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Visual description: A purple Whaikaha logo with a QR scan for the NZSL name.

Briefing

Date: 6 August 2025

For: Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Disability Issues

File reference: REP/WHK/25/8/053

Security level: In confidence

New Zealand Disability Strategy refresh – approval of Strategy

Purpose

- 1 This paper seeks your approval of the revised education section and final drafting changes for the New Zealand Disability Strategy. The revised education section is attached at **Appendix 1**. The final consultation draft strategy is attached at **Appendix 2**.

Background

- 2 On 28 July 2025, the Ministerial Disability Leadership Group (MDLG) and the Minister of Justice met to decide whether to approve the draft New Zealand Disability Strategy (the Strategy) for public consultation.
- 3 You have approved the employment outcome area of the draft Strategy. Officials from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development have indicated that the Ministers of Health and Housing are comfortable with the health and housing outcome areas.
- 4 The education and justice outcome areas were not approved at the MDLG meeting:
 - 4.1 The Minister of Education raised concerns about the education outcome area, noting that its current framing was inconsistent with the Government's direction in education.
 - 4.2 The Minister of Justice raised concerns about the feasibility of the justice outcomes.

Officials have revised the education outcome area of the Strategy

- 5 Since the MDLG meeting, we have worked with the Ministry of Education to revise the education chapter. As a part of this process, senior Ministry of Education officials met with the education working group as agreed at the MDLG meeting.
- 6 A revised draft is attached as **Appendix 1**. This has been signed off by the Minister of Education. If you are comfortable with this version, it can be included in the consultation draft of the strategy.
- 7 The Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha considers that the actions in this revised draft provide a balance across:
 - 7.1 Continuing to progress already announced policy decisions and investments (Actions 1-4);
 - 7.2 Some broad commitments to new areas of work (Actions 5-8); and
 - 7.3 A continuing commitment to the existing direction of travel for tertiary education (Action 9).
- 8 Actions 5 – 8 signal a commitment to undertake work with the Ministry of Disabled People - Whaikaha on key issues the working group identified:
 - 8.1 Improvements in teacher training and guidance so teachers are better able to meet the needs of disabled learners.
 - 8.2 Improved accountability for schools through reporting on learning and achievement outcomes for disabled learners.
 - 8.3 Improved identification of disabled learners in data collection processes – this would eventually make it possible to disaggregate data about disabled learners within broader schooling data.
- 9 It is likely the working group will continue to be concerned about the lack of specificity in some actions, particularly the ones relating to data and teaching practice. However, there are opportunities through both consultation on the draft strategy and implementation of the final strategy to make sure the key details that the Working Group have emphasised are incorporated into future work. We have updated the Working Group Chair on the version agreed by the Minister of Education.
- 10 We consider that it is important for the draft NZDS to include an education chapter that the government can deliver on. The version that has been signed off by the Minister of Education achieves this, and will provide an opportunity for disabled people and their families to give feedback on priorities for improvement from their perspective.
- 11 We recommend that you approve the attached draft education section for inclusion in the draft NZDS released for consultation.

Officials have revised the 'what success means' section in the justice outcome area of the Strategy

- 12 At the MDLG meeting, the Minister for Children confirmed that she had no concerns regarding the justice outcome area. However, the Minister of Justice expressed concerns about the feasibility of some of the proposed justice outcomes.
- 13 The Strategy now clarifies that the actions are intended to contribute toward achieving the success measures, to avoid any potential misunderstanding that the success measures are expected to be fully achieved by the end of the Strategy period.
- 14 Officials from the Ministry of Disabled People and the Ministry of Justice have revised the justice success measures to incorporate feedback from the office of the Minister of Justice.
- 15 As indicated at the MDLG meeting, the office of the Minister of Justice provided the Minister's preferred wording for two success measures. Instead of 'Disabled parents and guardians are not discriminated against', the Minister requested this be reworded to 'Disabled parents and guardians have equitable access to family justice services'. Additionally, he asked for 'The rights of disabled people are upheld and their needs are met when they interact with the justice sector' to be reworded to 'The rights of disabled people are consistently considered in their interactions with the justice sector'.
- 16 The Minister's preferred wording is now reflected in the following justice success measures:
 - 16.1 For disabled children and young people who interact with the youth justice system, and for adult disabled people who interact with the criminal justice system, their rights and accessibility needs are consistently considered, and they have the right supports to transition out of those settings.
 - 16.2 Disabled parents who use the Family Court will have equitable access to family justice services.
- 17 The office of the Minister of Justice has confirmed its comfort with the rewording of these two justice success measures, as have officials from Oranga Tamariki.

The Strategy includes minor editorial changes

- 18 The Strategy attached at **Appendix 2** now clearly identifies which success measures each action contributes to.
- 19 The Strategy now also includes a glossary of key terms.

Next steps

- 20 If you approve the updated education content, which has also been approved by the Minister of Education, we will send the final draft Strategy to alternate format providers for translation on Monday 11 August, so that public consultation can begin on Monday 18 August. This is one week later than originally planned.
- 21 There are two options for the consultation period, one of which would involve delaying the launch of the final strategy:
 - 21.1 A six-week consultation period, with the strategy being launched as planned on 3 December; or
 - 21.2 A seven-week consultation period, with the strategy being launched on around 10 December.
- 22 We had originally planned a seven-week consultation period, and the disability community generally prefer longer consultation opportunities. However, this would mean not launching the strategy as planned on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. We are therefore seeking your decision on whether to retain a seven-week consultation period and move back the strategy launch date.

Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

- a) **Note** that the attached Strategy includes revised education outcome area content, which has been approved by the Minister of Education
- b) **Approve** the revised education outcome area content in the Strategy (**Appendix 1**)
- c) **Approve** the final drafting changes made to the draft Strategy (**Appendix 2**)
- d) **Indicate** whether we should retain the planned seven-week consultation period and move back the launch date for the final strategy to mid-December

Noted

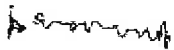
Approved | Not Approved

Approved | Not Approved

Yes | No



Hon Louise Upston
Minister for Disability Issues
Date **20 2500 14**



Ben O'Meara
Deputy Chief Executive, Policy and Insights
6 August 2025

End

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Appendix 1: Revised education section for the NZDS

Goal for education

Every learner is supported to attend, participate and progress in education. There is a high expectation that all learners – including disabled learners – will achieve their potential in the education setting of their choice.

What success in education means

- Educators are well-prepared and supported to plan for diversity across teaching, learning and assessment to meet the needs of all learners, including disabled learners, and support them to succeed.
- The education system has high expectations for all disabled learners and focuses on their diverse strengths and aspirations.
- Learning support is delivered in a timely and effective way, with a skilled and capable specialist and support staff workforce, so disabled learners are supported to engage with their education and experience success.
- Early intervention services work to identify learning support needs early and can work with students in a timely and effective way.
- Kaupapa Māori education settings have access to curriculum, assessment and learning support interventions delivered by a culturally capable and trained workforce.
- The learning support system is responsive, accessible and easy to navigate for educators, families and learners.
- Data is gathered to support understanding the progress of disabled learners, allocation of services and supports, and working with their families.
- Disabled learners are supported by effective in-school co-ordination and planning of the support they need to succeed.
- Tertiary education providers are supported to implement disability action plans, with progress monitored through the TEC mechanism.

The Government has made a significant investment in Learning Support through Budget 2025

Budget 2025 provided the largest investment into learning support in a generation and is a significant first step in ensuring all learners get the support they need. The Government invested \$645.8 million of operating funding and \$100.9 million of capital funding into learning support. Some of this investment includes:

- \$266.0 million to extend the Early Intervention Service from early childhood education thorough to the end of Year 1 of primary school.

- \$192.5 million so that all state and state integrated schools and kura with Year 1 to 8 students get access to a Learning Support Coordinator.
- \$122.5 million to meet increased demand for the Ongoing Resource Scheme for students with high and complex needs.
- \$41.5 million of operating and \$1.4 million of capital funding for an extra 78.5 full-time equivalent speech language therapists, 6.3 full-time equivalent psychologists.
- \$39.9m of investment in additional Teacher Aide time
- \$7.3 million for 45 more places in the Intensive Wrap Around Service for students with high-and-complex needs.
- \$90 million invested into 25 new learning support classrooms and up to 365 property modifications to make schools more accessible.

This investment will support more learners with learning support needs, meet growing demand for learning support services and address funding shortfalls. This funding will enable educators and learning support specialists to identify learning support needs early in a child's life, and to provide the right support for all learners – including disabled learners – to attend, participate and progress in education.

The case for change

Education is a key driver of long-term wellbeing, employment, and life outcomes. However, some learners – particularly disabled learners – continue to face barriers to participation, progress and achievement. Disabled students have lower attendance and are more than twice as likely to leave school with no qualifications compared to their non-disabled peers.¹

While many disabled students benefit from quality teaching and committed educators, many feel like they do not belong. In 2022, 30 percent of disabled students reported they did not feel like they belonged at school.² Ongoing challenges, such as inconsistent educator knowledge and confidence to support disabled learners, specialist staff shortages, long wait times, limited access to support services, and gaps in outcomes data, continue to affect the consistency and effectiveness of support across the education system.³

To meet the needs of all learners it is important to build the capability of teachers to plan, teach and assess in a way that responds to a wide range of learning needs. The system also

¹ Ministry of Education. (2020). *The educational experiences of disabled learners*. He Whakaaro Education Insights. Ministry of Education.

² Education Review Office, (2022). *Thriving at School? Education for Disabled Learners in Schools*. Education Review Office.

³ Education Review Office, (2022). *Thriving at School? Education for Disabled Learners in Schools*. Education Review Office.

must provide more equitable, coordinated and responsive support for disabled learners, enable genuine choice across settings and have high expectations for their success.

Education actions

These are the education actions proposed to be included in the strategy:

1. Invest \$266 million to expand early intervention services to support the identification of learning support needs early in a child's life and reduce wait times for assessments and services.
2. Explore new options for targeted and specialised support and provisions to reduce wait times using private providers and NGOs.
3. Make improvements to the learning support system so it is easier to navigate for educators, families and learners through: funding all schools with Year 1-8 students for a Learning Support Coordinator; and by reducing the complexity and accessibility of the application process.
4. Invest funding in additional learning support classrooms to provide choice for parents.
5. Work with the Ministry of Disabled People - Whaikaha to develop improvements in teacher training and guidance that support teachers to meet the needs of disabled students.
6. Work with the Ministry of Disabled People - Whaikaha to explore opportunities to improve accountability for schools through reporting on learning and achievement outcomes for disabled learners.
7. Support Kaupapa Māori settings, within the existing Education budget, to access the resources, knowledge and capability to deliver high quality kaupapa Māori educational programmes that meet the needs of disabled ākonga (students) in a kaupapa Māori setting.
8. Work with the Ministry of Disabled People - Whaikaha to explore opportunities to identify disabled learners in education data collections.
9. Continue implementation of the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) mechanism for reviewing provider progress in implementation of disability action plans (which will be integrated into Investment Plans from 2027). The TEC will consult with disabled student representative groups, including the National Disabled Students' Association, on how the mechanism will be implemented.