

GREATER CHRISTCHURCH EDUCATION RENEWAL ADVISORY BOARD

Proposed Reorganisation of the Special Education Network within Christchurch – Advice to the Minister of Education and Ministry of Education

BACKGROUND

1. The Advisory Board received a presentation of the draft proposals at its meeting on 19 September. At that meeting it was agreed that a sub group would meet and consider the updated draft proposals in more detail and to provide advice to the Ministry and Minister – on behalf of the Board.
2. The sub group met with the Ministry on 23 October to receive a briefing –which was based on the draft “Education Report: Proposed Reorganisation of the Special Education Network within Christchurch”.
3. The advice provided below is based on that report.

PREAMBLE TO THE ADVICE

1. The Advisory Board seeks an assurance from the Ministry that the proposed reorganisation of the special education network- “including co location” incorporates best international practices. The proposal is considered to involve major changes which must be consistent with “best practice” to maximise the likelihood that it they will be successful.
2. The Advisory Board is concerned that the proposal does not adequately include any discussion about maintaining /strengthening the existing commitment to “inclusiveness” and the resourcing required implementing that commitment. It seeks an assurance that the proposal will not reduce the real choice between mainstream and special schools.
3. The Advisory Board is interested in ensuring that network proposal is supported by pathways or options for students to be included in their communities – including resourcing appropriate community organisations to achieve community inclusion.

ADVICE ABOUT THE PROPOSAL

1. The Advisory Board supports the overall goal (as expressed in “success for All –Every School, Every Child) of fully inclusive state schools and the requirement for boards to enrol students irrespective of student needs and abilities.

2. The Advisory Board supports the overall proposal to develop a Special Education Network that includes
 - a. Three “base” Special Schools (Allenvale, Ferndale & Waitaha)-each co located on the campus of a mainstream school. However, it is concerned that co-location of a “base” Special School with either a mainstream primary school or mainstream secondary school may reduce the options available to a family .That is, integration with the co-located mainstream school may only be effective when that school operates at a level consistent with the primary or secondary status of special school students who are attending the “base” Special School.
 - b. Three geographical catchments across greater Christchurch –each with one of the “base” Special Schools as the hub for the geographical catchment.
 - c. Satellite provision located on mainstream schools within each catchment and itinerant specialist teachers for each catchment. These need to be positioned and supported to align them with where students live and where the schools are located.

3. The Advisory Board considers that the overall proposal outlines worthwhile opportunities to pursue the overall goal and requirement (as summarised in 1 above) regarding “inclusion” , with potential to offer significant positive benefits to students and families and to support the overall goals of the greater Christchurch education renewal. The Advisory Board considers that the proposal will need to be supported by;
 - a. An enrolment scheme that reinforces/supports the concept of geographical clusters and promotes the attendance of students at their “local” special school as well as their local school (with appropriate support). This will enable students to be more engaged in their “local “community and also alleviate some of the current “criss crossing” associated with student transport. The scheme must be,
 - i. Sufficiently flexible so that a small minority of students –who have specific circumstances - can attend an alternative Special School
 - ii. Progressively implemented to avoid disruption to the current education of existing students and families .Grand parenting of students at their current Special School should be an option which is offered to parents/caregivers.
 - b. An expansion of the Specialist Teacher Outreach Service to strengthen the opportunities for students/families to have a “real” choice to choose a local mainstream school and to maximise the extent to which inclusion is being practiced by those schools.

- c. Partnerships, underpinned by documented collaborative agreements, (i.e. between each “base Special School and the co-located main stream school) that may increase social integration and promote (amongst others)
 - i. Shared access to /use of physical facilities/resources
 - ii. Shared access to/use of administrative systems/services
 - iii. Shared professional learning/development and teaching.
- 4. To support the concept of “geographical clusters”, each of the three “base “Special Schools will need to have the necessary resources and capabilities to provide quality learning and support for the diversity of students /families with special needs who primarily live within each cluster. To complement this, one or more of the “base’ Special Schools will be able to develop specialist capabilities on behalf of the network and/or to be shared with the other Specialist Schools
- 5. The Advisory Board considers that serious consideration should be given to establishing “inter Special School ” arrangements that
 - i. Support their efficient and effective operation,
 - ii. Recognise their relatively small scale –as separate schools
 - iii. Reflect the possibility that the proposed geographical zoning will result in these schools being more “similar” –in order to meet the needs of each geographical zone.
- 6. In particular, almost as a natural consequence of these proposals to develop the Special Education network, the Advisory Board sees significant merit in the three Special Schools having
 - a. A shared governance Board -that could include usefully Ministerial appointments
 - b. Cooperative or shared school leadership –that could include an overarching “principal” or arrangements to “cooperate” on a range of leadership issues which would benefit from “consistency “across the three schools.
 - c. Shared or common systems & processes –where there are either efficiency benefits or benefits for staff and /or students.
 - d. Shared or common technology and teaching resources.
- 7. The Advisory Board sees merit in the preferred Ministry option (i.e. Para 39.4) –to relocate the 3 Special Schools; to relocate or co locate them with mainstream schools, to establish one governance board and to integrate satellite provision into schools within each geographical cluster. The Advisory Board also considers that cooperative or shared leadership at a management level could be a positive contributor to implementing an enhanced Network that comprises “base” schools, satellite provision and itinerant specialist teachers.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. The Advisory Board recommends that the proposal
 - a. Gives more prominence to the importance of strengthening pathways from ECE to primary school. There is a need to ensure that (when most appropriate for a student or their family) that it is easy for an ECE learner and family to “flow “into their local primary school –along with peers from ECE and/or siblings/family members. The overall proposal to develop a Special Education Network will offer increased opportunities for continuity in relationships and learning .However the proposal needs to provide more specific information in relation to strengthening these pathways.
 - b. Gives more recognition to ensuring that providing pathways to inclusive environments is paramount for all students.
 - c. Takes account of past learning and current initiatives (including the Wayne Francis Trust Research project and the Enabling Good Lives Report) in the reorganisation of the network.
 - d. Explicitly recognises the importance of the Special Education Network being a separate LCC, and also that the relevant geographical LCC’s include the “base” Special Schools.

2. The Advisory Board recommends that the proposal includes more specific information on the implementation requirements of the proposal. Whilst it supports the appointment of a Project Manager to develop/implement the proposal, it is concerned that
 - a. There is limited recognition given to the operational funding/requirements which may arise as a consequence of the relocation/co location of Special Schools, satellite provision and itinerant specialist teachers.
 - b. There is limited recognition given to the professional development requirements of staff at Special Schools co-located mainstream schools, satellite “host” schools and enhanced itinerant specialist teachers.
 - c. There is no specific reference in the proposal to
 - i. The need for mainstream schools to strengthen their “inclusive” practices and how this would happen
 - ii. To the processes which would support the strengthening of those practices and the commitment to make this happen.
 - iii. The impact on parent choice for primary aged children if the school in a geographic zone is co-located with a secondary school.
 - d. There are no key milestones for reorganising the network (nor timeframes for their achievement) included in the proposal.

31/10/2013