are in place, and support awareness and use of these, so that information follows disabled learners across education settings (MoE).
- **Recommendation 14:** Improve coordination across agencies on supporting disabled children's education (Whaikaha | Ministry of Disabled People, MoE).

Acting on these recommendations will ensure continuity of provision and smooth transitions as disabled children and their whānau move through their education.

Conclusion

Improving education for disabled children has the potential to dramatically improve their and their whānau's lives and life course trajectory. Disabled children must be prioritised in early childhood education to ensure they have the best chance of lifelong success. Together, these recommendations have the potential to significantly improve education experiences and outcomes for disabled children. Coordinated and focused work across agencies is needed to take these recommendations forward and ensure change occurs. This report provides valuable information and evidence to support these improvements.

Part 11: Next steps

ERO evaluated the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled children in English medium early childhood education services. We identified 12 key findings and four areas for action. The recommendations outlined under each area for action require development and approval from Ministers. We propose relevant agencies report back to Ministers in July 2023.

ERO last evaluated the quality of inclusion for disabled children in ECE in 2012.[35] In 2012, we found nearly all services with children with moderate or high needs were mostly or very inclusive. The current evaluation found that many issues identified in 2012 still persist. These include low kaiako and leader confidence to adapt teaching for disabled children, and a lack of focus on disabled children in services' evaluation of their provision for children. We have made recommendations to strengthen the quality of education for disabled children.

Given the issues we found, we will continue to monitor, evaluate, and report on education for these children. We intend to review this provision again in 2026/27. It is our hope that, by that time, we will see improvements based on the action areas we have identified:

1) greater prioritisation and accountability of education experiences and outcomes for disabled children
2) stronger capability of leaders and kaiako in teaching disabled children
3) more informed and empowered parents and whānau
4) better coordination and collaboration.

Implementing the recommendations

The recommendations outlined in Part 10 are high level and require a coordinated work programme across the Ministry of Education, ERO, Teaching Council, and Whaikaha | Ministry of Disabled People. We recommend that the agencies involved develop implementation plans and report back to Ministers on progress by July 2023.

For ERO's part, we will:

- provide support for service leaders and Governing Organisations on how to understand how well their service is meeting the needs of disabled children
- strengthen the focus on provision and outcomes for disabled children in all ECE evaluations, and require service leaders to report on provision for disabled children as part of their education evaluation
- review the quality of disability-specific PLD provision for ECE leaders and kaiako.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Methods

Our evaluation questions

This evaluation looked at the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled children in ECE. We answered four key questions:

1) How well are disabled children doing?
2) What is the quality and inclusivity of early childhood education provision (including teaching and learning practice) for disabled children?
3) How strong are the system enablers that support more inclusive and higher quality education?
4) What key actions could lead to improved outcomes for disabled children?

Analytical framework

In developing an analytical framework for this evaluation:

- we started with a conceptual socio-ecological model which places the disabled child (and their whānau) at the center of the education eco-system that consists of service and system-level factors that interact with each other
- we used a simplified theory of change to identify the following levels for analysis:
  - outcomes for disabled children (learning, engagement, and wellbeing)
  - inclusive services providing quality teaching and learning for disabled children
  - system enablers supporting inclusive education for disabled children
- we then developed a detailed evaluation framework, which identifies key components that support inclusive education at the level of the service and education system. The framework was informed by latest national and international research and was tested with experts and practitioners.

An overview of this framework is presented in Appendix 2.

Defining level and complexity of need

In order to establish the level and complexity of need of their child, we asked parents a range of questions based on the Washington Group Child Functioning Module, an internationally established measure used by UNICEF. It was adapted to fit an Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood context, through consultation with our Expert Advisory Group.

The questions broadly come under five areas:

- sensory challenges
- physical challenges
- communication challenges
- intellectual impairment
- neurodiversity.

Each area includes three to five questions.

In each question, parents were asked to identify the level of challenge children had with different activities. Parents could indicate their child had no difficulty, some difficulty, a lot of difficulty, or that they could not do it at all.

From this we established the following definition:

Level of need	How we defined it	Proportion in our survey
Complex	Children who had a lot of difficulty, or could not do something across any three of the five areas.	52%
High	Children who had a lot of difficulty, or could not do something across any two of the five areas.	16%
Moderate	Children who had a lot of difficulty, or could not do something in one area or some difficulty in three or more of the five areas.	27%
Low	Children who had some difficulty across one to two of the five areas.	4%

According to this measure, all parents reported their child had at least a low level of need.

Mixed methods approach to data collection

This evaluation used a complementary mix of quantitative and qualitative data sources to ensure breadth and depth in examining the key evaluation questions:

a) ensuring **breadth** to provide system judgement on the key evaluation questions and a national picture through:
  - online surveys of a sample of services (leaders and kaiako)
  - online surveys of disabled children's parents and whānau – sent out via services and disability networks
  - interviews with key system informants
  - literature review, administrative data, and interviews with key informants and experts.

b) ensuring **depth** in understanding how services are (or are not) being inclusive; what good looks like; and what needs to improve, through:
  - case studies with interviews with services and site visits
  - interviews with disabled children's parents and whānau.

Case studies: Service interviews and site visits

A sample of 24 services across the country were invited to participate in the case study component of this evaluation. We selected services which had significant experience with disabled children (identified through a screening email survey) and that provided good regional and demographic coverage across the country. The interviews were conducted by ERO's team, which included those with specialist experience in reviewing early childhood practice.

In 22 services, we interviewed the service leader and at least one kaiako. In one service, we spoke only with kaiako. In one other service, we spoke only to leaders. We also reviewed key documents (for example, service philosophy, curriculum, and a sample of IEPs). Most of the interviews were conducted during Term 1 and 2 of 2022. To minimize risks of Covid-19 transmission, most of these interviews were conducted through videoconferencing. Nine service site visits with observations were conducted in May 2022.

Profile of services which participated in the field work:

- Service type:
  - Two Playcentres
  - Two Homebased networks
  - Eight Kindergartens
  - Twelve Education and care services
- Regional spread:
  - Eight services located in the Auckland Region
  - Four services located in the Hawke's Bay Region
  - Eight services located in the Wellington Region
  - Four services located in the Canterbury Region
- Ethnic spread:
  - Seven services with Māori children making up more than 30 percent of their roll (four with majority Māori children)
  - Four services with Pacific children making up more than 20 percent of their roll

The interviews with service staff were guided by semi-structured questions that were developed from the framework on inclusive practice for disabled children. Based on analysis of key documents and interviews with key staff, the evaluation team assessed each school against 17 indicators across five levers in the framework. This assessment led to a description of how the service was performing on each lever and indicator.

This helped the evaluation team identify examples of good practice and to understand what the key contributing factors were. Similarly, the team was able to identify examples of issues and challenges that services were facing and understand the main contributing factors. The insights from the interviews were used to identify particular areas/questions to examine further through surveys, and also helped in understanding the patterns that emerged from the survey data.

We also interviewed leaders from eight Governing Organisations.

Interviews with parents and whānau of disabled children

We conducted interviews with 22 parents and whānau of disabled learners. Each interview was led by two evaluators. To minimize risks related to Covid-19 transmission, nearly all of the interviews were conducted remotely through phone or videoconferencing (depending on the preference of the parent).

The families were nominated by the services which participated in the case studies.

Service surveys

We invited 2,690 services to participate in online surveys. These services represent all of the English medium early childhood services which, based on Ministry of Education 2020 data, have at least one child receiving Early Intervention Funding. This also included a range of services from Auckland, Hawkes Bay, Wellington, and Canterbury who responded to an email query from ERO asking services if they currently had children enrolled who have additional learning needs, or are disabled – and would be happy to participate in this project. These services were also approached for interviews.

We used the publicly available information on the Ministry of Education site Education counts to obtain email contacts for all 2,690 services. An email inviting leaders, kaiako, and parents of disabled children to participate in our surveys was sent to those addresses, with a request for the relevant information to be passed to each respondent.

In March 2022, we received survey responses from:

- 130 kaiako
- 291 service leaders.

Profile of kaiako and leaders who responded to the survey in March 2022:

- Ethnicity: 65 percent were Pākehā, 12 percent were Māori, 9 percent were Asian, 3 percent were Pacific, and 10 percent were other.
- Region: 29 percent were from Auckland, 13 percent were from Canterbury, 10 percent were from Wellington, 8 percent were from Bay of Plenty, 7 percent were from Manawatu, 6 percent were from Waikato, 6 percent were from Otago, 5 percent were from Taranaki, 4 percent were from Southland, 3 percent were from Northland, 3 percent were from Hawkes Bay, 2 percent were from Nelson, 1 percent were from Gisborne, 1 percent were from Marlborough, 1 percent were from Wairarapa, and 1 percent were from Tasman.

Parent surveys

We sent out online surveys to parents and whānau of disabled children through three channels:

a) services who participated in the case studies or surveys

b) disability support organizations and networks

c) specialist early childhood education providers.

Parents or learners who needed help to complete the survey were invited to contact the Office for Disability Issues, who could organize NZ Sign Language interpretation or someone to help read or explain the questions over the phone or by Zoom.

We received survey responses from a total of 118 parents and whānau.

Profile of parents and whānau who responded to the survey in March and April 2022:

- Ethnicity: 67 percent were Pākehā, 26 percent were Māori, 16 percent were Pacific, 16 percent were Asian, 18 percent were other
- Region: 38 percent were from Auckland, 25 percent were from Canterbury, 13 percent were from Waikato, 9 percent were from Wellington, 7 percent were from Manawatu-Whanganui, 3 percent were from Northland, and 3 percent were from Bay of Plenty.

Interviews with sector experts, stakeholders

Five interviews were conducted with key experts and stakeholders in the sector including:

- Ministry of Education: Learning Support Directorate, Curriculum, Learning Support Manager in one region
- one early education specialist
- one prominent academic.

Analysis of administrative data

As noted elsewhere in the report, there is a lack of systematic administrative data on disabled learners. The only detailed administrative data that was available was Early Intervention Funding data from the Ministry of Education.

Analysis, sense-making, and testing of recommendations

At the end of interviews with each service, the interviewers had synthesis and sense-making discussions to assess the practice at each service against the evaluation framework.

The interview data and open-ended comments from surveys were analysed and coded to identify key themes. The quantitative survey data was analysed using SurveyMonkey and Excel.

Following analysis of the data from the survey and interviews, sense-making discussions were conducted to test interpretation of the results, findings, and areas for action with:

- ERO's team of specialists in reviewing school practice
- Expert Advisory Group
- Steering Group.

We then tested and refined the findings and recommendations with the following organisations to ensure they were useful and practical:

- Ministry of Education
- Teaching Council.

Informed consent

Survey of parents and whānau

Before parents and whānau agreed to complete the online survey, they were informed of the purpose of the evaluation and the survey. The information provided assurance that:

- participation was voluntary and anonymous
- neither the parent, their child, nor their service will be named or identified in the reports
- parents can withdraw their consent to participate or choose not to answer any questions.

Parents and whānau indicated their consent by proceeding to complete the survey.

Interviews with parents and whānau

Parents and whānau who were invited to participate in an interview, were provided with an information sheet which explained the purpose of the interview and the evaluation. They were informed that their participation was voluntary, and that they could change their mind at any time. Any personal information they shared would be treated as confidential and the report would not identify them, their child, or their child's service. If the parent and whānau agreed to participate in the interview, we also asked their consent for the interview to be recorded. Parents and whānau were asked how they preferred to talk to us (by phone or videoconference). Parents provided their consent by completing and submitting a written consent form to ERO.

Surveys of leaders and kaiako

Service staff were informed of the purpose of the evaluation and the survey before they agreed to complete the survey. They were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would be kept confidential. No details identifying them or their service would be reported publicly. They could withdraw their consent to participate at any time or choose not to answer any questions, without any consequences to them.

Interviews with leaders and kaiako

Service staff were informed of the purpose of the evaluation before they agreed to participate in an interview. They were assured their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw consent to participate, and permission to use their information, at any time. They were told the interviews were not an evaluation of their service, and that they and their service would not be identified in the resulting national report. They were assured their information was confidential and would be kept securely subject to the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982, Privacy Act 1993, and the Public Records Act 2005 on the release and retention of information. Interviewees provided their consent to participate in an interview by completing and submitting a written consent form to ERO. Their verbal consent was also sought to record their online interviews.

Security

Audio files and notes from interviews with service leaders and kaiako, and disabled children's parents and whānau is stored digitally for a period of six months after the research is completed. During this time, the data is held in secure password protected project folders with access limited to project team members only.

Limitations of this evaluation

There are limitations to this evaluation.

In terms of scope, this evaluation:

- does not consider early identification or early intervention programmes
- does not examine specific intervention programmes or funding
- does not make judgements about individual services or teaching practice of individual kaiako
- does not examine needs assessment regarding health support
- does not make judgments about the quality of provision from specialist providers.

In terms of the evaluation findings:

- they are based on children, parents and whānau, and services who responded to our survey and interviews. The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on response rates and limited most interviews to over the phone or videoconferencing. Responses from families of Pacific disabled children were particularly low
- as noted elsewhere, there is a lack of standardised, administrative data on disabled children, therefore most of the measures in this evaluation are based on self-report.

There is no current counterfactual data on outcomes for non-disabled children.

Appendix 2: Key principles underpinning this evaluation

Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia (Māori Education Strategy) principles:

Te Whānau: Education provision responds to learners within the context of their whānau

Te Tangata: Māori are free from racism, discrimination, and stigma in education

Te Kanorautanga: Māori are diverse and need to be understood in the context of their diverse aspirations and lived experiences

Te Tuakiritanga: Identity, language, and culture matter for Māori learners

Te Rangatiratanga: Māori exercise their authority and agency in education

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) article 24, including general comment 4 – Right to Inclusive Education

Access to primary and secondary education: children with disabilities must have access to inclusive, quality, and free primary and secondary education in the communities where they live. This means that:

- sufficient numbers of schools must be **available** throughout the country
- schools must be **accessible** for all children with disabilities – including buildings, transport, playgrounds, hygiene and toilets facilities, communications, curriculum, education materials, teaching methods, and assessment and support services. All new buildings must be accessible
- education services must be **acceptable** to the requirements, cultures, and languages of all students with disabilities
- schools should **adapt** to the needs of students with different learning requirements.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) lists 42 rights and article 23 of the CRC refers specifically to disabled children. Under the right to special disability care: A disabled child has the right to special care, education, and training to help him or her enjoy a full and decent life in dignity and achieve the greatest degree of self-reliance and social integration possible. New Zealand ratified the UNCRC in 1993.

The National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) which set out the Government's priorities for education that will ensure the success and wellbeing of all learners:

- ensuring places of learning are safe, inclusive, and free from racism, discrimination, and bullying
- have high aspirations for every learner/ākonga, and support these by partnering with their whānau and communities to design and deliver education that responds to their needs, and sustains their identities, languages, and cultures
- reduce barriers to education for all, including for Māori and Pacific learners/ākonga, disabled learners/ākonga and those with learning
- ensure every learner/ākonga gains sound foundation skills, including language, literacy and numeracy
- meaningfully incorporate te reo Māori and tikanga Māori into the everyday life of the place of learning
- develop staff to strengthen teaching, leadership, and learner support capability across the education workforce
- collaborate with industries and employers to ensure learners/ākonga have the skills, knowledge, and pathways to succeed in work.

Enabling Good Lives (EGL) principles:

- Self-determination
- Beginning early
- Person-centred
- Ordinary life outcomes
- Mainstream first
- Mana enhancing
- Easy to use
- Relationship building

Components of effective practice

Lever 1: Effective leadership and strong expectations for inclusion of disabled children	
Indicator	**What good looks like**
1.1 Service leaders set clear expectations for equity and inclusion, wellbeing, and achievement for disabled learners Linked to Te Ara Poutama – Organisational condition: Te Whakaruruhau / Stewardship through effective governance and management	The service's vision for inclusion and equity is articulated in its philosophy statement, strategic and annual plans, and is promoted by service leaders. There is shared understanding of this vision among leadership teams, kaiako, tamariki, parents/whānau, and documents articulate high expectations and aspirations for disabled learners/tamariki with additional needs. 4.1 Leaders collaboratively develop and enact the service's philosophy, vision, goals and priorities, recognising te Tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi as foundational. 5.1 The learning and wellbeing of children are the primary considerations in decision making.
1.2 Leadership planning and resourcing for kaiako capability and capacity for inclusive education Linked to Te Ara Poutama – Learning conditions: Whakangungu Ngaio / Collaborative professional learning builds knowledge and capability	Leadership provides highly effective ongoing development opportunities (PLD) and support for kaiako to be effective, inclusive, and culturally responsive practitioners providing high quality early learning for disabled learners (Including PLD for leaders in services managed by umbrella organisations responsible for providing PLD opportunities to service leaders, managers and headteachers, and visiting teachers). 4.3 Leaders ensure access to professional learning and development that builds capability. 2.3 Children's learning is enhanced through leaders and kaiako engaging in professional learning and development opportunities that contribute to ongoing and sustained improvement.
1.3 Leaders promote a culture that welcomes and values disabled learners and their whānau	Disabled learners and their whānau are welcomed and valued into the early learning service Interactions between leaders/kaiako/staff and disabled learners and their whānau are mana enhancing.

Lever 1: Effective leadership and strong expectations for inclusion of disabled children

Indicator	What good looks like
1.4 Service leaders ensure alignment of policies, procedures, and practices with current national legislative requirements, including the guiding principles of Ka Hikitia Ka Hāpaitia – evident in approaches to partnership/collaboration with Māori whānau for inclusion and equity	Shared, articulated understanding of rights-based legislative and regulatory requirements for early learning services – policies and procedures (for example, restraint, transition, and enrolment). The service is effectively partnering with Māori disabled learners and their whānau to realise their aspirations, valuing te ao Māori conceptualisation of disability and inclusion. 4.2 Relational trust enables collaboration and sustained improvement. 1.4 Te reo Māori and tikanga Māori are valued and an integral part of teaching and learning.
1.5 Inquiry and evaluation are effectively used to promote innovation and improvement in inclusive practices and equity of learning opportunities and outcomes **Linked to Te Ara Poutama – Organisational condition:** **Ngā aronga whai hua / Evaluation for improvement**	Effective use of data for supporting decisions about sustaining or changing interventions or practices to support disabled learners. Effective use of internal evaluations (self-reviews) which include disabled learner and whānau voice to improve the learning experiences and outcomes for disabled learners. Feedback is regularly sought and acted upon from disabled learners and their parents 5.3 Outcomes for children and their whānau are promoted by effective systems, processes, and internal evaluation. 4.5 Leaders develop, implement, and evaluate systems, processes, and practices that promote ongoing improvement. 3.1 Coherent organisational conditions enable managers, leaders, and kaiako to do and use evaluation for improvement and innovation. 3.3 Engagement in deliberate, systematic internal evaluation processes and reasoning promotes valued outcomes for all children.

Lever 2: Quality teaching	
Indicator	**What good looks like**
2.1 Development of responsive and meaningful curriculum for disabled learners **Link to *Te Whāriki* 2017** An essential role of kaiako is to understand how children learn and **know all of the children** in their service well – so that they know when and how to provide additional support and/or remove barriers for children to promote participation and learning.	Curriculum design seeks to incorporate prior knowledge of the learner and their context, including learner and parent/whānau aspirations. Appropriate adaptation of learning resources in response to diverse needs. 1.1 Children's learning and development in play-based contexts is supported through caring, learning-focused partnerships. 1.3 Children have equitable opportunities to learn through a responsive curriculum that is consistent with Te Whāriki. 4.4 Effective planning, coordination and evaluation of curriculum, teaching, and learning promote equitable outcomes for all children.
2.2 Teachers demonstrate effective teaching practice for disabled learners	Kaiako have high expectations which shape appropriate progression planning, which is clearly communicated to learners and whānau. Kaiako plan for the best use of additional resources like education support workers and early intervention teachers to optimise learning for all disabled learners **challenging practices of segregation and event or activity-based exclusion.**
2.3 Use of assessment as feedback loop for planning	Kaiako / teachers use assessments effectively for planning and identifying next steps for ILP/ learning goal. 1.6 Assessment practices enhance children's mana and their learner identities.

Lever 2: Quality teaching	
Indicator	**What good looks like**
3.2 The social and emotional environment supporting wellbeing and learning for disabled learners **Learner outcomes linked to *Te Whāriki*** Inclusive early childhood services create a community culture that ensures all children can be actively involved in meaningful play and learning with and alongside their peers. This includes providing additional supports or removing barriers when required.	Kaiako / teachers create positive learning conditions and foster inclusive, collaborative (peer-peer), and independent learning. There are frequent opportunities and spaces provided for positive peer relationships to be formed and nurtured.

Lever 3: Inclusive, accessible environments	
Indicator	**What good looks like**
3.1 The physical environment supporting access and learning for disabled learners **Linked to Te Ara Poutama – outcomes for learners** **And *Te Whāriki*** Fully inclusive early childhood services provide an environment that invites, acknowledges, and celebrates the diversity that each child and their whānau bring.	Organisation and arrangement of physical environments effectively support safe, mana-enhancing, and barrier free access to learning and social opportunities for disabled students Early learning service's policy documents indicate how new builds and upgrades should align with the principles of universal design for learning UDL. 5.1 The learning and wellbeing of children are the primary considerations in decision making.
	Appropriate resources and equipment are available to support full participation in all activities (such as communication devices, hoists, and specially designed furniture). Outings and off-site programmes are planned for disabled learners to access and safely participate in.
	Specially designated quiet / sensory spaces to support self-regulation are built into the service design and layout.

Lever 4: Strong, learning-focused partnerships with parents and whānau

Indicator	What good looks like
4.1 Educationally focused engagement of learners, parents, and whānau **Linked to Te Ara Poutama – He whāriki Motuhake: The learner and their learning**	Service leaders and kaiako invest time in getting to know their disabled learners, parents, and whānau, invite their input and value the knowledge they bring to the early learning service.
4.2 Disabled learners and whānau agency **1.5 Children's learning and development is supported through intentional and culturally responsive pedagogy**	Kaiako regularly seek feedback from learners and their whānau and invite their contribution to develop responsive learning plans. 1.2 Children, parents, and whānau contribute to a curriculum that recognises their identities, languages, and cultures.
4.3 Collaboration and meaningful partnerships with Māori disabled learners, their parents and whānau **2.1 Children's learning and development is supported by leaders and kaiako, and others with culturally relevant knowledge and expertise**	Leaders, kaiako, and early intervention demonstrate a collaborative and culturally responsive approach to addressing the holistic needs of the learner. Regular communication with whānau to share information and progress and seek guidance on culturally responsive approaches and whānau aspirations.

Lever 5: Collaboration and communication	
Indicator	**What good looks like**
5.1 Coordination of effective transition into and within early learning services	Mana enhancing processes for welcoming new learners and their whānau. Policy guidelines support effective and adaptable transitions processes.
	Transition plans are designed in partnership with learners, parents, and whānau.
	Accurate and relevant knowledge and information is shared across agencies and specialists to ensure smooth transitions for learners, parents, and whānau.
5.2 Coordination for effective transition and pathways to school	Accurate and relevant knowledge and information is shared across agencies, early learning services, and specialists to ensure smooth transition from early learning to school for learners, parents, and whānau. Service leaders, kaiako / teachers, and specialists provide a range of options for learners and whānau to consider as they plan for transition into school.
5.3 Effective collaboration and communication between early learning services, schools early intervention service providers and MoE specialist services	Service leaders, kaiako, and specialists meet regularly and collaborate on learning plans and demonstrate shared understanding of principles of inclusive education.
	Service leaders, kaiako and specialists effectively share knowledge and develop next steps based on assessment data
5.2 Children's learning and development is supported through responsive partnerships, including networked relationships between services, agencies and the wider community.	Service leaders, kaiako, schoolteachers, and specialists have the opportunity to learn from each other's inclusive education practices within clusters/communities of learning (Kahui ako). 2.4 Children's learning is enhanced through leaders and kaiako working as a professional learning community.

Appendix 3: Learning outcomes in *Te Whāriki*

Strand	Learning Outcomes Over time and with guidance and encouragement, children become increasingly capable of:
Wellbeing **Mana Atua**	Keeping themselves healthy and caring for themselves Te oranga nui
	Managing themselves and expressing their feelings and needs Te whakahua whakaaro
	Keeping themselves and others safe from harm Te noho haumaru
Belonging **Mana Whenua**	Making connections between people, places and things in their world Te waihanga hononga
	Taking part in caring for this place Te manaaki i te taiao
	Understanding how things work here and adapting to change Te mārama ki te āhua o ngā whakahaere me te mōhio ki te panoni
	Showing respect for kaupapa, rules and the rights of others Te mahi whakaute
Contribution **Mana Tangata**	Treating others fairly and including them in play Te ngākau makuru
	Recognising and appreciating their own ability to learn Te rangatiratanga
	Using a range of strategies and skills to play and learn with others Te ngākau aroha

Strand	Learning Outcomes Over time and with guidance and encouragement, children become increasingly capable of:
Communication **Mana Reo**[n]	Using gesture and movement to express themselves He kōrero ā-tinana
	Understanding oral language and using it for a range of purposes He kōrero ā-waha
	Enjoying hearing stories and retelling and creating them He kōrero paki
	Recognising print symbols and concepts and using them with enjoyment, meaning and purpose He kōrero tuhituhi
	Recognising mathematical symbols and concepts and using them with enjoyment, meaning and purpose He kōrero pāngarau
	Expressing their feelings and ideas using a wide range of materials and modes He kōrero auaha
Exploration **Mana Aotūroa**	Playing, imagining, inventing and experimenting Te whakaaro me te tūhurahura i te pūtaiao
	Moving confidently and challenging themselves physically Te wero ā-tinana
	Using a range of strategies for reasoning and problem solving Te hīraurau hopanga
	Making sense of their worlds by generating and refining working theories Te rangahau me te mātauranga

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[n] *Te Whāriki* explains that 'oral language' encompasses any method of communication the child uses as a first language; this includes New Zealand Sign Language and, for children who are non-verbal, alternative and augmentative communication (AAC). For children who are deaf or hard of hearing, 'hearing' includes watching.

Appendix 4: Annotated bibliography

We carried out an extensive review of national and international literature on what high quality inclusive education practice looks like for disabled learners when they are learning with their non-disabled peers. This annotated bibliography sets out how this literature evidence base informed the development of the framework for this evaluation of the quality and inclusiveness of education provision for disabled learners in schools.

Learner outcomes

UNICEF. (2017). *Inclusive Education Understanding Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.* UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. https://www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org.eca/files/IE_summary_accessible_220917_0.pdf

This document provides an overview of the General Comment on education, recognising the right to inclusive education for all disabled people. It interprets inclusive education as a fundamental human right for every child with disability and sets out what governments must do to make it happen.

This document was fundamental to our understanding of inclusive education for disabled learners as framed by the UNCRPD and UNCROC.

Oliver, M. (2004). The social model in action: if I had a hammer. In C. Barnes and G. Mercer (Eds.), *Implementing the social model of disability: Theory and research* (pp. 18-31). The Disability Press.

Mike Oliver is one of the most influential authors of the social model of disability. He argues that disability is a socially constructed phenomenon when the environment – both social and physical – presents challenges for individuals who may have physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments and, therefore, disables them.

The social model of disability is now the internationally recognised way to view and address “disability”. It marks a significant paradigm shift in attitudes towards disabled people. As the model adopted by the UNCRPD, and the New Zealand Disability Strategy, it has been the model of disability applied to all aspects of this evaluation.

Hickey, H., & Wilson, D. (2017). Whānau hauā: Reframing disability from an indigenous perspective. *MAI Journal, 6*(1), 82-94.

In this research paper Huhana Hickey, a Māori disability advocate, refers to the medical and social models of disability as individualised and western, and as not relevant to many indigenous disabled people who may have a holistic, collective, and relational world view of disability. The authors propose the concept of whānau hauā or “Māori families living with disability” as an alternative Māori approach to disability locating the individual within the whānau, and as the whānau being collectively impacted by disabling conditions present in the environment.

This concept of the individual disabled learner located within their whānau was used in our evaluation for data gathering and analysis of the data. It informed our methodology for the survey design and qualitative semi structured interviews.

Cologon, K. (2019). *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation.* Macquarie University for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA). https://www.cyda.org.au/images/pdf/towards_inclusive_education_a_necessary_transformation.pdf

This report, commissioned by Children and Young People with Disability Australia, is a follow up from their 2013 in-depth literature review examining the evidence base for inclusive education. This report builds on that research base for inclusive education, examining 400 research papers and reports published over the last six decades.

This report attempts to define inclusive education, and critically examines the barriers to inclusive education. It also identifies the practices of segregation and micro exclusion that exist within inclusive education settings. It has a chapter dedicated to "ableism in education", helping readers to examine unconscious bias in education provision.

This report highlighted the outcomes of inclusive education for disabled and non-disabled children and young people and helped frame our understanding of ableism in the context of education provision for disabled learners. It also drew our attention to practices of segregation and micro exclusion, which we were able to build into our survey and interview tools, helping make this evaluation more nuanced in its understanding of participation and inclusion of disabled learners.

Hehir, T. (2016). *A summary of evidence on inclusive education.* Alana Institute in partnership with Abt Associates. https://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf

The Alana Institute Reports' lead author, Dr Hehir, examined the performance of 68,000 students with disabilities in Massachusetts. Hehir found that, on average, the greater the proportion of the school day spent with non-disabled students, the higher the mathematic and language outcomes for students with disabilities. Hehir's reviews indicate that students with disabilities educated in mainstream classrooms outperform their peers who have been educated in segregated settings.

This review of multiple research studies, undertaken in different parts of the world, helped inform our understanding of why inclusive education of disabled learners in mainstream settings, with their peers, matters. It also helped inform our understanding of what good looks in highly effective and inclusive education settings.

Components of effective practice

Mitchell, D. (2015). Inclusive education is a multi-faceted concept. *Centre for Educational Policy Studies Journal, 5*(1), 9–30.

In this paper, the author advocates for a multi-faceted approach to inclusive education, emphasising the need for legislative and policy level changes to be embedded into practice through changes in school leadership, teacher education, parent engagement, and for classroom teaching and learning practices that go beyond "placement" of disabled learners. The paper presents a brief synthesis of international research to elaborate on the concepts of "accommodation" and "modification" of curriculum and assessment for disabled learners. Each facet of inclusive education is presented with a criterion and indicators, that can be used as a basis for planning inclusive education and for evaluating its quality.

This paper was foundational in the development of our evaluation framework and in defining what good looks like for school leadership and quality teaching.

Berryman, M., Nevin, A., SooHoo, S., & Ford, T. (2015). Culturally responsive contexts: Establishing relationships for inclusion. *International Journal of Special Education, 30*(3), 39–51.

In this chapter, the authors theorise within an alternative framework that they refer to as culturally responsive inclusion. Based on key understandings derived from Kaupapa Māori and Freirean philosophies, the authors theorise educational disparities can be associated with the power imbalances in classrooms and schools because of increasing diversity disrupting the composition of the dominant mainstream. "We still expect all students to be represented within the same curriculum, pedagogy and testing regimen or we form separate enclaves, and the divide becomes even wider". The authors argue that when diverse students have physical and/or learning disabilities, these situations and inequities are further exacerbated.

The framework proposed for culturally responsive methodologies, challenges traditional notions of professional experts working with objectivity, and calls for meaningful engagement with parents and whānau by establishing respectful and trusting relationships.

This framing of culturally responsive and meaningful engagement was applied in our understanding of what good looks like for parent and whānau engagement in this evaluation.

Hornby, G. (2014). Special education today in New Zealand. *Special Education International Perspectives: Practices across the globe. (Advances in Special Education), 28,* 679-696.

Hornby presents the historical context for the provision of special education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The article presents a critique of policies and practices, prior to the new Learning Support Action Plan. He argues that Aotearoa New Zealand has followed a similar journey to inclusive education as other OECD countries. Interestingly, he argues that New Zealand has gone further in legislating inclusion of disabled learners in mainstream classrooms, but with less development of provision for these learners. This has led to a situation where many disabled learners are not getting the specialist help that they need, contributing to the largest achievement gap in the developed world.

This article contributed to our understanding of the historical context of education provision for disabled learners in New Zealand in comparison to other jurisdictions.

Ok, M. W., Rao, K., Bryant, B. R., & McDougall, D. (2016). Universal design for learning in Pre-K -Grade 12 classrooms: A systematic review of research. *Exceptionality: A Special Education Journal, 25*(2), 116-138.

The authors of this research review analysed 13 studies to investigate the impact of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) based instruction on academic and social outcomes for kindergarten and school aged students. They reported mixed findings and variability in UDL guidelines and components, as well as variability in the effectiveness of UDL based interventions.

This article informed our understanding of the wider literature and effectiveness of UDL in the context of school-based instructional design strategies for inclusion of disabled learners.

Stevens, K. (2019). Supporting teacher confidence and perceived competence in relation to culturally responsive pedagogy utilising communities of learning Kahui Ako. *Kairaranga, 20(*2), 30-39.

This article, written by an across community teacher, highlights the role communities of learning or Kahui Ako can play in building teacher confidence and capability in relation to their culturally responsive pedagogy. It also defines what makes a community of learning successful and how it can be used to accelerate Māori learners' achievement as Māori.

This informed our understanding of what good looks like when schools collaborate and share strategies to build teacher capability and confidence in culturally responsive pedagogies.

Glass, B., Baker, K., & Ellis, R. (2009). *Inclusion at Botany Downs Kindergarten, Centre of Innovation 2006-2008. Final research report.* Ministry of Education. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/75028/COI-Botany-Downs-Kindergarten-Inclusion-at-Botany-Downs-Kindergarten-COI-2006-2008.pdf

This report shares research from the Centre of Innovation, focusing on inclusion in the early childhood education centre Botany Downs Kindergarten. It explores the devotion teachers at the service have to inclusion of all children, including those with additional needs. This report highlights approaches towards accessibility and inclusion of all children in the classroom.

This paper informed our understanding of what good looks like when neurodivergent children are included in mainstream classrooms and the physical environment and equipment needed to facilitate this inclusion.

Alton-Lee, A. (2003). Quality Teaching for diverse students in schooling. *Best Evidence Synthesis.* Retrieved from https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515

This report is one of a series of best evidence syntheses, commissioned by the Ministry of Education. It is part of a commitment to strengthen the evidence base that informs education policy and practice in New Zealand.

This best evidence synthesis (BES) identifies 10 characteristics of quality teaching derived from a synthesis of research evidence linked to student outcomes. The report states that the central professional challenge for teachers is to "manage simultaneously the complexity of learning needs of diverse students".

This framework applied in this BES rejects the notion of a "normal" group, and "other" or minority groups of children, and constitutes diversity and difference as central to the focus of quality teaching. Diversity in this BES includes ethnicity, socio-economic background, home language, gender, special needs, disability, and giftedness.

The research evidence synthesised in this BES formed the basis for the indicators of quality teaching in our evaluation framework

Mutch, C., & Collins, S. (2012). Partners in learning: Schools' engagement with parents, families and communities in New Zealand. *School Community Journal, 22*(1), 167-187.

This article presents the historical background and key findings from literature about the engagement between schools and parents and whānau in Aotearoa New Zealand. Based on their evaluation of over 200 New Zealand schools, the authors present six key factors that are critical to enhancing and strengthening parent and whānau engagement: school leadership; respectful relationships; school culture; learning partnerships; community networks; and effective communication.

This article helped inform our understanding of what good looks like for effective partnerships with parents and whānau. It also informed the development of our survey and interview guides on how well schools were doing in this aspect.

System enablers

Ainscow, M. (2020). Inclusion and equity in education: Making sense of global challenges. *Prospects, 49,* 123-134.

This article provides an introductory commentary on the papers in the special issue of Prospects on inclusive education. It outlines a research-based framework that can be used for contextual analysis. It highlights the importance of setting system-level expectations for equity and inclusion of disabled learners. “A culture of inclusion within an education system requires a shared set of assumptions and beliefs amongst senior staff at the national, district, and school level that value differences, believe in collaboration, and are committed to offering educational opportunities to all students”. The article concludes by arguing that emphasising inclusion and equity within national education systems can potentially improve the quality of education for all learners, disabled and non-disabled.

This article by Ainscow in the special issue of Prospects was instrumental in developing the theoretical framework applied at a system level in this evaluation.

UNESCO. (2017). *A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education.* UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254

This UNESCO guide is intended to support government education policy developers in embedding inclusion and equity in educational policy. It provides an assessment framework to review and decide on actions, and monitor progress. It also includes the evidence that informed the framework, and examples of initiatives contributing to more inclusive and equitable education systems in different parts of the world.

The UNESCO 2017 guide for inclusive education influenced the evaluation framework development and emphasised the principles of inclusion and equity across the three levels of the education system in our evaluation framework, and the indicators within each component of the framework.

UNICEF. (2022, January). ***Seen, counted, included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities.*** **Children with Disabilities Report. https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-report-2021/**

This report discusses over 60 indicators of wellbeing for disabled children and provides an understanding of the characteristics and challenges of disabled children internationally. UNICEF obtained quality data, to inform robust statistics that filled previous gaps in knowledge on disabled children.

This report informed understanding of disability internationally and provided the evaluation with important context on characteristics of, and wellbeing for, disabled children.

UNICEF. (2020, July). ***Producing disability inclusive data: Why it matters and what it takes.*** **UNICEF. https://data.unicef.org/resources/producing-disability-inclusive-data-why-it-matters-and-what-it-takes/**

To break the cycle of invisibility, this resource developed by UNICEF urges member states to build effective systems for disability data collection. The argument proposed is that inclusive data is the key to eliminating discrimination based on disability, and to accelerating the development of inclusive policies and programming. To help ensure that the experiences and needs of disabled people are adequately reflected in the evidence being generated, this UNICEF resource recommends that disabled people are included in all stages of the data collection process.

This resource acknowledges that while different data collection efforts in different jurisdictions face different challenges, there are common issues to consider when planning, designing, and implementing inclusive data collection. This document also provides general recommendations and guidance for government departments who are working together to gather and analyse national disability data.

The system enabler indicators for monitoring and accountability at a national level to report on outcomes for disabled learners was informed by this UNICEF resource.

Macfarlane, S. (2012). ***In Pursuit of culturally responsive evidence based special education pathways in Aotearoa New Zealand: Whaia ki te ara tika.*** **PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury.**

Sonja Macfarlane developed the He Ritenga Whaimōhio framework to show how the concepts of Tika, Pono and Aroha can inform and broaden the evidence being gathered to inform educational practice. Te ao Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi wrap around the three kete (baskets) or categories of evidence.

- Tika-Research: Research that is culturally grounded, relevant, authentic, and realistic
- Pono-Practitioner knowledge & skills: Practice interactions that have cultural integrity, are reasoned, just, and fair
- Aroha-Whānau: Interactions with whānau that enable whānau voice, knowledge, perspectives, and participation

This research study informed the methodology, survey, and interview tool design, and analysis of the data and provided a Te Tiriti-based structure for our evaluation framework.

Berryman, M. (2015). Conclusion: Relationships of interdependence – Making the difference together, in Working with Māori children with special education needs. In J. Bevan-Brown, M. Berryman, H. Hickey, S. Macfarlane, K. Smiler, & T. Walker (Eds.), ***Working with Māori Children with Special Education Needs. He mahi whatahirahira*** **(pp. 241–257). NZCER Press.**

This chapter emphasises the importance of learning from the past and listening to Māori children and whānau. It explores the key components of culturally responsive, evidence-based, special education practice and describes holistic and inclusive responses to educating all, especially those with identified special education needs. “Māori have a culture that is based on inclusion, and a collective, reciprocal approach to learning and teaching that values all students and takes responsibility for finding ways to meet their needs, be they intellectual, physical or spiritual, or their need for being connected and included with whānau … Inclusion is about valuing and including all children for what they arrive with and for the families that stand beside them.”

All the chapters in this book influenced the theoretical framing of this evaluation and this chapter, in particular, informed the historical context section of this evaluation and deepened our understanding of culturally responsive, inclusive education for Māori disabled learners.

Kasprzak C, Hebbeler K, Spiker D, et al. (2020). A state system framework for high-quality early intervention and early childhood special education. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 40*(2), 97–109.

This article highlights The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Centre's work to develop a framework for high-quality state early intervention and early childhood special education systems. In doing so, it emphasises the need to communicate what quality state early intervention and early childhood special education looks like.

This research informed the knowledge used in this evaluation, on what quality education should look like at a system level and, in turn, the education disabled children should be receiving.

Research First. (2016). *Investigating the value of the early intervention programme: A programme differentiation analysis.* https://www.championcentre.org.nz/uploads/1/2/7/2/127208613/research_first_report_revised_april_2016.pdf

This report explores the achievements of the early childhood education centre Champion Centre as a model service. The analysis in this report investigates the factors leading to positive outcomes and success for disabled children attending the Champion Centre. In doing so, it highlights the importance of commitment to purpose, professional ability, tailored physical environment, work culture, and predominantly evidence-based best practice.

This paper informed our understanding of what good looks like when neurodivergent children are experiencing strong, successful, and positive outcomes, and what contributes to such outcomes at a service level.

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