

# **Including Students with High Needs**

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## Overview

This evaluation examined how well schools include students with high needs. Approximately three percent of students identified as high needs. For the purposes of this evaluation, inclusion involved students with high needs successfully enrolling, participating and achieving in the academic, extra-curricular and social life of their school.

This evaluation found that approximately half of the 229 schools reviewed demonstrated mostly inclusive practice. This judgement is based on the context and students of each school and on the overall systems and responsiveness of the schools.

The most inclusive schools operated under three key principles:

- having ethical standards and leadership that built the culture of an inclusive school;
- having well-organised systems, effective teamwork and constructive relationships that identified and supported the inclusion of students with high needs; and
- using innovative and flexible practices that managed the complex and unique challenges related to including students with high needs.

A further 30 percent of schools had some inclusive practices. While these schools had 'pockets of inclusiveness,' major weaknesses limited the extent to which inclusiveness was found throughout the school. Systems, teaching, attitudes or approaches at each of these schools meant that, in some significant way, students with high needs were not fully included in the academic, extra-curricular or social life of the school.

The remaining 20 percent of schools were found to have few inclusive practices. The key differences between these schools, and those above, was the level of ethical and professional leadership shown towards including students with high needs. While these schools were inclusive in some less important ways, overall, students with high needs were not included in significant aspects of each school's academic, extra-curricular and social activities.

The key question that emerges from this review is: how can more schools become better at including students with high needs? Schools invest in various professional development courses that provide specialist knowledge to teachers and support staff. Similarly much of the professional support available from Group Special Education (GSE) and Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) is aimed at supporting the inclusion of individual students. More can be done to use school-wide professional learning and development processes to make schools more inclusive.

## Next steps

On the basis of this report, school staff should:

- use the report's findings, case studies, self-review questions and inclusive teaching indicators to review the extent to which students with high needs are included across the school; and
- identify where students are not well included and implement a plan to extend the effective practice already in the school.

On the basis of this report, the Ministry of Education should:

- build school-wide capability to support effective teaching for all students by extending effective evidence-based whole-of-school professional development programmes;
- review how well principal training and support fosters leadership for inclusive schools;
- consider, as part of the special education review, how effective mainstream schools, special schools, Group Special Education and Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour can work together to improve the level of inclusion in New Zealand schools.

## Introduction

This evaluation examines how well students with high needs are included in New Zealand schools. The focus of this review is the enrolment, participation, engagement and achievement of students with high needs in schools. This report also provides examples of good practice for including students with high needs.

Students with high needs make up approximately three percent of the student population. These students have significant physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric, behavioural or intellectual impairment. Some students with high needs qualify for support funding from Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS). Others may be eligible for other forms of assistance including Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) funding, high health needs funding, supplementary learning support (SLS), input from educational psychologists, assistive technology, physiotherapy, speech-language therapy and other support related to hearing or vision impairment.

Some students with high needs may have their education supported through the involvement of Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs) or through additional resources provided by their school. This may include extra time from classroom and specialist teachers, teacher-aide support and individual programmes.

### What does ‘including students with high needs’ mean?

The phrase ‘including students with high needs’ can have several meanings. In its most literal form, ‘including students with high needs’ is concerned with mainstreaming. Under this definition students with high needs are expected to undertake all their schooling within a normal classroom setting.

ERO has taken a pragmatic approach to inclusion in this evaluation. ERO recognises that it is desirable for students with high needs to learn in mainstream classes. However, it is also important to point out that many students with high needs learn well in special schools and units that may be outside the mainstream.<sup>1</sup> Some others with high needs are homeschooled. Many of these students have tried education in mainstream settings but were not successfully included. Moreover some students with high needs benefit from specialist assistance, outside of mainstream classes, to meet their specific learning and/or medical needs.

### The legislative and policy basis for including students with special needs

New Zealand state and integrated schools are obliged to enrol all students in their local area, regardless of their level of impairment or educational need. This right is enshrined in the Education Act 1989 which sets out that all children from five years

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<sup>1</sup> This view is based on EROs individual reviews of special schools. Special schools did not form part of this evaluation.

old are entitled to attend their local school until the end of the school year in which they turn 19. Students who receive ORRS funding can stay at school to the age of 21.

*...people who have special educational needs (whether because of disability or otherwise) have the same rights to enrol and receive education in state schools as people who do not.* Section 8 Education Act 1989

Other legislative and policy statements underline the right of students with high needs to be included in their local school. This includes the National Education Goals (NEGs), which set out the rights of all students, including those with special needs, to receive the highest possible quality of education. NEG 7 specifically refers to special education students in setting out the following goal:

Success in their learning for those with special needs by ensuring that they are identified and receive appropriate support.

In addition, the Human Rights Act 1993 makes it unlawful for a public school to deny enrolment for various reasons, one of which is disability.

The New Zealand Disability Strategy is a framework for government to deliver on the rights of people with disabilities. Objective three of the strategy sets out eight actions related to schools' obligations for including students with disabilities.

- 3.1 Ensure that no child is denied access to their local, regular school because of their impairment.
- 3.2 Support the development of effective communication by providing access to education in New Zealand Sign Language, communication technologies and human aids.
- 3.3 Ensure that teachers and other educators understand the learning needs of disabled people.
- 3.4 Ensure that disabled students, families, teachers and other educators have equitable access to the resources available to meet their needs.
- 3.5 Facilitate opportunities for disabled students to make contact with their disabled peers in other schools.
- 3.6 Improve schools' responsiveness to and accountability for the needs of disabled students.
- 3.7 Promote appropriate and effective inclusive educational settings that will meet individual educational needs.
- 3.8 Improve post-compulsory education options for disabled people, including: promoting best practice, providing career guidance, increasing lifelong opportunities for learning and better aligning financial support with educational opportunities.

## Not including students with special needs

There is considerable evidence to suggest that many children with special needs are not included in New Zealand schools. This includes material from government publications as well as educational research. A short summary of this evidence is included below.

### ***Disabled Children's Right to Education***

The Human Rights Commission (HRC) 2009 report *Disabled Children's Right to Education* refers to 261 complaints about disabled students' access to schooling from 2002 to 2008. The majority of the concerns from parents related to:

- enrolment problems, for example schools not wanting to enrol children or only enrolling them for limited hours;
- the suspension, exclusion or expulsion of disabled children from school;
- funding for teacher aides or additional resources; and
- the ability of children with disabilities to participate fully in wider school activities, such as school camps and other school trips.

The structure and content of the HRC report does not provide the detail about the substance and resolution of each of these cases.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, the number of complaints indicates that many children are denied access to schooling because of their high needs.

Significant proportions of the complaints received by the HRC were from the parents of students with disabilities that affected the behaviour of students. This included students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and with some form of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), including Asperger's syndrome. The number of students with behavioural issues reflects the challenge such students can pose for many teachers and schools.

In addition to these individual complaints in the 2008/09 financial year, the HRC also received two complaints concerning the government policy for students with disabilities. As stated in the HRC report: 'IHC brought a class action complaining about acts and omissions of government that prevent a broad range of students with disabilities from fully accessing the curriculum at their local mainstream school.' At the time of publication, this complaint has yet to be resolved.

The other complaint was from Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand (DANZ). HRC has said that this complaint alleges that 'the Ministry of Education has not recognised NZ Sign Language (NZSL) as a medium for education nor the role Deaf identity and culture play for deaf students' education...'.<sup>3</sup> At the time of publication this complaint had been deferred in light of work being undertaken by the Ministry of Education, deaf education service providers and DANZ.

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<sup>2</sup> See pg 31 Human Rights Commission (2009) *Disabled children's right to education*.

<sup>3</sup> See pg 5 Human Rights Commission (2009) *Disabled children's right to education*.



### **Recent New Zealand research on students with disabilities**

Research from Alison Kearney outlines how particular students with disabilities (including some with high needs) are not included in schooling. For example, in a 2008 paper Kearney discussed the experiences of 63 parents or caregivers who each perceived that their child had faced barriers to schooling, including limited access to 'learning experiences, learning resources, friendships, school and class rewards, teacher time and so forth.'<sup>4</sup>

Kearney suggests that the reason why students with disabilities are experiencing exclusion and marginalisation is because of unquestioned assumptions held by education professionals about disabled students and their rights, and about their own roles as professionals. These assumptions include placing less value on the worth of students with disabilities, both as learners and as contributors to the school.<sup>5</sup>

### **Learning better together**

In May 2009 the IHC published the *Learning Better Together* report based on the inclusion of students with disabilities. The aim of the report was to 'provide readers with clarity by presenting a current perspective on inclusion as it is described in the research literature in education.' The report is critical of the extent to which New Zealand education has included students with disabilities, and calls for significant changes to the way students with disabilities are included in New Zealand schools.

There is also an emphasis on the benefits for students with disabilities of being included in regular schools and suggests that special schools be disestablished.

The report contains a useful way for considering the inclusion of students with disabilities or high needs. Drawing on the work of researchers in the United Kingdom, and their Index for Inclusion,<sup>6</sup> the report sets out the importance of presence, participation and achievement as distinct dimensions of inclusion.

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<sup>4</sup> Kearney, A. (2008). Exclusion at school: What is happening for students who are disabled? *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*, 7(6), 219-227.

<sup>5</sup> See also the 2008 NZJES article by N. Ruth Gasson High fences and locked gates: Extreme special needs in the era of inclusion. This article contains several anecdotes about the experiences of a handful of students who had not been included in mainstream schools, or, in some cases, within other special schools. It specifies the sorts of issues facing these students and the effects it has had on their education.

<sup>6</sup> See also the *Index for Inclusion* at [http://www.eenet.org.uk/index\\_inclusion/index\\_inclusion.shtml](http://www.eenet.org.uk/index_inclusion/index_inclusion.shtml).

## Methodology

### Schools in this study

ERO evaluated the extent to which schools provided an inclusive environment for students with high needs during Terms 3 and 4, 2009. Thirty secondary schools and 199 primary schools were included in this report.

This evaluation included 19 Years 9 to 15 schools, nine Years 7 to 15 schools and two composite Years 1 to 15 schools. Twenty of these schools were from main urban centres, three were from secondary urban centres, six were from small provincial centres and one was based in a small rural community. There were 15 large schools, nine medium-sized schools and six small schools.

There were 109 contributing schools in the sample, 80 full primary schools and 10 intermediate schools. One hundred and one of these schools were in main urban centres, 13 were in secondary urban centres, 23 were in small urban centres and 62 schools were based in small rural communities. The primary schools were a variety of sizes with 54 large schools, 99 medium-sized schools and 46 small schools.

### Evaluation approach

ERO gathered and analysed information in response to the following questions:

1. How well do schools include students with high needs?
2. What issues and challenges exist for schools in enrolling and supporting the inclusion of students with high needs?
3. What are some specific exemplars of good practice in including students with high needs?

An extensive set of indicators was used to guide the judgements made by review officers about the inclusive practices of schools.<sup>7</sup> They were based on the Indicators for Inclusion developed in the United Kingdom,<sup>8</sup> as well as other research literature<sup>9</sup> and ERO's evaluation experience. The indicators were developed in terms of the following dimensions:

Dimension	Includes
Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enrolment and Induction</li><li>• Identifying student needs and strengths</li></ul>
Participation and Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Links with families</li><li>• The coordination of services and support</li><li>• School-wide culture</li><li>• Relationships with peers</li></ul>

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 3 for a copy of these indicators.

<sup>8</sup> Indicators for inclusion at [http://www.eenet.org.uk/index\\_inclusion/index\\_inclusion.shtml](http://www.eenet.org.uk/index_inclusion/index_inclusion.shtml)

<sup>9</sup> For example Kearney, A. (2008). Exclusion at school: What is happening for students who are disabled? *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*, 7(6), 219-227.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom teaching</li> <li>• Extra-curricular involvement</li> <li>• Learning supports</li> <li>• Professional development and support</li> <li>• Cultural responsiveness</li> </ul>
Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The achievement of students with high needs</li> <li>• The benefits to mainstream students</li> </ul>

ERO collected documentary evidence from schools, including student enrolment and induction processes, student achievement information, classroom planning and IEPs. Teachers, school leaders and teacher-aides were interviewed by ERO at most schools. ERO talked with parents and students at some schools.

A questionnaire was given to each school. This questionnaire included questions about:

- each school's involvement with external agencies (including Group Special Education);
- the barriers or challenges each school faces in meeting students' needs; and
- whether or not as a school they had enrolled students with high needs subject to certain conditions (such as part-time enrolment or enrolment subject to additional funding or support).

A total of 149 schools completed this questionnaire.

## **Methodological challenges in this evaluation**

### ***Identifying students with high needs***

In managing this evaluation ERO has taken a practical approach to identifying students with high needs. In line with the Special Education Framework, ERO used the guideline that students in the top three percent of educational need are designated students with 'high needs'. Typically these students receive funding and support through such mechanisms as Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes, the Behaviour Initiative, the Communication Initiative or through the School High Health Needs Fund.

In carrying out this evaluation ERO discussed with schools which students they considered to be in the top three percent of educational need. Many of these students qualified for some sort of additional support, while some did not.

Consequently, this report therefore uses three terms. 'Students with high needs' generally denotes the students who have been designated high needs through their funding and support. 'Students with special needs' represent the broad grouping of students who may need some form of additional support or assistance (including those of moderate need.) Where it is relevant, ERO also refers to students the school perceives as having high needs. These are students who exhibit special educational needs but who have not qualified for the additional resource currently allocated to students with high needs.

### ***Low numbers of students with high needs***

In this evaluation ERO gathered information about a school's inclusiveness based on the systems and culture of the school.

The small number of students with high needs at most schools, and their different abilities and special educational requirements, has an important implication for this evaluation. ERO's analysis was primarily based on what was observed in schools. We have not made a judgement about how well these schools might have included the diverse range of students with high needs. In essence, this evaluation has placed more weight on how a school was catering for its students with high needs and less focus on how it may operate with future students.

As a result, little statistical data is provided in this report. Schools are evaluated against highly variable contexts in terms of the different proportions of students with high needs they have and the range of needs these students may exhibit.

Similarly no differences between types of schools are identified as part of this evaluation. The findings section of this report does, however, include a discussion about the different sorts of challenges faced by schools.

### ***Secondary schools and inclusion***

One of the indicators ERO looked for in this evaluation was that students with high needs were spending as much time as possible in mainstream classes. Research evidence shows considerable benefits for all students when students with disabilities are mainstreamed.

The issue of mainstreaming is complicated for some students with high needs when they get to secondary schools. Some secondary schools have special education units where students with high needs learn for at least some part of the day. The students in these units may be included in a mainstream form class as well as the school-wide social, cultural and sporting activities, while also spending a majority (or even all) of their learning time in the special education unit.

The decision made by the staff at these schools is that many special education students are better served in the special education unit, especially when it comes to learning the core subjects and skills (numeracy, literacy, science and so on). This judgement has often been made because the teachers in mainstream classes were not well prepared to meet the diverse needs of a classroom that includes a student operating at level 1 or 2 of the curriculum.

## Findings

### Schools with mostly inclusive practice

ERO found that approximately half of the primary and secondary schools in this evaluation demonstrated inclusive practice for students with high needs, albeit with the need for minor improvements. The staff at these schools demonstrated good practice in teaching students with high needs and in ensuring that they took a full part in the social, cultural and sporting life of the school. The areas of strength for the personnel at these schools were their:

- ethical leadership and standards;
- coordinated and informed approaches; and
- innovative and flexible practice.

#### ***Ethical leadership and standards***

#### **Commitment in the face of challenges**

The staff at the most inclusive schools demonstrated a commitment to educate students with high needs. This commitment went beyond offering a welcoming environment to students, and extended to ensuring that the school made adaptations to cater for students with high needs and their families.

At these schools, principals, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO) and the wider staff expressed the importance of meeting the needs of students, rather than ‘fitting’ a student to the school. In order to include students with high needs the staff at these schools led changes to the buildings, equipment and teaching programme. This can be seen in the example set out below.

The parents of one student with high needs were greeted by an enthusiastic principal when they went to discuss enrolling their daughter. These parents had not received such a warm welcome at other schools.

Subsequently the principal worked with the family to develop an individual learning programme for the girl who was in a wheelchair, had autism and did not speak. She was enrolled in a mainstream class and took part in almost all class activities. One of the activities the student had taken part in was a dance class where she had used a walking frame to straighten her legs in time with the music. As part of the programme the principal also organised for the child to use a heated pool at the retirement village to help strengthen her muscles.

In order that the school was ready for the student, the principal got training and background information from GSE staff on her complex health needs. A SENCO from another school spent a day in the school with the principal, GSE staff, teacher and teacher aide providing training on strategies for learning. Regular visits from a physiotherapist, speech-language therapist and occupational therapist assisted with programme development, needs assessment and assistive equipment.

The commitment shown by the principal and school staff appeared to influence the friendly approach to this student by her peers. The other students at the school took

turns at reading to her in the classroom and being her buddy in the playground. Fellow students also joined together to paint the wheelchair ramp she used to get to technology class.

### **A caring culture**

The above example also demonstrates how a caring culture developed around a student with high needs. ERO found several other examples of how a caring culture can operate at the inclusive schools. For example, at one school a Year 8 student with Down syndrome and autism had become a popular member of the class. The student participated in all classroom activities and was genuinely welcomed by his peers. After showing some interest in wheels and bikes the caretaker, along with several classmates, built the student a go-kart.

At another school a student with high needs wanted to represent the school in a cross country event. Unfortunately, because of her poor eyesight, the student could not navigate the course on her own. An older student at the school volunteered to run alongside her so that she could compete in the event.

### **Experienced and able leadership and staff**

The high professional standards of the staff at inclusive schools were linked to their experience in working with a diverse range of students. Staff at the inclusive schools drew on a wide range of knowledge, strategies and networks to support students with high needs and their families.

The examples given above demonstrate how ethical school leadership influences the development of an inclusive school culture. The role played by school principals was vital but other areas of school leadership were also important to developing an inclusive approach across the school.

One of the most important roles requiring an experienced and able leader is that of SENCO. The SENCO's role is pivotal for ensuring that students with high needs have the learning programmes and support they need to achieve at school. The SENCO also works with other staff to ensure that professional development is in place and that effective teaching strategies are applied in classrooms.

Teacher aides, as well as teachers, need appropriate professional development. Targeted professional development for teacher aides encourages them to understand the sorts of effective learning and behavioural strategies they should employ. It emphasises the role of the teacher aide in relation to the teacher and outlines strategies for how teacher aides can support the social relationships and inclusion of students. This is especially important given that, in some cases, students can become socially and emotionally dependent on teacher aides and effectively excluded from contact with their peers.<sup>10</sup> Effective professional development also gives teacher aides

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<sup>10</sup> See also Giangreco, M., Edelman, S., Luisella, T. and McFarland, S. (1997) Helping or hovering? Effects of instructional assistant proximity on students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 64(1), 7-18, as downloaded from <http://www.uvm.edu/~mgiangre/helpinghovering.pdf> 28 May 2010.

information about the sorts of health, privacy and medical issues that affect students with high needs.

### **Managing the available funding**

The personnel at inclusive schools noted that the amount of funding they received for students they perceived to have high needs could create challenges when it came to paying teacher aide hours and specialist learning equipment. Despite this challenge, it was evident that these schools found a solution that supported the inclusion of these students. For instance, students that the school considered to have high needs, and who did not qualify for additional government funding, had teacher aide hours paid for out of locally-raised funds. Boards also changed their priorities when it was identified that such students required additional support.

Some school personnel were adept at getting whatever funding was available from government and non-government agencies. This could include RTLB, GSE, Behaviour Support Worker (BSW), the Interim Response Fund, Child Adolescent and Family Service (CAFS) and Child Youth and Family service (CYF). The fact that the current funding framework for special needs often appears to reward the quality of a funding application, rather than the actual level of need, is a potential issue that needs more investigation.

However, the use of locally-raised funds for including students with special needs reflects wider funding issues for schools. ERO's 2006 review of operational funding<sup>11</sup> found some schools relied on locally-raised funds to help run their school. Similarly, some schools were using locally-raised funds to include students with special needs. Given their varying ability to raise funds locally this can create pressure for schools, especially in funding support for those students who the school considers to be high needs, but who do not qualify for additional government funding, especially ORRS funding.

#### **Self review questions for your school**

##### **School culture and leadership for including students with high needs**

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

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<sup>11</sup> Available from ERO's website under national reports.

## ***Coordinated and informed approaches***

### **Teamwork, systems and relationships**

Schools that demonstrated the most inclusive practice for students with high needs had well-organised systems, effective teamwork, and constructive relationships with outside agencies and with families and whānau. The systems, processes and relationships at these schools worked well to identify and support the education of students with high needs. They helped people, both inside and outside the school, to identify and solve any problems, develop effective processes and/or celebrate and promote student success.

Several schools held regular meetings, both inside the school and with outside agencies, to deal proactively with any issues that involved all students, including students with high needs. For example, at one secondary school, weekly meetings occurred between an Assistant Principal, deans and the RTLB. Multi-agency meetings had also been held with GSE, the RTLB, Child Youth and Family, police, an alternative education provider, the truancy service and the school counsellor. In addition a special needs management committee operated with the principal, the teacher in charge of special needs education, an additional member of the senior management team and a parent representative of the board of trustees. The role of the management committee involved appointing staff, approving programmes and promoting parent/whānau/iwi partnerships.

In addition to these meetings, the staff from the special needs department met once a week to plan and review student progress. Individual education plans were reviewed twice yearly. These meetings involved parents, teachers, teacher aides, GSE and, where practical, students. These meetings ensure that all the relevant health, home-life, academic and social information relevant to a student was coordinated to support the student's successful inclusion at school.

### **Working with families/whānau**

Inclusive schools worked well with the families of students with high needs. The basis of an effective relationship between the school and family members was open communication. Good communication at the enrolment stage made it clear which health, social and academic issues the family saw as important. Good communication also made it easier to set goals for individual education plans and, once a child was working in the classroom, made it possible for teachers and parents to work together to support student learning and development.

Inclusive schools used the same sorts of communication strategies as they did for the parents and care-givers of other students. This included electronic note-books, face-to-face communication, email and phone calls to talk with parents and care-givers. ERO found that parents' receiving good news about their child's day at school was important. This information helped parents to be proud of their child. It also enhanced the working relationship between the child's family and the school.



## **Use of information**

The nature of information available to school staff, and how they used it to help students with high needs, was fundamental to the quality of a school's inclusion. Inclusive schools used information regarding student achievement, interests, strengths, medical conditions, behaviour and parental expectations to inform the programme and support they gave to each student with high needs.

Individual education plans needed specific measureable goals and/or objectives for the student. These could cover a range of fields including academic, social and extra-curricular activities. Where possible, individual education plans included the student's perspective or voice on the learning goals. Student interests and strengths were an important focus for inclusive schools, not just the areas in which a student with high needs may struggle.

The feedback for individual education plans often included observations from GSE staff. This type of input helped identify specific strategies that were working with the student as well as how they could be modified to support future learning and engagement.

Other information about a student with high needs was useful for placing that child with a particular teacher. Some large schools, including intermediate schools, used the range of information, such as the strengths, interests, needs and medical issues of a student, to ensure a good match between them and their class teacher.

A detailed and up-to-date special needs register gave schools a base for understanding the types of educational need for students with high or moderate needs. Inclusive schools also had information about the initiatives they had for all special needs students and how effective these were in supporting their academic and social development. This was a good way for the school to review and improve its performance in special needs.

## **Managing school transitions**

The effective coordination of staff at inclusive schools was evident in their management of entry and exit transitions for students with high needs. At their best, transitions involved several staff, working together with a student and their family so that the specific needs of a student were taken into account in making a transition as effective as possible.

In one example of transitioning a five-year-old with high needs to a school, the approaches used involved:

- having pre-entry visits to the school over one or two terms;
- meetings between the staff of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) service;
- the involvement of GSE and other agencies working with the student and family;

- putting into place any necessary building or equipment needs;<sup>12</sup>
- hiring and training teacher aides; and
- ensuring individual education plan was completed with short and longer term goals.

A strategy that helped the transition of several students to their new schools included the use of photos or learning stories. These helped some students with high needs know the routines, people and environment of their new school. Contributions to these learning stories could be made by the student, parents, staff at a student's exit school or early childhood centre as well as the staff and students at the new school.

Another effective strategy involved teachers discussing with their classes the differences in routine and behaviour they might expect from a new student with high needs. These discussions gave staff a chance to model and emphasise the sorts of behaviour that would make a student with high needs feel welcome at the school.

In some cases five-year-olds would attend their new school in a part-time capacity. This enabled a student to develop a sense of safety in their new environment and/or to build up the physical stamina that a day at school requires. It is important that such transition decisions are made in the best interests of the student, rather than the school and its staff. Parents and GSE specialists should be consulted about part-time attendance to confirm that it is the best possible decision for the student.

#### **Transition and support at a low decile primary school**

One low decile school used a variety of strategies to successfully enrol a six-year-old with ADHD<sup>13</sup> and severe behavioural difficulties. The student had been stood down from two other schools and, for several months previously, had been homeschooled by his mother.

Staff at the school worked with a Behaviour Support Worker from GSE to prepare his transition to the school. They collected information from the previous schools and the child's family so they would understand the specific issues affecting the child's behaviour. The subsequent transition plan focused on 'working with others.'

Initially the child would frequently speak to staff and students by swearing or shouting. He would often not participate in classroom learning, disliked any exercise/physical activity and wanted to leave the school. In these early stages he also assaulted and abused some staff and students at the school.

The school did not stand the child down, but instead ensured that he was withdrawn from class if he exhibited the early signs of non-compliant behaviour. The principal and classroom teacher also made it clear to the child that he was cared about and that,

<sup>12</sup> The *New Zealand Disability Strategy* provides that no child should be denied access to their local, regular school because of their impairment. In addition, the *Education Act 1989*, the *Human Rights Act 1993* and the *Building Act 2004* (and the *Building Code*) require boards to make sure that students with special physical, behavioural or sensory needs can access school buildings, including the toilets and technology areas. (See also Appendix 3 of this report)

<sup>13</sup> Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

even though he wanted to leave the school, they wanted to keep him.

The classroom teacher implemented some additional strategies to support the boy's positive behaviour. This included taking a few minutes every morning to encourage the student. "You're going to have a really good day today..." or "Today is a new day and a new start ..." (especially if there had been a problem the day before). The teacher also reminded the child of the consequences if he left the school grounds or assaulted anyone.

The teacher employed a 'no surprises' policy if there was going to be a reliever in the class or a timetable change. This involved the teacher talking through any upcoming changes with the student. This approach made it easier for the student to be mentally prepared and helped avoid a change of routine leading to behavioural problems.

One of the biggest changes the child had to face was when the classroom teacher went overseas for two weeks of the term. The school used the same reliever for the class over this time. The classroom teacher also provided the child with a laminated map of the countries she was visiting. In addition, she sent emails and text messages to him as encouragement while she was away.

The child's behaviour has improved over time. He has been at the school for nearly two years and although his behaviour can still be challenging, the focus for the school is now on the child's learning. His reading has improved significantly in recent times and he has become an enthusiastic participant in the school's mini-ball team and swimming programme.

The school has kept the same teacher with the child from Years 2 to 4 to make the most of the positive relationship that has been developed. She receives daily hugs from this student, in marked contrast to their initial relationship. The teacher has sought to find important interests for the student, and as a result, he has been on the classroom gardening duty for over 12 months.

### **Self review questions for your school**

#### ***Teamwork, working with families, using information and transitions***

1. To what extent does the school hold internal meetings, and meetings with external people, to support students with special needs?
2. To what extent does the school's relationship with the parents of students with high needs support the inclusion and achievement of these students?
3. How well does the school use various forms of information about students' achievement, social interests and physical skills, to better include and support students with high needs?
4. To what extent does the school have the systems, coordination, links with external agencies and internal expertise to support the transition of students with high needs both to and from their school?

### ***Innovative and flexible practice***

As the above example indicates, good practice in being inclusive requires innovation and flexibility. Staff at inclusive schools were effective at managing the complex or unique challenges related to including students with high needs. Despite these challenges they continued to focus on the individual needs of students.

The most important area in which inclusive schools could be innovative was in their pedagogy for students with high needs. An inclusive pedagogy involves understanding what a student can achieve and designing a programme that engages that student. For some students with high needs their learning programme was essentially the same as other students. For other students with high needs an entirely different approach was required.

Some schools used the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*, to develop meaningful learning experiences for particular students. The use of *Te Whāriki* is especially useful for those students who are not yet operating at level 1 of *The New Zealand Curriculum*. *Te Whāriki* allows teachers to identify the strengths and interests of students and develop a curriculum that is relevant to these aspects.

Using strengths and interests to develop a curriculum for students with high needs is also consistent with *The New Zealand Curriculum*. The work of inclusive schools provides examples of how this can be done. At one school a boy's interest in film and media was used by teachers to involve him in videoing elements of a physical education class. The boy's use of a wheelchair had precluded him from participating in this class directly.

Schools were also innovative in facilitating the social context for students with high needs. Some students with high needs required additional support to develop friendships at school. At the most inclusive schools teachers and teacher aides had developed networks of students around students with high needs to promote their social inclusion in the school. At some schools this involved developing a lunchtime and interval buddy system. One school established a friendship group who worked with the student to help him learn how to relate to his peers.

Other examples of innovative school practices included simple systems for particular students with high needs. For instance one school used student specific signs to provide directions for an autistic student. This student had previously 'wandered' from the school site and the signs helped this student to stay on the school grounds. Another school had painted yellow lines on the school playground to help a partially sighted student find her way back to her classroom.

#### **Including a new entrant student with high needs**

The inclusion of a new student with high needs at a small, middle decile school began with a comprehensive transition plan worked on by the school, health professionals, GSE and staff from the girl's kindergarten. The plan included short term goals and long term learning goals. One of the short-term goals was that the student would be able to use "Yes" and "No" as accurate responses. Longer-term goals focused on the student learning to indicate her needs and wants.

The transition process included several discussions with the girl's parent and visits to

the school by the girl. Social stories with photographs helped the girl understand the move from kindergarten to primary school. The visits included her taking part in school learning activities. During these times the student was accompanied by her kindergarten teacher aide. The school's new entrant teacher also visited the kindergarten to help build relationships with all the intending students, including the student with high needs.

Once the student began school the class teacher was released on a weekly basis to work with high needs student, using 0.1 release time under the child's ORRS funding. The principal oversaw the planning for student and provided support for the work of the classroom teacher. In turn, the teacher set the teacher aide clear expectations of how she was to assist the girl to learn maths, writing, reading skills as well as being part of the class.

At the time of the ERO review, the girl had been at the school for almost a year. Frequent communication between her teacher and parents has kept them up to date with her achievements over the year. The parents have been involved in the individual education plan meetings along with the various health and education staff. These meetings have also served as a way to talk about what the student is able to do. For example at one of the meetings it was noted that she was able to play on the computer but has difficulty taking turns with other children. The adults at the meeting subsequently emphasised the importance of helping the girl learn to share and take turns.

The individual education plans provided specific targets in the areas of oral language, social skills (relationships), reading, writing and maths. Under each of these headings the teacher and teacher aide wrote ongoing assessment notes that were dated. These notes helped identify that the student was making progress.

Since her enrolment the student had made good progress. She was able to write letters and some high frequency words. She could repeat some sounds she heard and was reading at level 5.<sup>14</sup> In mathematics, she was counting to 10 and working on counting up to 20. The student had progressed socially and was willing to take part in classroom routines – including when it was tidy up time.

### **Meeting the diverse needs of students at a large secondary school**

The work of a special education department at one secondary school has helped to ensure that the needs of all students, including students with high needs, have been met. The department oversees several programmes for students of varying educational need. At the time of the review, there were 110 students on the school's special education register.

Nine students with high or very high needs were enrolled in a homeroom special needs unit. These students have been mainstreamed as ability and interests allow. All but one attend mainstream form classes, some independently, others with teacher aide support. Four spend the greater part of the school day in mainstream classes. Their individual education plans incorporate goals for social skills and the curriculum. The

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<sup>14</sup> These are level 5 readers, not level 5 of *The New Zealand Curriculum*

unit has at least one session a day where all students are together for language class. This class integrates work on sign language, literacy and numeracy.

Life skills are taught to students in the school's special education unit. One simple strategy the unit uses to teach students social and financial skills has been to give students small amounts of money to buy items at the canteen.

The focus of the unit's health and safety programmes has been on developing self esteem and personal hygiene, as well as developing an awareness of school emergency procedures. Technology has included crafts, fundraising activities, planning and cooking a meal, and the development of computer skills.

Various other special education programmes have operated across the school with different levels of support from the staff in the unit. For example the special education department coordinated basic skills classes for Year 10 students at risk of underachieving and a support class for Year 9 students with low levels of literacy. Some Years 9 and 10 students, with very low reading ages, have received individualised programmes from an external tutor.

In addition, the learning support department has provided mainstream support for several students; mentoring for students in Years 9 to 11; reader-writer programmes for several junior and senior students; and referral programmes for students with particular learning or behavioural concerns.

### ***Areas for improvement at inclusive schools***

Despite the good practice shown by the inclusive schools, there were still ways in which many of these schools could further include students with high needs. In general these did not substantially limit the degree to which the schools were inclusive for their students with high needs. However, these development areas may have been more significant should other students with high needs enrol. ERO's concerns included:

- teachers having insufficient time to plan for students with high needs;
- teachers at a secondary school having insufficient knowledge of formative assessment and/or differentiated teaching to specifically meet the needs of students;
- little Māori or Pacific presence in the school although several of the students with high needs were Māori or Pacific;
- some IEP goals lacking in detail, making it difficult to identify progress;
- teacher aides doing too much of the programme planning with too little input from teachers;
- weaknesses in writing ORRS applications, meaning that some students with high needs may not have received funding to which they may have been entitled;
- the principal of the school also operating as the SENCO;
- some physical access difficulties (including a split site and some two-storey buildings);
- evidence of teasing/taunting by other students in some contexts;
- a shortage of teacher-aide cover (for instance if a teacher aide is ill); and

- too high a work load for the SENCO.

### Self review questions for your school

#### *Cultural identity, ORRS, Individual learning programmes and school safety*

1. To what extent does the school support the cultural identity of students with high needs?
2. To what extent are the school's ORRS applications successful for gaining support for the student?
3. To what extent do all teaching staff know how to develop differentiated programmes for students with high needs?
4. To what extent do individual education plans provide specific, measurable, attributable, realistic and time-bound goals for student achievement?
5. How does the school know that students with high needs are safe from bullying?

### Schools with some inclusive practices

Approximately 30 percent of schools were found to have some areas of good performance in including students with high needs. However, ERO found that these schools also had some significant areas that needed improvement. In general these schools had 'pockets' of inclusive practice across the school, with a variety of strengths and weaknesses. For example, some schools demonstrated some good levels of commitment, but lacked systems for monitoring the inclusion of students with high needs. Other schools showed coordinated and informed approaches, although the inconsistent quality of their teaching did not support the achievement of all students, including those with high needs.

Examples of specific strengths at these schools included:

- caring relationships across the school;
- good relationships with parents and external agencies;
- well-developed IEPs for students, with detailed goals or objectives reviewed each term;
- a focus on student strengths and abilities;
- good transition processes that involved the family and resulted in a child's successful start to school;
- the SENCO providing good monitoring of students and assistance for mainstream teachers;
- staff able to differentiate their teaching and include students with high needs in the classroom activity;
- students' high levels of participation in the extra-curricular life of the school; and
- celebrating the success of students with high needs.

The specific weaknesses found by ERO at these schools included:

- no learning plans or IEPs for students with high needs;
- using unsuitable strategies to support the learning of students with high needs;

- a history of poor leadership and coordination for high needs (now being overcome by a new principal);
- a lack of differentiated teaching;
- unclear transition processes;
- students excluded from some activities, such as camps and physical education;
- some parents having to pay for teacher aide hours;
- some staff with poor attitudes about including students with high needs;
- no toileting and shower facilities;
- a lack of training for teacher aides;
- ineffective monitoring of initiatives to support students with high needs;
- students socially included but not adequately learning; and
- some evidence of bullying.

The case studies below show how two schools, with some inclusive practices operated. They highlight in particular the mix of practices. Some practices supported the inclusion of students with high needs while others did not.

#### **Moving towards inclusion at a small, rural secondary school**

This secondary school demonstrated several good practices to support the inclusion of students with high needs. For example, all students with high needs have had individual education plans. The assessment information for these plans was gathered from the student's previous school, as well as Supplementary Testing of Achievement in Reading (STAR) and GSE testing. Teaching and support staff were consulted as part of the individual education plans and deans have been fully involved in the planning process.

Families are involved with the setting of individual education plans. The school's RTLB visits most homes or meets parents to discuss the educational and social issues for their child. The RTLB is also an important figure in planning pathways and general support for students requiring an individual education plan.

Regular meetings of the special education committee and the teacher aides help to monitor student progress and adapt IEPs as necessary. The committee discusses appropriate strategies to assist students with high needs. Student progress has been reviewed each term and IEPs are considered and modified.

Students with high needs have teacher aides assigned to them. These teacher aides are trained and have ongoing assistance from the RTLB and are critical to the success of the high needs students in classrooms.

The SENCO knowledgeably leads a supportive team of teachers. The SENCO has a degree in special education and has a clear vision of how to support students with high needs. Her focus is on improving the extent to which students with special needs are integrated into mainstream classes. Currently students are withdrawn for special learning focus such as literacy but are mostly involved in the same activities as other students, if at a different level.



In some classrooms students in the mainstream classes have well-planned learning experiences and differentiation learning takes place. Classes are generally small and students receive a lot of individual attention.

Despite the good work happening in some classrooms, learning does need to improve for students with high needs in other mainstream classes. Some teachers need professional development to introduce programmes and teaching strategies that would assist students with high needs. The development of these strategies would be enhanced through greater use of student achievement data to inform teaching.

### **Inclusive aspects at medium-sized primary school**

The principal has provided a supportive and welcoming approach to students with high needs and their families. The positive attitude towards students with high needs was evident in the principal's active involvement in supporting students, including the work done in seeking additional support from external agencies.

The principal's approach has helped build a school culture where students with high needs are included in the social life of the school. Students with high needs have been treated as just another student by their peers.

The size of school means the principal has several teachers from which to choose the most appropriate class placement for students with high needs. This means students can usually be placed with teachers who are willing and able to adapt aspects of the curriculum in ways that are responsive to their needs.

Experienced and empathetic teacher aides have been provided for students with high needs. The school has not topped up the ORRS grant supplied to pay for teacher aides, but has limited their contact hours based on the money available.

The individual education plans have varied in quality. Some were more explicit about strategies and targets than others. This has made it difficult to evaluate the progress made by some students.

Frequent changes in SENCO and a lack of job description has hampered the effectiveness of this role in the school. During ERO's time at the school, the SENCO was the school's deputy principal. While the SENCO is a high status member of staff the competing demands of this position limit her time in liaising with staff, including the specialist teacher employed for the ORRS funded students. The demands on the deputy principal may have also influenced the fact that the 0.2 specialist teacher hours for one student were not fully used.

### **Schools with few inclusive practices**

Approximately 20 percent of schools were found to have few inclusive practices for students with high needs. While these schools usually had one or more aspect where they performed well, their overall performance meant that students with high needs experienced significant forms of exclusion. The individual strengths found at these schools included:

- the SENCO's making good use of best practice literature to inform their work;

- applying reliable methods for identifying the strengths and interests of students;
- having an affirming school culture;
- staff working together to identify successful strategies used with students with high needs;
- students with high needs having genuine friendships at the school;
- working with ECE and/or feeder schools to ensure good transition processes;
- students with high needs participating in extra-curricular events; and
- making use of external agencies to support the health needs of students.

The strengths shown at these schools were outweighed however by the several weaknesses they also each demonstrated, including:

- teachers' not convinced about the right of students with high needs to learn and their unwillingness to change to meet the needs of students;
- appointing an inexperienced teacher as SENCO;
- uncoordinated systems with no strategy or policy for supporting students with high needs;
- poor monitoring and evaluation, including student progress and achievements
- weakly constructed individual education plans;
- insufficient support and monitoring of the teaching provided for students with high needs (especially at secondary schools);
- staff and student prejudices about disabilities;
- students excluded from extra-curricular, sporting and cultural activities; and
- insufficient focus on building the student's learning and achievement.

The key differences between these schools and the most inclusive schools were linked to the ethical approach taken by school leaders and staff. While the personnel at inclusive schools consistently discussed and managed their obligations to help students with high needs learn, much less commitment was evident from the staff at these schools about how they could help students with high needs. As one principal said to ERO:

*Is school really the best place to be at for these students at the age of five? Their individual programmes, independence skills and socialising are at a three-year-old level. Would children with this level of learning be better to come to school at seven years of age?*

Similarly, a parent who talked to ERO expressed concern about the quality of schooling her child received at a previous school. The parent was very happy with the school her child was now enrolled in. At the earlier school the experiences was markedly different as the deputy principal had asked the mother why she intended enrolling her daughter given that 'she would never learn anything.'

## **Information from ERO's questionnaire to schools**

### ***The benefits of students with high needs***

School staff identified several benefits to the school of enrolling students with high needs. Through ERO's questionnaire, principals spoke about the positive influence of students with high needs on the culture of the school. Principals noted the degree of tolerance, understanding and empathy that was engendered in a school community in support of students with high needs.

Principals also discussed the professional benefits to teachers in having to adapt the curriculum to meet the diverse needs of students. In some cases, students with high needs gave teachers the opportunity to be more patient and understanding of different ways of learning.

Teachers also developed networks in response to their work with the outside agencies supporting students with high needs. These networks could be beneficial for the school's work with students in the future. Some teachers also observed the advantages of working with whānau in the way teams of professionals could work with the family of a student to support his or her learning.

Other students also benefited by having leadership responsibilities for some students with high needs. Not only did students understand that in a community people have different strengths and weaknesses, but they also saw how they could appropriately support those who had high needs.

### ***The challenges and barriers of including students with high needs***

The questionnaire information from schools also identified the challenges and barriers schools faced in including students with high needs. While these can vary with schools' context, most of the issues identified were not related to school size, decile, location or their ability to include students with high needs.

By far the largest identified challenge was the level of funding schools received for students with high needs. The majority of principals indicated that funding, in some form, was a considerable challenge. The specific issues associated with their funding included the costs of teacher aide time, specialist equipment and specialist services and, to a lesser extent, professional development for teachers and support staff.

The next most commonly identified challenges or barriers to including students with high needs were:

- recruiting suitable support staff;
- the amount of teacher time and energy needed;
- the level of staff knowledge; and
- property and buildings.

Each of these issues can be complex for schools.

The recruitment of suitable support staff was raised by some rural and provincial schools in terms of their isolation. All schools noted that it could be difficult finding

teacher aides with the correct skills and knowledge to work with individual students. Other support staff issues involved the difference schools observed between the money they received for teacher aide time, for example through ORRS funding, compared to what they paid a well qualified teacher aide at the top of the pay scale.

Various aspects of teacher time and energy were noted as a significant barrier or challenge by several schools. The degree of classroom planning as well as the additional meeting time and paperwork for a student with high needs was often cited by schools as a time consuming activity for staff. Concerns about the time spent in professional development for teachers and managing behaviour of some students with high needs was also of concern.

Property issues were seen by some schools as significant obstacle. The main property issues related to the extent to which their site could be navigated by a student with limited mobility. Some schools are built on different levels, they may be on hillsides (with many stairs) or on opposite sides of the road. A few of the schools with access challenges were integrated schools that had not yet brought their buildings up to specified requirements.<sup>15</sup>

Other barriers or challenges for schools included the time delay receiving additional funding for students with high needs and difficulties accessing external agencies and specialists. Again, some rural and provincial schools noted that their isolation exacerbated difficulties in accessing external support.

The behaviour of some students with high needs was seen as a challenge for some schools, including the effect some students could have on the overall classroom dynamic. To a lesser extent some schools also noted that the lack of support they received from the parents of students with high needs was a problem.

Some school personnel outlined the challenge posed by community perceptions of their school. Some parents of students without special needs can have concerns about the placement of students with high needs in a school. These parents may challenge the way a school uses resources to support students with high needs and they may also change schools, thereby reducing the schools roll and the overall level of funding they receive from government.

A further challenge facing schools is the confidence of completing ORRS applications. Anecdotal evidence suggested that there were students who had been denied ORRS funding on the first or even second application, only to receive this funding on the third application. At least part of the reason for the variation in funding acceptance appears to be the knowledge of the person completing the application. Where staff have more experience, and even some training, in completing ORRS applications, they appear to be more successful. It is ostensibly a difficulty with the special education funding system that some students may not be funded because of weaknesses in a schools' ORRS application rather than their actual level of need.

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix Four setting out the legislative requirements for public buildings and disability access.

### ***Professional development and support***

School questionnaire information showed that SENCOs, teachers and teacher aides take part in many different professional learning and development activities related to students with high needs. Typically staff are involved in one-off courses relevant to the specific educational or health needs of the students under their care. The courses taken by staff included:

- hearing impaired, sign language;
- Autism/Aspergers;
- working with ORRS children;
- Downs syndrome;
- behaviour management;
- dyslexia and dyspraxia;
- clicker and LEXIA training;
- Braille and vision-impaired courses;
- non-violent intervention;
- early language learning; and
- specialists teacher aide courses.

Some schools noted that they had professional support from GSE, RTLBs and from special schools. Teachers and support staff used professional development time to observe the practices at special schools and to develop strategies for their own students.

Very few schools indicated that they undertook whole school professional development related to including students with special needs. Some schools have completed initiatives on differentiated teaching and some had undertaken school-wide professional development on autism.

ERO's recent reports on professional learning and development (PLD) in schools suggested that effective whole-school development targeted at classroom teaching is more likely to change the overall quality of teaching in a school. The features of such professional development should:<sup>16</sup>

- be focused on student outcomes, with links between classroom activity and the desired outcomes;
- be based on worthwhile content, such as the findings of established educational research, and related to the particular context of the teacher;
- integrate theoretical ideas about teaching with teaching practice;
- use assessment information about the performance of teachers and students to make a difference in the classroom;
- work with, and challenge, teacher assumptions about learning; and

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<sup>16</sup> For a full list of the characteristics of effective professional development see Timperley, H. (2008). *Teacher professional learning and development*. International Academy Of Education, as cited in ERO (2009) Professional Learning and Development in Secondary Schools.

- have active school leaders who can create a vision for professional learning as well as lead and organise staff learning.

Given the amount of professional learning and development time that is based on course and conferences, rather than in dedicated school-wide initiatives, then it is questionable as to the extent to which the current professional learning and development of staff contributes to making schools more inclusive. It is more likely that these initiatives provide some skills for specific issues, without deeply challenging the school practices for students with high needs.

### ***The work of Group Special Education (GSE)***

As part of the questionnaire information gathered from schools, ERO asked to what extent schools have received GSE support in meeting the needs of students with high needs.

Approximately a quarter of schools were positive about the work GSE. These schools cited the responsive work of GSE staff, ORRS applications, classroom observations, behaviour support plans, interim response funding, working with staff and providing specialist support such as speech therapy, psychologists and physiotherapy.

A majority of schools were neutral in their comments about the GSE support they received. These schools discussed the types of support SENCO, teachers and teacher aides received without commenting on the quality of this support. It could be inferred that schools did not, therefore, have any major concerns with this service.

Fewer than 10 percent of the schools gave negative feedback about the performance of GSE. These negative comments related to a range of issues including limited access to support and funding, staff turnover and workload issues limiting the service that is available as well as concerns about the quality of service received.

## **Conclusion**

This evaluation found that approximately half of New Zealand schools demonstrate inclusive practice. This judgement was made, in part, considering how these schools responded to the needs of the students who were at the school at the time. These schools may be less inclusive should they enrol different students with high needs, especially students whose behaviour, or medical needs are not understood by staff.

Significant proportions of schools had some or few inclusive practices. For the 30 percent of schools that had 'pockets of inclusive' practice, inclusive approaches should be made the norm across the school. For those 20 percent of schools with few inclusive practices, a more ethical and professional approach to students with high needs is required. Inclusive education needs leadership from the school principal to ensure that students with high needs are welcomed in schools, that their needs are identified and met and that they are fully engaged in the academic, social and extra-curricular life of the school.

Funding is an important challenge for all those working in special education. All types of schools found the level of funding they received for some students was a challenge. This was especially so for those students who did not have ORRS funding

but for whom, their level of behaviour or their medical condition, meant that they would benefit from the assistance of a teacher aide for at least part of the day.

Despite this significant challenge, ERO found that it was not funding that differentiated the level of inclusiveness at schools. The quality of leadership, and the extent to which schools could adopt a specialised pedagogy for students with high needs, were more important than funding. Schools that had an ethical, committed, innovative, informed and coordinated approach to including students with high needs provide the examples of good practice for others to follow.

The key question therefore in response to this evaluation is how do we maintain and expand the level of good practice observed in schools? Very few schools in this evaluation took part in school-wide professional development for inclusive education. Almost all of the formal professional development undertaken by school staff was in the form of one-off courses and conferences.

As ERO has found in other evaluations, this type of professional development is not conducive to changing classroom practice or the culture of a school. Part of the answer to improving the level of inclusion across all New Zealand schools requires more school-wide professional development targeted at making classrooms more inclusive. Such an approach will not only benefit students with high needs but is also likely to improve the way teachers respond to the diverse needs of all students.

## **Next steps**

On the basis of this report, school staff should:

- use the report's findings, case studies, self-review questions and inclusive teaching indicators to review the extent to which students with high needs are included across the school; and
- identify where students are not well included and implement a plan to extend the effective practice already in the school.

On the basis of this report, the Ministry of Education should:

- build school-wide capability to support effective teaching for all students by extending effective evidence-based whole-of-school professional development programmes;
- review how well principal training and support fosters leadership for inclusive schools;
- consider, as part of the special education review, how effective mainstream schools, special schools, Group Special Education and Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour can work together to improve the level of inclusion in New Zealand schools.

## Appendix 1: Questions parents and caregivers may ask when enrolling a student with high needs

<p><b>1. What success stories does the school have about working with previous students with special needs?</b></p>
<p>Schools should be able to indicate, without identifying students, examples of how students with special needs have been supported at the school. In particular schools should be able to comment on how they have helped children with special needs learn, and not just participate.</p>
<p><b>2. To what extent will my child be in a mainstream class?</b></p>
<p>Parents should understand what sort of learning arrangement will be used for their child. Mainstream learning is generally beneficial, but there may be special programmes that will benefit your particular child.</p>
<p><b>3. How will staff know how to identify and meet the social and educational needs of my child?</b></p>
<p>Schools should be able to explain to you the sorts of tests and processes they use to understand your child's learning and social abilities. From this basis it should be possible to understand how your child has progressed.</p>
<p><b>4. What support processes will the school use to ensure that my child is achieving?</b></p>
<p>Schools should be able to discuss the people, in addition to the classroom teacher, who are available to support your child's learning. This could include speech-language therapists, physiotherapists, teacher-aides and so on.</p>
<p><b>5. What training do staff have in dealing with the medical issues of my child?</b></p>
<p>Your child may need to have a particular medicine, diet and so on that requires specialist knowledge and understanding. While this may not currently be available, parents can expect that the school will source appropriate training for staff. In general it is good practice to talk to a school well in advance of your start date to ensure that they can be as well prepared as possible.</p>
<p><b>6. What will happen if my child's teacher or teacher-aide is away sick?</b></p>
<p>Parents should not have to look after their child at home if a staff member is unable to attend school. Contingency plans should operate to ensure that your child's needs are catered for.</p>
<p><b>7. What opportunities will there be for me to work with staff to identify and support the strengths and development areas of my child?</b></p>
<p>Schools should include parents and caregivers in learning plans for their child. This will help to identify important abilities and interests your child has and approaches that have been successful at home and/or in previous settings. The most common formal planning tool is called an IEP – Individual Education Plan. As a parent you can expect to be included in any IEP for your child.</p>



<p><b>8. Are the goals set for my child’s IEP SMART? (Specific, measureable, attributable, realistic and time-bound)</b></p>
<p>If your child has an IEP it is important that the goals set are somehow measureable. There needs to be a clear sense of progress possible over time. It also needs to be clear who is responsible for supporting your child and the goals must be realistic, ie something that is possible for your child to do, that they can’t already achieve.</p>
<p><b>9. What sort of communication can I expect from the classroom teacher about my child’s progress?</b></p>
<p>Classroom teachers will be expected to make less formal reports to you about your child’s day to day progress. There may be a notebook or homework diary which can be used to communicate with your child’s teacher or teachers. There may also be occasional informal meetings with your child’s teacher when you pick them up from school. In a secondary setting you could ring your child’s form teacher.</p>
<p><b>10. What extra-curricula opportunities will be available to my child?</b></p>
<p>You can expect that your child can participate in sports, cultural events and school camps. Some schools ask parents to help pay for the cost of additional teacher aides when children with high needs go on camps.</p>
<p><b>11. What policies and processes does the school have to limit bullying?</b></p>
<p>Schools should have a plan for how they will deal with bullying at the school. See ERO’s report: <i>Safe Schools: Strategies To Prevent Bullying</i>, May 2007 to understand the types of processes schools should have in place.</p>
<p><b>12. How will the school support the cultural identity of my child?</b></p>
<p>It is important that a child with high needs continues to make links to their culture. Depending on the background of your child this may include participation in school cultural groups. It will also involve the sorts of topics learnt in the curriculum, for instance the study of languages, history and society.</p>
<p><b>13. How does the school know that it is effective at including other students with special needs?</b></p>
<p>The school’s Board should have carried out a self review of its performance with special needs pupils. The information from this review should be accessible to you as a parent. The findings of this review could form the basis of further questions.</p>

## Appendix 2: School building requirements and property entitlements linked to special needs

### *Extracts from the Ministry of Education's Schools Property Management Handbook*

#### **6.17 Special needs students – access in schools**

##### **6.17.1 Ensuring access**

The **New Zealand Disability Strategy** provides that no child should be denied access to their local, regular school because of their impairment. In addition, the *Education Act 1989*, the *Human Rights Act 1993*, the *Building Act 2004* and the *Building Code* require boards to make sure that students with special physical, behavioural or sensory needs can access school buildings, including the toilets and technology areas.

To align with government policy and the legislation, the ministry has developed a range of requirements to provide for students and staff with special needs, including design standards and a funding policy. **Section 3** covers the funding policy. The information in this section will help boards design and implement property modifications to accommodate students and staff with special needs.

##### **6.17.2 The New Zealand Standard**

*New Zealand Standard 4121 Design for access and mobility: Buildings and associated facilities*, known as **Access 2001**, ensures access to public buildings and other related facilities for people with disabilities. *Access 2001* contains a lot of prescriptive information, for example, door handles must be able to be opened by people who have limited arm strength (usually by specifying lever type door handles not door knobs).

#### **3.6 Special needs funding for first time enrolments**

##### **3.6.1 Purpose of the policy**

The **New Zealand Disability Strategy** provides that no child should be denied access to their local, regular school because of their impairment. In addition, the *Education Act 1989*, the *Human Rights Act 1993* and the *Building Act 2004* (and the *Building Code*) require boards to make sure that students with special physical, behavioural or sensory needs can access school buildings, including the toilets and technology areas.

To align with government policy and the legislation, the ministry has developed a range of property policies to provide for students with special needs, including design standards and a funding policy.

##### **3.6.2 How boards qualify**

Property entitlement for children with special needs is linked to staffing ratios for ORRS8 students. That is, each high needs student receives approximately three times the property entitlement of mainstream students in SPG, teaching space and 5YA funding. Similarly each very high needs student receives approximately five times the property entitlement of mainstream students.

This provides funding for students/staff members with special needs when they first enrol/join the school. If circumstances change for example, a student's condition deteriorates or an existing student/staff member becomes disabled, this policy equally applies.

Any reasonable property modifications (for example, ramps, ablution facilities, lifts) required to enable a student's **first-time enrolment** will be decided by the ministry and discussed with the board and the student's caregiver. A budget for the modifications will be agreed, with the scope of the modifications being all reasonable work required to support the student's needs.

Special needs funding is not available for work of a health and safety nature. For example, repaving areas for easier wheelchair use is really a health and safety issue, as uneven pavement can affect all school occupants. This **must** be budgeted for in the 10YPP.

### **3.6.3 Process for getting this funding**

A specific project budget separate from the board's 5YA budget will be provided for this work and paid out in accordance with the *Project Management Requirements* in **Section 5**. It is expected that the work will be completed within 12 months of the first-time enrolment. If the student does not enrol at the school, or the construction cost is less than the budget, then any unspent funding will be removed from the project budget.

After the initial enrolment costs, 5YA budgets are adjusted for ORRS students to provide for special education. **No additional square metres** can be provided to boards unless the adjustments for ORRS students prove inadequate on a case-by-case basis.

Any past spending on property modifications to enable a student's first-time enrolment **will not count** in the school's 5YA past expenditure calculations. Any modifications subsequently required must be included by boards in their 10YPP.:

## Appendix 3: Evaluation Indicators

### *Including students with high needs - indicator framework*

<b>Presence</b>	
<b>Enrolment and Induction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school welcomes students with high needs</li> <li>• The school is prepared to make appropriate changes to support a student with high needs (i.e. has not suggested to parents that children would be better off elsewhere)</li> <li>• The school's induction process is organised and welcoming for students with high needs and their families</li> <li>• The induction programme works well at all times through the year</li> </ul>
<b>Identifying student needs and strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school has high quality processes in place for identifying the educational needs of students with high needs</li> <li>• The school has sought and used the student's point of view with regard to what supports their inclusion and learning (decision-making)</li> <li>• The school has used valid and reliable methods to identify the interests and strengths of students with high needs in order to fully support their learning and development</li> <li>• The school has processes in place for identifying the needs of students in relation to any physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric, behavioural or intellectual impairments</li> <li>• School personnel understand that it is their role to adapt to the needs presented by a student – rather than 'fit' the student to their school</li> </ul>
<b>Participation and engagement</b>	
<b>Links with families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school respects and values the knowledge parents have of their child's learning, development and achievement</li> <li>• Relationships are focused on building a constructive partnership between families and the school, and supporting the ongoing inclusion of a student with high needs</li> <li>• The school is proactive in creating positive links with families (ie regular home/school contact)</li> <li>• Feedback to families includes a celebration of success and is not (deficit) focused on negatives or a sense of 'failure'</li> <li>• Parents are included in any IEP processes and provided with regular feedback about their child's progress and how they might complement school-based learning at home</li> </ul>
<b>The coordination of services and support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school has coordinated an appropriate range of services or personnel in support of any specialised needs presented by students with high needs, for example Special Education, RTLBs, therapists</li> <li>• The coordination and monitoring of specialist services and support for students with high needs is given high status in the school, e.g. it is overseen by an effective, senior member of staff (NB not all schools have a SENCO and some SENCO lack training)</li> <li>• The SENCO (or equivalent) provides support and guidance for teachers and teacher aides to include students with high needs</li> <li>• The SENCO (or equivalent) oversees the progress of students with high needs</li> <li>• Teachers share their knowledge of the needs, likes, interests and specialist</li> </ul>

	<p>support requirements of students as they progress through the school, from year to year (ie there is a formal process of planning for students as they progress from teacher to teacher)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plans are in place to ensure that all students with high needs can attend school if a teacher-aide is absent</li> </ul>
<b>School-wide culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The board of trustees and principal emphasise the importance of an inclusive culture through their comments, policies, processes, resourcing and planning</li> <li>The principal provides ethical leadership for the school on the importance of meeting the diverse needs of all students, including students with high needs</li> <li>There is a school-wide emphasis on meeting the needs of all students, including students with high needs</li> <li>The board has invested in appropriate resources to support inclusion (this includes the board using special education funding and staffing (ORRS, Learning Support etc) to support students with high needs</li> <li>The staff and students at the school are positive about the involvement of students with high needs at the school</li> <li>Regular students have been provided with coaching, support and modelling to appropriately relate to students with high needs</li> <li>Students with high needs are not seen in terms of their impairments, but are seen as students who are expected to achieve, contribute to school culture and have strengths worth nurturing</li> <li>There is an absence of bullying (especially towards students with high needs)</li> <li>There is evidence that the school has adapted its physical environment to meet the needs of current students with high needs</li> <li>The success of students with high needs is celebrated</li> <li>Teachers openly share with one another the success and challenges in their teaching of students with high needs (no blame approach)</li> <li>The board has developed appropriate behaviour management plans for students with high needs</li> </ul>
<b>Relationships with peers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The relationships students with high needs have with their peers are supportive</li> <li>Students with high needs have their social development supported as required</li> <li>Students with high needs have friendships with regular students</li> <li>Students with high needs are included in social events in and outside of the school (e.g. school socials, birthday parties)</li> </ul>
<b>Classroom teaching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students with high needs learn alongside their peers in regular classes as much as possible</li> <li>Learning programmes support the objectives identified in IEPs or other planning</li> <li>Students with high needs have well-planned learning experiences, not just 'busy work'</li> <li>Teaching is planned and differentiated with the learning of all students in mind</li> <li>Lessons encourage students with high needs to participate and interact</li> <li>Students with high needs work cooperatively along with other students</li> <li>There is evidence of student to student communication and teacher to student communication (and that the teacher aide is not the sole medium of information)</li> <li>Teacher aides support teachers to include students with high needs</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom teaching underlines the importance of diversity</li> </ul>
<b>Extra-curricular involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students with high needs take part in sporting and cultural activities alongside regular students at the school</li> <li>Students with high needs take part in physical activity (where appropriate) and other learning activities outside the classroom</li> </ul>
<b>Learning supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school has resourced high quality physical and educational support for the range of needs demonstrated by students with high needs</li> <li>The effectiveness of learning supports are monitored</li> <li>Learning support is coordinated with IEPs, and well developed objectives for student learning and development</li> </ul>
<b>Professional development and support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff receive high quality professional development to understand and support the specific learning needs of particular students with high needs</li> <li>Professional development and support is readily accessible</li> <li>Professional development for teachers and teacher aides supports their ability to teach students with diverse needs (ie professional development for Autistic Spectrum Disorder has been available for the last few years)</li> </ul>
<b>Culturally responsive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school has culturally responsive processes to identify and support the needs and aspirations of Māori and Pacific students with high needs and their whānau/families</li> </ul>
<b>Achievement</b>	
<b>The achievement of students with high needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are high expectations for all students (Including students with high needs)</li> <li>The achievements of students with high needs reflect deep and/or meaningful learning</li> <li>Students with high needs are making progress in their IEPs and/or any particular academic, intellectual, behavioural, communication, social or physical goals agreed to be appropriate</li> <li>Students with high needs succeed in a variety of contexts, academic, leadership, sporting and cultural</li> </ul>
<b>The benefits to mainstream students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students without high needs demonstrate tolerance, warmth, understanding and friendship to students with high needs in their classrooms</li> <li>Parents, whānau and the wider school appreciate the benefits for all students of their children working with students with high needs</li> </ul>

## Appendix 4: Self-review questions

### Self review questions for your school

#### **School culture and leadership for including students with high needs**

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

### Self review questions for your school

#### **Teamwork, working with families, using information and transitions**

1. To what extent does the school hold internal meetings, and meetings with external people, to support students with special needs?
2. To what extent does the schools relationships with the parents of students with high needs support the inclusion and achievement of these students?
3. How well does the school use various forms of information about students, including information about achievement, social and physical skills, to better include and support students with high needs?
4. To what extent does the school have the systems, coordination, links with external agencies and internal expertise to support the transition of students with high needs both to and from their school?

### Self review questions for your school

#### **Cultural identity, ORRS, Individual learning programmes and school safety**

1. To what extent does the school support the cultural identity of students with high needs?
2. To what extent are the school's ORRS applications accepted by GSE?
3. To what extent do all teaching staff know how to develop differentiated programmes for students with high needs?
4. To what extent does the school's IEPs provide specific, measureable, attributable, realistic and time-bound goals for student achievement?
5. How does the school know that students with high needs are safe from bullying?

## **Appendix 5: Previous ERO work related to students with special needs**

### ***Evaluation of the Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour Service (2009)***

In 2009 ERO reviewed how well RTLB clusters were governed and managed. This report followed on from a 2004 review of RTLB effectiveness. ERO's 2009 report found that although clusters had increased guidance and support from the Ministry of Education, the wide variability of governance and management remained evident. Strong external and internal accountabilities for the use of funding were lacking. The management of RTLB also remains an issue in a large proportion of clusters. The findings of this report have been included as part of the Government's review of special education.

### ***Schools' Provision for Students at Risk of Not Achieving (2008)***

While this report did not directly address issues of special education, it did examine the support offered by schools to students at risk of not achieving. The evaluation found that the majority of schools could adequately identify students at risk of not achieving, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. However, a much wider variation was found in how well schools addressed the specific needs of students, and how they monitored, reviewed and reported on the student achievement.

This evaluation also found that nearly half the schools had yet to evaluate the extent to which their programmes resulted in improved outcomes for low achieving students. Review and reporting activities varied between high quality reports based on student outcome data to, descriptions of activities and programmes with little reference to the progress achieved by students.

### ***Partners in Learning: Parents' Voices (2008)***

ERO's *Partners in Learning: Parents' Voices* report focused on what parents said about the relationship they had with their children's school. This report included a section for the parents of children with special needs.

Parents expected to work with the schools in supporting the education of their child with special needs. Some parents found that schools had expected parents to be responsible for their child's behaviour at school, while other parents found that schools did not involve them until a child's behaviour had reached crisis level. Some parents believed some schools only wanted to enrol "intelligent and well-behaved" children and encouraged parents to consider enrolling their child elsewhere if this was not the case.

Parents of children with special needs found that some schools were not open to working with them, and felt that they were not welcome. They struggled with entrenched attitudes by some school staff about their child. For some parents, the negative labelling of their child and themselves undermined the development of constructive relationships at home.



Parents emphasised the importance of being part of an inclusive school community where difference was accepted. When their initial contact with their child's school was welcoming and reassuring, it was easier for parents to feel comfortable about coming to school. Parents of children with special needs told ERO that they felt good school leadership made the difference in how effectively they and their child engaged with the school.

Parents of children with special needs appreciated having their views about their child listened to, and having ongoing opportunities to discuss their child's progress and achievement. They believed it helped when programmes were well matched to their child's needs and any homework given was appropriate to their child's abilities.

### ***An evaluation of ongoing and reviewable resourcing schemes (2005)***

This report focused on the planning, implementation and governance of educational support for ORRS funded students. It found that a majority of schools were using and managing the ORRS resource effectively to improve student achievement. ERO also found just over a quarter of schools had not managed this funding well.

Schools judged as effective had established and coordinated an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for students and monitored and evaluated the success of this plan in terms of student outcomes.

### ***Evaluation of the Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour Service (2004)***

In 2004 ERO evaluated the effectiveness of the RTLB service. It focused especially on the contributions RTLB have made to student achievement. The evaluation found that the RTLB service had a variable impact on student achievement overall, with some RTLB being highly effective, while many more were less effective. While over half of the clusters (63 percent) provided evidence that their service had improved student achievement, only a small group (20 percent) had substantial evidence of these improvements. Over a third of clusters (37 percent) could not provide evidence that they had made improvements to student achievement.

When Māori student achievement was focused on, even less evidence of effectiveness was found. Only 20 percent of clusters provided evidence that their service had improved Māori student achievement, while the remaining clusters (80 percent) could provide little or no evidence of improved Māori achievement.

### ***The New Zealand Disability Strategy in schools (2003)***

In 2002 ERO evaluated the extent to which New Zealand schools are meeting Objectives 3 and 4 of the NZDS with particular focus on the ways in which schools include and support children, young people and staff with disabilities.

The report concluded that "the majority of schools considered that they upheld and promoted the rights of students and staff with disabilities very well. ERO agrees that there is evidence that schools provide a range of measures to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities."

## Appendix 6: Report feedback form

### *Including students with high needs*

<p>The information in this box is optional</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>School/Institution: _____</p> <p>Your role: _____ <i>(for example, Teacher, Parent, Trustee, Researcher, Principal)</i></p> <p>Address: _____</p>
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*Please help ERO evaluate the quality of this report. By sending ERO your views on this report you are contributing to the quality of future national reports.*

*Please send you comments by email to **info@ero.govt.nz**; by fax to the following number: **0-4-499 2482**; or post to: **Evaluation Services, Education Review Office, Box 2799, Wellington 6140** (Freepost authority number 182612).*

1. How readable was this report? (language, structure and content) Indicate one of the following:

<b>Highly readable</b>			<b>Fair</b>		<b>Not very readable</b>
5	4	3	2	1	

2. Were there any aspects or sections of this report that were difficult to understand?

**Yes / No**

If **yes**, what sections or aspects were difficult to understand?


3. For school personnel: How useful is this report in helping you identify ways to improve the way you include students with high needs? Indicate one of the following:

<b>Highly useful</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Moderately</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Not very useful</b>
<b>5</b>		<b>3</b>		<b>1</b>

4. Which aspects of this report provided the most useful information about including students with high needs?


5. What improvements could be made to make future reports more useful for teachers, principals and board members?


6. Any other comments? If you have any other suggestions or comments about the quality of this report, or about how this report has been used by you or your school, please include them below.


*Thank you for completing this form. The information you provide will be used to reflect on how future national reports are prepared by the Education Review Office.*