

31 October 2018

New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) Submission on the DRAFT DISABILITY AND LEARNING SUPPORT ACTION PLAN

To: The Ministry of Education

Personal Details:

Agency: New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF)

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 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.

NZPF wishes to acknowledge the Associate Minister of Education and the Ministry of Education for the invitation to provide feedback on the *Draft Disability and Learning Support Action Plan*.

Introduction

Over the past decade we have watched support for young people with special learning needs erode and at the same time we have experienced exponential growth in the number of young people presenting with severe behavioural challenges. With the lack of professional support from psychologists, financial support to employ para-professionals and staffing entitlement to employ specialist teachers, many schools have found themselves in a position where they are unable to support young people with special education needs.

We hear constantly that teachers cannot manage many of these young people in their classes; other children's learning suffers; parents complain; principals are constantly under pressure to mediate, to work harder to get the expertise these young people need, and all too often, that expertise is nowhere to be found.

This has gone on too long and thus NZPF fully supports this plan and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to it.

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Priority Area 1: Improve the way children and young people are assessed for learning needs.

NZPF would support the design and implementation of tools to identify young people who may have learning and developmental differences.

The **proposed five checks** would support schools and whānau to better understand the needs of our young people. However, we would also propose the development of a tool for whānau to complete. Whānau know their child better than anyone else. Whānau voice should sit central to any assessment data.

If the outcome is to ensure children’s learning needs are identified quickly and responded to in a timely manner, then NZPF would support the notion of **central data collection**.

However, we would caution the notion of centralized data collection and urge the MOE to consider the following:

- How will this data be shared between schools and across the system?
- How detailed will this data be?
- Will the data be robust enough to ensure supports are in place when transitions occur?
- Who will own the data?
- Who will manage and control the access of the data?

We note that no tools have been suggested to assess/diagnose whether a child has moderate or severe behavioural issues. Behavioural issues are one of the biggest barriers to learning and with the increasing number of young people presenting with such behaviours, NZPF would support the development of a pre-diagnostic tool.

Priority Area 2: Strengthening the range of supports for children and young people with disabilities and additional learning needs

NZPF would agree that the outcome to ensure that the current gaps in provision are filled, so that there is a graduated system of response that better meets the needs of all learners, including at-risk children and young people. The profession has been asking for more supports for some years now. The lack of supports is now at a crisis point. Our young people deserve better from the system.

Proposed Actions:

1. Learning Support Coordinator: Strengthen the Learning Support Delivery Model through the establishment of in school Learning Support Coordinator role (currently known as Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCO)).

NZPF would fully support this proposal. We would expect that the position description would be developed in consultation with the profession. We would expect that those appointed to these positions are experienced teachers who would have extensive experience in this area. For those appointed to have any credibility, they would need knowledge and experience on how to work with teachers to provide professional development and supervision which will in turn support teachers’ professional capability and practice, along with the strong ability to develop relationships with young people and their whanau, school leaders and colleagues and other agencies.



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As the culture of individual schools is unique, it is also important that those appointed to these roles have a good understanding of the school community and know how best to navigate and build relationships.

NZPF is interested in how the staffing ratio formulae will be calculated and would welcome an invitation to NZPF to be involved in this discussion.

We would highlight a concern that the current teacher supply issue may affect the establishment of these roles across the country.

RTL B Service

We see the SENCO roles as being separate to the roles currently being undertaken by the RTL B service. This is a front line service and should not be tampered with to support the staffing of the SENCO role. With RTL B's proven success, it would be counterproductive to decimate one service to enhance another.

2. Flexible package of support: Co-design a flexible package of support for neurodiverse and other children and young people with ongoing needs who are not eligible for Ongoing Resource Scheme (ORS) including tools for neurodiverse learners.

This flexible funding provision needs to recognise that these students do require paraprofessional support within the classroom so as to fully empower them to access the curriculum.

3. Early intervention: Determine appropriate levels of investment for early intervention services and the appropriate balance of responsibility between Ministries of Health and Education.

The early intervention services should not cease when a child starts school - there needs to be a seamless pathway of support for these young learners. Time must be built in to ensure that schools and teachers build positive relationships with whānau before their child starts school.

Where a child and his/her whānau has involvement with other agencies, for example, Ministry of Social Development, there must be stated clear guidelines of responsibility and terms of engagement.

Utilising the skills and knowledge within the RTL B Service to extend into Early Childhood, would alleviate the concerns experienced through transition from ECE to school which also sees a change from MOE:LS:EI to RTL B. However, to ensure the success of this extension to service, would require additional resourcing for the RTL B. Similarly extending the RTL B Service into Year 11-13 would be a positive move to ensure the needs of these students are met.

4. Dispute resolution: Implement a dispute resolution process so that parents, whānau and schools have a next step when issues arise.

The Ministry of Education has already done good work in this area. NZPF has been consulted with and contributed to a disputes resolutions process during the "Success for all Forums" and would support this "process" being used as the basis for the development of a Disputes Resolution process in this area.



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5. Improving the provision of at-risk education: Explore options to improve at-risk education to ensure all students engage in a viable pathway to education, training or employment.

Besides Westbridge and some youth justice schooling options, alternative education for students at risk has been focused on the secondary sector. With the increase in severe behavioural challenges presenting at primary schools, NZPF believes that provision for at-risk alternative education needs to be strengthened and increased.

6. Transitions: Identify additional supports required to enable young people with learning support needs to access secondary/tertiary programmes, careers advice and transition into further education.

The system needs to do better for these young people. The SENCO role will enhance the transition for this group but should not be limited to only primary and secondary schools. Early childhood should also be included in this plan.

Strengthening the RTLB service beyond Year 10 will also be beneficial to our senior high school students.

7. Alignment with Ministry of Health supports: Align education and health supports for disabled children aged 0-8 and their families and whānau (Ministry of Health-led Mid Central prototype for Disability System Transformation).

Whānau require support to enable them to access services relevant to their needs. Services such as Plunket need to be inherent within this structure as is the Public Health nurse, particularly within rural settings .

Iwi partners delivering health service should also be considered and play a central role in these supports. We know that rates of Māori accessing special education support is lower than other groups. Health and Education can and should do better to support Māori.

Note that consideration will be given to potential differences in service delivery needs and mechanisms for rural vs urban settings.

Priority Area 3: Improving the way the education system responds to neurodiverse and gifted learners

NZPF strongly supports this Priority. Our education system has in past attempted to address and support these learners. However, we need to strengthen this area.

Outcome: Children and young people who are neurodiverse and/or gifted progress in education and achieve their potential.

Proposed Actions:

1. Improve teacher capability: Support teachers across all education settings to recognise and respond to the needs of gifted and neurodiverse students. This will include exploring options in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and professional learning and development (PLD).

NZPF would fully endorse the emphasis on initial teacher education - this needs to be both theoretical as well as practical. Trainees need to experience such settings whilst in training.



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Anecdotally our members report that ITEs are not preparing new teachers for the challenges of the classroom in terms of special and gifted education. ITE must do more to strengthen their training programmes.

2. Make information more accessible: Provide information about teaching and learning for neurodiverse students, including through exploring the potential to create new tools.

Teacher professional development must sit alongside the implementation of a set of “tools” so as to maximise the potential impact of such tools.

3. Flexible targeted supports: Ensure that possible solutions to the specific challenges gifted and neurodiverse students experience in secondary schools are addressed in the flexible package of support under ‘strengthening the range of support’.

NZPF would disagree with this idea. The question is, are we trying to strengthen the supports or not? If the supports are too flexible in secondary schools, they may not land with the young people who need them the most. Thus, the resourcing might then be used for something it was not intended for.

These students should be well supported right throughout their education.

Priority Area 4: Ensuring that learning support is resourced for increased support and service delivery

NZPF would urge the Government to ensure that learning support is well resourced now and into the future.

Outcome: Learning support services are resourced to meet identified needs in an efficient and timely manner, with flexibility to change the mix of services to meet the needs of children and young people, families and whānau and education professionals

Proposed Actions:

1. Cost and demand pressures: Respond to pressures across specific supports such as Residential Special Schools, Early Intervention, Te Kahu Tōi/Intensive Wraparound Service, New Zealand Sign Language and Deaf education.

NZPF strongly believes those students at most risk must be afforded access to these supports. The system must do better.

2. Future network provision: Clarify the role of special and residential schools, satellite units and learning support facilities within inclusive communities of provision.

Residential schools, satellite units etc should be viewed as a vital component of our education system for those young people and whānau who choose these as an option for their schooling. These schools are a support agency for children who are at most risk.

In the past the MOE has viewed residential schools as “institutions.” We know, however, that such schools are places of learning. Along with special schools/satellite units, when enrolled the young people are learning within a safe and nurturing environment to prepare them for their adult lives.



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In recent years with removal of these schooling options, whānau, young people and schools have been left with no alternatives. In many cases young people are suspended from school and because of the difficulty of enrolling in an alternative school setting, many of these children go months without attending a school.

The criteria and process for applying to enrol in such schools should not be a barrier. The system should do more to ensure the application process and transitions are seamless.

Learning Support Facilitators

This function is currently being funded from Ministry of Education baselines and delivered by existing staff as part of their existing role.

The function currently:

- **is a formal contact and connection point to disability and learning support services available across education and other government agencies and could work closely with the proposed Learning Support Coordinator role**
- **supports the coordination of professional learning and development**
- **establishes ways to ensure the collective decision-making process reflects the needs and views of parents and whānau**
- **identifies patterns of need in a cluster or Community of Learning; support coordinated professional learning and development; and work alongside agencies such as the District Health Board, New Zealand Police, Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Health.**

From the outset NZPF has been concerned with the current Learning Support Pilots running in areas such as the Bay of Plenty. We would query if a full evaluation has actually taken place and if so, when will this be shared with the profession.

If this idea is going to be embedded across the system, like the SENCO model, we would welcome an invitation to co-construct the design of it. NZPF believes that the LSF may not need to sit with the MOE, rather it could be based within the community as an entity such as the RTLB Service.

It is important the professional in this role:

- Has recent teaching and learning experience along with knowledge of local support services and agencies;
- A broad knowledge of students with diverse needs;
- Explicit behaviour management knowledge;
- Receives training and ongoing coaching for the role;
- Knows the local schools well and has a strong relationship with them;
- Can collaborate with local services, including but not limited to the RTLB service, Iwi, Oranga Tamariki, SWIS, Health agencies, child and youth mental health etc;
- Has strong interpersonal skills and the ability to work with young people, whānau, teachers, school leaders and other services.

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Learning Support Coordinators

The proposed in school Learning Support Coordinator role (previously known as a Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO) will require a funding decision before it can be confirmed or Implemented. This role will:

- be the primary point of contact for parents and whānau, and support them to work in partnership with the school
- support the school or kura to build the capability and knowledge base of teachers
- make connections for transitions from early learning services.

As mentioned above the NZPF would fully support this proposal.

We agree that the role will be the primary point of contact for whānau and to help them build a partnership with the school to support their child. NZPF would also agree that the role will be to support the school to build the capability and knowledge base of teachers along with school leaders.

NZPF believes that role should not be limited to primary and secondary schools and over time should be extended to early learning services.

We would expect that the position description would be developed in consultation with the profession.

We would expect that those appointed to these positions are experienced teachers who would have extensive experience in this area. For those appointed to have any credibility they would need knowledge and experience on how to work with teachers to provide professional development and supervision which will in turn support teachers' professional capability and practice, along with the strong ability to develop relationships with young people and their whānau, school leaders and colleagues and other agencies.

As the culture of individual schools is unique, it is also important that those appointed to these roles have a good understanding of the school community and know best how to navigate and build relationships.

NZPF is interested in how the staffing ratio formulae will be calculated and would welcome an invitation to NZPF to be involved in this discussion. There will be schools who, for whatever reason, will require more support than others and therefore the allocation of staffing for a SENCO or LSC must reflect this. This may not be based of the roll number. Some schools become known as "magnet schools" as thus any staffing calculation for these schools should acknowledge this.

We would highlight a concern that the current teacher supply issue may affect the establishment of these roles across the country.

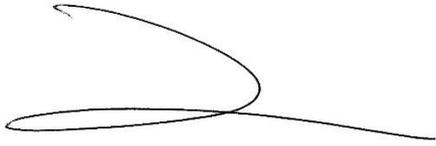
In summary, NZPF welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Disability and Learning Support Action Plan.



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The profession has for some time been asking for more professional support to nurture our young people. As the largest professional organisation for school principals, NZPF believes the intent of this plan will better support our young people.

Ngā manaakitanga



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