

March 2022

**New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) Submission on
Children with Highest Needs Review
Closing Date 31 March
To: highestneeds.review@education.govt.nz**

Personal Details:

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Designation: National Executive
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The New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) is the largest professional organisation for lead educators representing the interests of over 2,000 Principals of Primary, Intermediate, Area and Secondary Schools. Principals are from public, integrated and independent schools and are spread throughout New Zealand. NZPF aims to be the most influential advocate for school principals to enable high quality, well supported leadership for school learners in New Zealand.

General Comments

1. NZPF welcomes the opportunity to submit comments on the children with highest needs review. We have sought the views of our own executive committee to capture their experiences in constructing this commentary.
2. In recent years, principals have reported, through many NZPF surveys, that there are barriers to accessing appropriate, adequate and timely assistance for young people in schools, with high physical, behavioural and learning difficulties. Whilst recognising the individuality of each child requiring additional support, they have reported that the current system does not deliver equitably and nor does it deliver services and specialist help in a targeted or timely way. Further, they have commented that one area of the system is not in communication with another. For example, where a school has enrolled a child they discover is a 'runner' and the school's perimeter has an incomplete boundary fence facing a busy highway, the property division of the Ministry does not necessarily recognise the urgency for the school and does not communicate constructively with the learning support section of the Ministry. We welcome the opportunity to examine and comment on the review and to bring a practical 'lived' experience to the discussion.
3. NZPF agrees strongly that in any review of high needs learning support the child and their needs must always be at the centre of any discussion and decision making. We also agree that for the child to reach their potential they must have the learning support they need, when they need it and for as long as they need it, as per priority 4 of the Learning Support Action Plan 2019 – 2025. Inevitably decisions about learning support for students with high needs should have the full involvement of the student's whānau so that the individual circumstances of the case can be fully understood and decisions supported. Many students in this category are on Individual Education Programmes which already involve educational specialists and related experts, parents/caregivers/whānau.
4. The Learning Support Action Plan also emphasises supporting better education outcomes through building knowledge on the right to enrol and receive an education. It is the view of

NZPF parents/caregivers/ whānau retain options of choice in meeting the needs of their children. Whilst principals would prefer that all children have access to their local school full time, they are aware that this is not always the option best suited for some children with highest needs. Whānau should be offered full knowledge about all alternative placements for their children and be given good information so they can make the best choices for their children's future education. There should not be barriers to any option from residential, to special school, to special unit on a school site, to part time mainstreaming to full time mainstreaming. This view is consistent with the Learning Support Action Plan - other initiatives to improve learning support – getting the network right p. 12.

5. Principals/Board Chairs have reported that parents seeking residential placement, for example, of their children with high needs have come up against countless barriers to enrolment and in some cases have resorted to telling their story in the media before barriers were lifted and enrolment could proceed. In one example parents persisted for two years to fight obstacles to enrol their daughter at a residential school and it was only when they went public with their story that action was taken. This scenario is not consistent with '...the right to enrol and receive an education'.
6. Principals report that they face frustrations with the lack of continuity of support throughout the education pathway of a child with high needs. In many cases, the high needs logically will not change, yet principals can be asked to re-apply for funding that should automatically follow the child throughout their schooling lives. This repeated form filling and evidence gathering exercise is unnecessary and wasteful of a principal's time. Further, a student allocated ORS funding is likely to lose support hours over time, especially when the student is succeeding in learning. The reason the child is succeeding is because the school has the hours! To reduce them is to invite failure. These activities are inconsistent with the Learning Support Action Plan – other initiatives to improve learning support p. 12.
7. Similarly, students with very high needs who cannot feed, toilet, move or access anything without Teacher Aid support are not funded full time. The Teacher Aid time allocated is described as a contribution to supporting the child, but where do the rest of the funds come from to support the child who is in school full time? The operations grant is often called on to supplement and that in turn is depriving other children of access to a full curriculum.
8. Principals have long noted the lack of access to experts and experienced specialists to work with students with high needs in schools. The scarcity of specialists is worse in rural or isolated areas and in some regions of the country. Some regions, such as Northland, have higher rates of students with high needs and are particularly disadvantaged by the unavailability of specialists.
9. In-class support for our children with highest needs lasts only one year. Given that these children's pathology is unlikely to change over time, NZPF recommends that the in-class support remains for the duration of the child's schooling.
10. It is well documented that schools with access to a SENCo, a Learning Support Coordinator or a school counsellor fare much better than those who don't. This highlights another inequity in the delivery of support in schools. Similarly, the service schools receive from the RTLB

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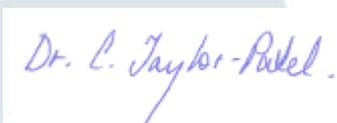
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service is described as uneven at best.

NZPF Recommendations

1. Reduce the administration/paperwork for funding applications.
2. Accept that students with highest needs require continual funding throughout their educational lives and do not ask principals to continually fill out more application forms when the reasons for the original application have not changed.
3. Ensure that every school has access to a fully funded Learning Support Coordinator (LSC), or SENCo as well as a counsellor. LSCs were announced last year, and all schools should by now have access to these as intended.
4. Train and employ more experts, specialists, educational psychologists, speech therapists and pay them well to ensure retention and equity of access.
5. In restructuring the Ministry, ensure that silos are broken down and there is connection between sections and divisions.
6. Ensure parents are fully informed of all educational options for children with high needs so they can make the best choice for their child. Enrolling children with high needs in their place of choice should be made as simple and barrier free as possible for parents/caregivers/whanau.
7. ORS funded students should retain fulltime funding and if they qualify for ICS, should retain that funding throughout their education lives so that they have the best chance of success. No school should be subsidising support for children with highest needs.

Ngā manaakitanga



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