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YouthLaw calls for significant changes to special education sector

In a report released today, YouthLaw urges the Government to make comprehensive changes to the structure, funding and accountability of the special education sector.

YouthLaw General Manager Vanushi Walters says there are significant weaknesses within special education at present. This includes a lack of sufficient support for teachers and schools and the absence of an accessible appeal function to review some decisions made within the sector.

“If we want young people to be engaged members of our communities, we need to provide them with a meaningful education. Failing to do that can take a heavy toll on these young people and society as a whole.”

Ms Walters says that despite a growing need, the Government has no plans to increase funding for special education, with recent announcements that funding will simply be shifted around the special education sector.

“Our research demonstrates that to be effective we must invest in these children on a needs basis throughout their education. Greater funding and support is required for children, young people and the schools who work hard to support them.”

Kenton Starr, Principal Author of the Report and YouthLaw Solicitor, says the report provides a set of recommendations derived from comprehensive research and analysis of what is working well in comparable jurisdictions.

“We hope that others in the sector will join YouthLaw in calling for the Government to adopt these recommendations and ensure all young people in New Zealand are given the opportunity to thrive”.

The report “*Challenging the Barriers: Ensuring access to education for children with special educational needs*”, was funded by the IHC Foundation and Prader-Willi Association. For a copy see www.youthlaw.co.nz

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YouthLaw Aotearoa is a free, national community law centre for children and young people. We have been providing a free legal service for those who cannot afford a lawyer and can't access legal aid for 30 years. Legal services are provided by qualified, practising lawyers. YouthLaw also distributes legal information resources, provides educational seminars and workshops and is heavily involved with law reform work affecting children young people in Aotearoa New Zealand.