Education Report: Current Status of the Next Steps for the Special Education Update

Recommendations

We recommend that you:

a. **note** that the Ministry’s engagement with parents to date about the special education update is the first step in an ongoing process that will continue during 2015 and 2016; and

b. **forward** this report to the Minister for Disability Issues.

Katrina Casey  
Deputy Secretary  
Sector Enablement and Support

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NOTED / APPROVED

Hon Hekia Parata  
Minister of Education  
18/6/15
Education Report: Current Status of the Next Steps for the Special Education Update

Background

1. This report is in response to an enquiry from [redacted] a parent of a child with learning disabilities.

2. [redacted] has initiated a public petition asking the Ministry of Education to extend the "consultation" period for the special education update to allow "wider consultation with parents at a local level."

3. [redacted] has emailed the Ministry during May and June about this topic. The National Director Special Education has replied by email and spoken to [redacted].

4. The special education update was initiated in February 2015 to follow on from the wider review of special education undertaken in 2010 and to build on progress made since then. The update comprises several phases, the first of which will be completed in July this year.

5. Engagement with representative groups from the education and disability sectors is a key component of all phases of the update.

6. Phase one of the update also included looking at progress since the 2010 review and conducting an analysis of the current state and the international literature about the education of children and young people who need additional learning support.

7. In phase two the Ministry will undertake more detailed analysis and design of improvements to the education system arising from phase one. This will be followed by trialling and implementation of the recommended improvements.

The Engagement Approach

8. Many thousands of children and young people receive some form of additional learning support each year, (over 80,000 in 2014) and these numbers represent a wide spectrum of learning need.

9. In the 2010 review a wide ranging survey with questions for different audiences was posted online and the opportunity to respond was actively promulgated through schools, and other education and disability sector networks.

10. During phase one of the current update, the Ministry engaged with representative groups of parents (and others) rather than attempting to reach large numbers of parents because the update was designed to build on what had been learnt from the 2010 review.

11. Meeting with representative groups rather than using a survey also meant that the Ministry obtained a wide range of views while at the same time building relationships for engagement in subsequent phases.
To ensure a wide range of perspectives, the Ministry met with all the major nationally representative bodies from the education and disability sectors plus local groups of parents, students with learning disabilities, teachers and urban and rural principals, Ministry of Education staff and other specialists working in education. We have also collated and analysed the feedback from children and young people from the 2010 review.

During phase one, 123 engagement forums were held around the country. This included 17 specific parent forums attended by 183 parents.

A further 32 parents submitted individual responses to the topics discussed during the engagement forums. This option was made available to people who were invited to attend a forum but were unable to do so.

The Engagement Discussion Topics

Engagement for phase one of the update focused on four aspects of service provision that were raised during the 2010 review and that in the Ministry’s view needed further attention.

The four topics discussed during the engagement forums were:

- improved early identification of the need for additional learning support
- increased involvement of parents and educators in the decision making process about additional learning support for each child
- the possibility of providing a single point of contact for children and young people, parents, whānau and educators
- improvements to ensure a more managed education pathway for children and young people needing additional learning support.

Feedback Received from Parents

Early indications from the analysis of the engagement feedback suggest that the themes arising from the parent forums are largely similar to those raised by [redacted] in her emails to the Ministry.

Parents at the forums have made the following key points:

- Parents with children in early childhood education aren’t listened to; their concerns can be dismissed as trivial or not informed by expertise.
- Many parents think that early childhood educator training and knowledge of the system of additional learning support needs to improve.
- Greater collaboration with the health sector was seen as critical to ensuring that the need for additional learning support is identified and actioned early.
- Several parents commented that in their experience diagnosis of a learning problem was the only way to get help for the child.
In relation to greater involvement of parents and educators in decision making, the majority of parents saw this as a very positive step although some parents noted that they may need additional knowledge to be more involved.

Parents felt that an improved sense of empowerment and being better informed about their child's learning needs would be benefits of greater involvement.

A number of parents also mentioned that educators need better training in working with children and young people who need additional learning support.

Parents expressed strong support for some form of single point of contact. Many saw a need for an advocate for their child - and for their concerns as parents.

Many parents noted that the success of this role would depend on the skill and personal qualities of the person in the role.

Keeping parents and whānau better informed about the support that is available and how the system of support works was also seen as very important.

Parents felt understanding the goals and aspirations of the child and their parents is very important to managing their child's education pathway.

They also noted that an adaptable progress and achievement approach is needed for children and young people for whom NCEA or National Standards may not be achievable and that schools must be held accountable for regularly reviewing student progress and involving parents in this process.

Next Steps

19 The Ministry sees the recently completed engagement as a first step in an ongoing process that will continue as a programme of work is undertaken to deliver the improvements identified during phase one.

20 The Ministry will release the key themes from the initial engagement in mid July and invite further input from groups of parents and others in the education and disability sectors as the design of improvements progresses.