Working in special education

Speech-language therapist
Meet Jennifer Williams, a speech-language therapist in Palmerston North

Jennifer Williams has worked as a speech-language therapist for the Ministry of Education since 2011.

Jennifer’s story

Jennifer qualified as a speech-language therapist in the UK in 2004. Before her move to NZ she worked for the UK’s National Health Service supporting children with mild to severe speech and language difficulties. She also worked with adults with communication and swallowing difficulties.

Jennifer’s day-to-day

Jennifer supports children and young people with significant speech and language difficulties, their parents, whānau and teachers.

There’s no such thing as a typical day - it might include observing a child or young person in their classroom or talking with the people who know them best to find out more. It might involve supporting parents, whānau and teachers to learn communication strategies so they can support the child or young person in every day contexts.
Reflecting cultural values in her work

“The Ministry has been great at providing a number of workshops for employees to enhance our knowledge when working with whānau Māori. This helps us to deliver a service that best combines the speech and language goals and cultural considerations for the child and the whānau.” We also have access to kaitakawaenga (Māori liaison advisers) who support us,” says Jennifer.

Rewards of the role

“I really enjoy building relationships with the wider team - schools, families and whānau and making the most of opportunities to share knowledge,” she says.
Nature of the work

The Ministry of Education is a significant employer of speech-language therapists.

Speech-language therapists:

› work to understand the impact of the child’s speech and language difficulties in the context of their home, school and community

› work closely with parents, caregivers, teachers and other specialists to help children and young people with the development of speech and language skills

› work as part of a multi-disciplinary team where a child’s needs are complex

› talk to the adults in a child’s life to find out about a child or young person’s overall development and behaviour so they can identify what their individual communication needs are.
Qualifications and experience

To become a speech-language therapist you need:

› a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree in speech-language therapy or an equivalent that meets the requirements of the New Zealand Speech-language Therapists’ Association
› to be eligible to be a member of the New Zealand Speech-language Therapists Association.

Skills and knowledge

In addition to the qualifications a speech-language therapist must have knowledge of or skills in:

› managing speech and language needs in a variety of settings understanding of how speech-language needs affect how children learn and participate in social contexts
› adult learning models
› community and family support services
› working with diverse cultures
› effective communication, teaching and planning skills.
Career development

Becoming a speech-language therapist with the Ministry of Education will give you the rewards and challenges of the job itself, as well as opportunities to develop your career.

You will:
› be supported and supervised by experienced professional colleagues
› be kept up to date with the latest evidence
› take part in ongoing training
› have opportunities to share and extend your knowledge and skills.

In time you might be considered for leadership roles e.g., manager, practice adviser or practice leader. You might also have opportunities to take part in projects, working groups or consultations.
Further information about speech-language therapists

Special education careers and professional development
For more information about the role of the speech-language therapist and working in special education, visit our special education careers webpage [www.education.govt.nz/careers-in-special-education](http://www.education.govt.nz/careers-in-special-education)

Special education scholarships and study awards
If you’re interested in a career in special education you may be eligible for a scholarship or study award. Find out more at [www.education.govt.nz/r/sestudyawards](http://www.education.govt.nz/r/sestudyawards)

Career information
For profiles of different careers visit the Careers New Zealand website [www.careers.govt.nz](http://www.careers.govt.nz)

Contact us
Want to speak to someone about a career as a speech-language therapist? Give us a call or drop us an email.

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