

Special Education Update – Pre-Reading

In recent years, there have been many significant improvements to the special education system. For example, we know the majority of mainstream schools are meeting standards of inclusive practice. However there's a clear message that more must be done.

Our next step is to ensure children and young people with special education needs progress and achieve their full potential throughout their education, from early childhood through to tertiary level. We're interested in the whole of the education system – not just the Ministry of Education's responsibilities.

It's also important to note that a very diverse range of special education needs are expected to be met by our education system. These encompass additional support relevant to physical and intellectual ability as well as behavioural issues.

On top of that, the duration of need will vary – some will be temporary e.g. resulting from a temporary health issue, some will be enduring and other needs will be intermittent.

What issues will the Update address?

For children and young people with special education needs, parents and whānau, and everyone involved in their education:

- Support for these children and young people (and their parents and whānau) is highly fragmented, leading to barriers at key points, such as moving from early childhood education to primary school.
- The funding system is compartmentalised, complicated, highly inefficient and inflexible – funding is ring-fenced for particular services or categories of support and cannot be transferred.
- Access to services and decision-making about assistance are unnecessarily complicated for everyone involved. This hampers prompt intervention being put in place.
- Too many children are waiting too long for service – the earlier support is provided, the better the long-term outcomes.
- There is no one point of contact and coordination for everyone involved in the education of a child or young person with special education needs.
- Education pathways for children and young people with special education needs are not always adequately planned or managed – children are proceeding through the system with unmet or exacerbated needs.
- Assessment of progress and achievement is not appropriate for many children and young people with special education needs.
- There is insufficient coordination between the education, health and welfare systems which causes inefficiencies and confusion.
- There is a lack of coordination between professionals working in special education.

What is proposed?

This Update aims to put achievement at the heart of support for children and young people; remove barriers throughout the education pathway and provide certainty for parents and whānau.

Soliciting a range of views is important

We are engaging with Ministry of Education staff, parents, whānau, schools and education and disability sector partners during April and May 2015 to gather representative views on the work planned in the Update.

This engagement will inform the high-level design of future improvements to the Special Education system that will be presented to Cabinet in July 2015.

The focus of the engagement

The ways in which additional support is provided, how these fit together and the workforce that supports these is at the core of the improvements we're thinking about. We're keen to hear your views about four areas of proposed improvement.

These are:

1. Improve early identification of the need for additional support and early response.
2. Place parents and education providers at the centre of making decisions and coordinating additional support the child requires.
3. Provide a single point of contact, for as long as it's needed for everyone involved in the child's education.
4. Provide a managed education pathway that supports the child to achieve - from assessment of need through to completion of their education.

We look forward to working with you on this progressive piece of work.