

Q 1a What is needed to help schools succeed?

Resourcing should be as close to the student and school as possible. A significant increase in special needs funding is required to meet the growing number of children with special education and behavioural needs. The child's special needs are not being met within current funding.
The verification process is too rigorous with many children missing out on an ORRS classification. Moderate needs children receive minimal funding.

Q 1b How could schools work together to succeed?

The funding to support children should be given directly to the school to encourage more creative resourcing such as clustering of resources.
Schools could share the ability to purchase support services. Parents wherever possible should have the option of a special school or unit. These centres can in many instances provide the level of care, safety and expertise not available in rural or mainstream contexts.
Special schools need flexible resourcing to enable dual and shared enrolment of very high needs students. It is problematic and unrealistic to replicate expertise and resources in every school. The funding therefore for teacher, paraprofessionals and teacher aide should be direct and in the form of money.

Transitions and agencies working together

Q 2 What needs to be done to make transitions work better?

Introduce the ORRS scheme into early childhood and attach it to the child so that they are supported into the primary sector. The support services need to work with the families at the earliest stages of a child's education.
Must remain with the child over the transition stages.
ECE support needs to continue with the child into their primary schooling.

Q 3 How could services be better coordinated and focused on the needs of students and families?

Ensure the funding is as close to the child as possible and schools are responsible for the management of the resource. Families must be consulted and involved in all decision making for the child. A "wrap around" effect to support the child and families ensuring all services work together for the good of the child.

Funding and resource use

Q 4 What arrangements for funding, decision-making, verification, and fundholding should we have?

Funding should be direct to the schools so that the school can manage the funds to fully assist the child into the classroom and school community. Decisions shouldn't be made by those who do not know the child and the family. Our view is that the verification process should:

Be managed regionally, but moderated nationally. Verification would include actual observation of the student in order to determine the real classroom needs and supports. Currently variables and inequalities exist due to the expertise and experience of the writer and the quality of applications. There are clear anomalies in the criteria administered to gain verification from those that are used to moderate teacher aide funding. There are huge discrepancies in regional allocation of teacher aide funding. The nominal 10 hours for high needs is not adequate.

Increase the categories from 2 to 4. (high, very high, severe and extreme). Greater graduation and expanded criteria are needed to capture the breadth and extent of needs.

Behaviour must be included in the criteria. It has a serious impact on schools' ability to manage and currently is not explicitly considered. A key driver, is managing (or coping) in the classroom environment. Schools allocate a significant resource to ensure a student is engaged and to minimise the impact of difficult or impulsive behaviour on the classroom environment and on peers. Mitigating the impact on peers can require constant vigilance, and often without full teacher aide. The funding cannot be capped. Successful verification must be determined by need.

The reviewable nature of verification has become annual in terms of learning support. It creates enormous stress for schools, families and M.O.E. The supports do not necessarily diminish as the child gets older or improves.

Funding has to be as close to the school and student as possible. Direct resourcing in the form of money rather than teacher and teacher aide would give schools and families the ability to personalize the supports.

Verification of the child should be at the regional level with full family and school input. It is important that all those involved in the process know the child and the needs to enable the child to be fully supported into the classroom.

5a How can individually targeted services and supports be made more efficient?

Reduce bureaucracy. The funding should go to the school to be managed according to the needs of the child. The school should be able to purchase the services required. This would make the providers accountable and ensure the child receives quality support.

Q 5b Is the current mix of programmes, services and supports right and does it provide value for money? What changes would you suggest?

No the current mix of programmes, services and supports are not right and do not provide value for money.

Funding must be allocated to meet the needs of children. The school receive the cash funding to enable schools to purchase teacher, teacher aide and para-professional services which will in turn meet the needs of the child.

High quality services and being accountable

Q 6 How can the quality of services be improved?

Given the very wide range of students' needs with which schools are challenged, there needs to be some scope within the framework of special needs providers, including or beyond GSE, for schools to access services beyond those traditionally provided or able to be currently sourced.

To ensure however quality of service, guidelines would need to be established by GSE to accredit providers so that the quality of service is improved for all schools and accessibility for remote schools is assured. The resources must reach the child. Presently bureaucracy and admin services decrease the amount of funding available.

The funding should be managed by the school on a needs basis.

We urge that the scope of this review be extended to include a full review of the "RTL service" The ERO report [Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour – An Evaluation of Cluster Management - September 2009] strongly identified the need for a review to be undertaken, "ERO's view that the existing governance and management model should be reviewed to ensure a more cohesive and consistent approach to the service that RTL provide for schools."

Q 7 How can families and schools be better informed?

Strengthen the informing of parents through IEPs especially at the early intervention stage. Families need to work closely with the school so that the needs of the child are met as they enter school. It is critical that students who are identified as early as possible in the ECE sector are supported and transitioned into school.

Q 8 What does successful special education look like and how should we measure it?

Full support to meet the needs of every child, their family and their school. Measured through successful learning and happy parents, schools and communities.

Q 9 When things do not go well, what arrangements should be in place to resolve issues?

Parent and school advocacy through planned meetings and discussions. Local MOE personnel (School and student support officers) could assist with conflicts and unresolved issues.

In closing

Q 10 What is the most important change that would improve outcomes for children and young people with special education needs?

Reduction of bureaucracy allowing more funding for the child with special needs. A teacher aide should be provided for every ORRS child, with full support to allow all learners every possible opportunity to make progress and achieve to the best of their ability. Other learners in the classroom must have every opportunity to achieve without distraction from a child with special education or behavioural needs. Allow the schools to be self-managing with the funds provided to support the child.

The verification process needs to be broadened to include severe behavioural needs. It needs to include a broader classification and more funds available to include those children who just miss out.

*Acknowledgement: these views were influenced by our NZPF Position Paper and the initial findings from a joint research project undertaken with a parent advocacy group for special education – **Understanding Schools' Experiences in Supporting Students' Needs with Teacher Aide Allocation.** (Roddick,S. 2010)*