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PPTA

NEW ZEALAND POST-PRIMARY
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

TE WHIENGARUA

www.ppta.org.nz

SUBMISSION

on

**The Future Shape of the Special Schools
Network in Greater Christchurch**

16 June 2014

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The PPTA is the union representing around 18,000 teachers in state secondary, area, manual training and intermediate schools, as well as tutors in community education institutions and principals in secondary and area schools. PPTA represents the professional and industrial interests of its members, including those working in alternative education centres and activity centres. More than 92% of eligible teachers choose to belong to the union.
- 1.2. In early 2011, PPTA established an Earthquake Recovery Taskforce (ERT) to oversee our members' response to the ongoing earthquakes in Canterbury and subsequent education renewal process. The ERT has a strong relationship with the Ministry of Education and many education stakeholders in greater Christchurch.

2. Background

2.1 Special and Residential Schools

PPTA affirms that it is essential for the support of the SE network that we maintain special and residential schools.

PPTA opposes the suggestion that these become resource centres and/or bases for itinerant staff. This arrangement would increase the potential for increased bureaucratisation and inefficiencies and does not address the concerns of schools and families in isolated areas – many of whom are currently well-served by residential and special schools. In particular, we reject the superficial appeal of vouchers (like the Enabling Good Lives project) which, rather than empowering parents as is sometimes naively imagined, provides a strong motivation for parents to remove their children from education in order to access other services.

Professional Learning

PPTA sees the need for the Inclusive Practices work underway at the Ministry of Education to be brought to teachers' attention and to be supported by PLD provision in schools. While some progress has been made here the project seems to have stalled before any noticeable delivery has begun to have an impact in classrooms.

Initial teacher education (ITE) courses and In-service professional learning and development (PLD) for practising teachers need to include compulsory SE theory and practicum components. It is difficult to see how this could be achieved within current one year Grad Dip Sec programmes, which raises the question about the extent to which it is reasonable or realistic to expect teachers with little or no training in this specialist field to run inclusive programmes in mainstream schools.

PPTA supports pre- and in-service PLD for teacher aides and learning support assistants that are resourced, standardised and available across the country.

Information

The only comprehensive SENCO handbook currently available is privately produced and costs \$90. There is demand for common practice and good practice to be articulated in ways that are readily (and nationally) accessible. This means that GSE has a responsibility to provide written frameworks and guidelines – such as this book provides.* PPTA recommends that a set of SENCO frameworks and guidelines – including requirements and best practice examples – be published, publicised and distributed to all schools and ITE providers and updated regularly: <http://www.learningnetwork.ac.nz/shared/products/productBook.aspx?id=book545>. Again the Inclusive Practices work has the ability to influence more positively by providing more information to schools, but has yet to have a discernable impact.

Resourcing

While PPTA understands that this review does not include budget increases within its terms of reference it should be noted that the current level of ORS funding, for example, does not allow schools to cover current PLD and related environmental adaptation requirements to ensure full and ongoing inclusion and safe instruction for all students.

To help mainstream schools succeed, appropriate environments, class sizes, space and equipment are needed, so that all classrooms and areas of a school are equipped to support inclusion and integration for all students and, where appropriate, to support students with very high and/or multiple needs in a homeroom environment.

This includes equipment and resources that would not normally be found in secondary schools (except where there are students with specific learning/communication/mobility needs. Schools are not currently funded to this level.

Inclusion

The multi-teacher model of secondary education makes inclusion challenging and complex. This needs to be recognised in managing and maintaining funding, staffing and support for SE in the secondary context.

For secondary schools trying to offer inclusion the costs are increasingly outweighing their ability to do so effectively. Schools find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet – let alone maintain quality service provision and learning programmes, offer safe and inclusive learning environments and ensure that staff are given reasonable working conditions. In a system that has always relied to some extent on balancing 'unders and overs', the 'overs' now heavily outweigh the 'unders'. This adds up to significant stress for schools and teachers with fund holding responsibilities. It is critical that schools are supported to manage this responsibility. Ideally, this support would take the form of adequate funding, time allowances that enable SE unit managers and SENCOs to oversee staffing, liaise with parents, specialist and other agencies, and manage the related administrative load.

2.2 How Could Schools Work Together to Succeed?

A key message from PPTA is that local solutions work well when schools are supported by strong, coherent, national frameworks. Inclusion and collaboration take significantly more time than the current resourcing (staffing and funding) allows. Account needs to be taken of the complexity of SE work, particularly in the context of secondary schools and their communities.

SENCOs and other SE staff in secondary schools value opportunities to network, problem-solve and to share good practice. However, the organisational time for this does not sit within schools' current staffing resources. GSE could fulfil this role by providing networking at the regional level for SE teachers, SE units and schools.

There is also a lot of variation in practice between different regions and different clusters of schools, particularly with regard to service delivery by GSE, some of which is both unnecessary and undesirable.

Within secondary schools there is a clear need to ensure there is one designated middle, and one senior, manager (other than the principal) with a thorough understanding and overview of SE provision, funding and need. This happens currently in some schools, but not others. Once each school is confident in its overview of SE and key people are known, schools will be better able to liaise and work across in co-ordinated, coherent ways.

Schools need support to ensure that all students are offered suitable pathways and transitions from school. This holds true for SE and mainstream students. However, SE students generally have complex needs making this process more demanding. It is also sensible to have brokering/support services available to all schools in an area, rather than having this type of work replicated by every school or provider. Again, examples of this type of practice already exist, but are not necessarily available across the country.

Non-ORS-verified students with moderate to high needs do not receive support. This remains an area of significant pressure on schools.

PPTA members would like to see GSE regional offices being more pro-active in their leadership of SE and in creating opportunities for cross-school, cross-sector and inter-agency communication and collaboration. This may mean that additional resourcing is required in regional offices.

The co-operation and collaboration which underscores the Investing in Educational Success (IES) initiative should have a positive effect on schools working together and where possible special needs units should be part of a cluster of schools.

2.3 What arrangements for Funding, Decision-Making, Verification, and Fund Holding Should We Have in Christchurch?

PPTA recommends that the SE budget could be increased by redistributing existing funding streams:

- 1) Take the funding for private schools and redeploy it into SE to support more inclusive practice.
- 2) Move the money from contestable funding pools into the SEG grant (see SEG recommendations below).
- 3) Evaluate current bureaucracies in SE with a view to redistributing funding to secondary schools.
- 4) Tag funding and staffing for special needs students so it is ring-fenced for its intended purpose.

While PPTA supports special and residential schools as part of SE provision, we note that mainstream secondary schools offering more inclusive models of education are not funded to support their level of need. We applaud the funding of special and residential schools and suggest that MOE investigate equivalent funding models for SE in mainstream and inclusive secondary environments.

Students with moderate needs have been disenfranchised by recent funding decisions. More attention needs to be paid to ensuring that all students' needs are met and that non-ORS students are not disadvantaged.

It is critical that fund holding schools are supported and adequately funded. The real value of SE funding per student continues to drop as costs continue to increase. The compliance requirements that form part of the specialist service provider standards place schools under further stress.

SEG and TFEA funding should be more transparent and systems put in place to ensure that secondary schools use these funds (and associated MUs, MMAs) appropriately. PPTA would prefer to see LSF moved into the SEG pool.

SEG funding needs to be targeted more closely to each school's actual needs.