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NZSL name



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

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| <b>Date:</b>           | 4 April 2025            |
| <b>For:</b>            | Education Working Group |
| <b>Security level:</b> | In-confidence           |

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## Key issues and opportunities for disabled children and young people's education

### Purpose

1. This paper outlines key issues and opportunities for disabled people in education.<sup>1</sup> It describes the impact of current processes and programmes and alignment to policy, convention, and law.
2. The paper is part of a series of papers examining strategic issues and opportunities for better outcomes for disabled people across government and to inform the development of the New Zealand Disability

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<sup>1</sup> State education. Most schools in New Zealand are owned and funded by the state (state schools). They teach the national curriculum and are secular (non-religious). State schools include state integrated schools and kura kaupapa Māori <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/about-us/education-new-zealand/our-education-system/primary-and-secondary-education> . Early childhood and tertiary education are also referenced in this paper.

Strategy.<sup>2</sup> These papers are intended to provide a starting point for the working groups that will consider each outcome area in more detail, and propose a prioritised set of well-defined, achievable actions for inclusion in the strategy.

## **Executive summary**

3. Education has a critical role in a person's overall development. Education also has long-term influence on health, wellbeing, future employment choices, income, and financial security.
4. Many disabled children and young people receive an excellent education in welcoming environments with confident capable teachers and resources to enable success. However, in general, disabled children have lower attendance, participation, and achievement at school, and are less likely to continue with further education and employment than their peers who are not disabled. Education outcomes for disabled people are inconsistent. Tāngata whaikaha Māori have the worst overall outcomes in education. There are many issues

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<sup>2</sup> This paper does not unpack impairment-related inequities for groups of disabled children but focuses on systemic issues that impact on the presence, participation and learning progress of every disabled child who needs additional support to reach their potential. This does not mean specific barriers experienced by Pacific Island children, Māori children and deaf and hard of hearing children for example are not recognised.

that appear to contribute to poor outcomes for disabled children in education.

5. Lower school attendance is impacted by higher rates of stand downs and suspensions and active discouragement from enrolling and attending. Unmet needs include a lack of appropriate equipment, and social difficulties also impact attendance. The school practice of limiting disabled children's attendance is unlawful and significantly impacts disabled children's ability to learn and make friends.
6. Initial teacher education and professional development about inclusive education and teaching children with diverse learning needs is critical to building a capable teacher workforce. However, 49% of teachers reported a lack of confidence in adapting the Curriculum and including disabled children in the full range of classroom activities. Sixty-four percent of teachers reported low confidence in working in a culturally responsive way with tamariki whaikaha Māori, and 65% of teachers reported low confidence in supporting disabled children to manage their behaviour.<sup>3</sup>
7. A common response from teachers who lack confidence and capability is to rely on teacher's aide support.

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<sup>3</sup> ERO (2022) Thriving at School. Education for Disabled Learners in Schools  
<https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>.

Schools can also limit disabled children's learning opportunities by not allowing them to attend school outdoor education camps or suggesting an alternative place of learning such as a day special school or Te Kura.

8. Learning Support manages a range of funds and services available to schools and kura to support disabled children. Support includes building modifications, technology support, specialist teacher support, and teacher's aide support. Some children will require all these accommodations throughout their schooling, and some children may require a piece of technology for example a hearing loop that enables curricular access and equitable learning outcomes.<sup>4</sup>
9. Early intervention support is also available through the Ministry of Education.<sup>5</sup> Some children may be receiving support in early childhood settings from other agencies such as the Ministry of Social Development<sup>6</sup> and trusts such as TalkLink.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education, (2025). Learning Support. <https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/schools-year-0-13/learning-support>

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Education, (2025). Learning support in the early years. <https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/early-learning/learning-support/learning-support-early-years>

<sup>6</sup> Disability Support Services, (2025). Child Development Services. <https://www.disabilitysupport.govt.nz/disabled-people/support-and-services/specific-disability-services/child-development-services>

<sup>7</sup> TalkLink Trust. (2025). TalkLink. <https://talklink.org.nz/>

10. The tertiary sector is developing system capability to support disabled students although accessibility remains the biggest barrier. Disability Action Plans are an important tool to enable tertiary education organisations (TEOs) to evidence their support of disabled learners. Tertiary institutions develop their own disability support services, and student experiences vary across and within tertiary institutions.
11. There is a high degree of unmet need among disabled children in education. The Household Disability Survey (2023) shows there are 100,000 disabled people in school education, 51% of whom have unmet needs.<sup>8</sup> These needs relate to specialist support, health support, adapted materials, accessible features and assistive technology. Modern Learning Environments (MLEs) can be very challenging spaces for disabled children and can impact engagement, attendance, and outcomes at school.
12. Supports and interventions are available but limited. For example, the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme is difficult to access but provides schools and early learning centres with some flexibility and surety of resource. The three Residential Specialist Schools cost more than

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<sup>8</sup> Statistics New Zealand, (2025). Household Disability Survey 2023 – findings, definitions, and design summary. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/household-disability-survey-2023-findings-definitions-and-design-summary/>

\$15m per annum for very few children and have poor outcomes.

13. It is not known how many disabled children attend early childhood centres, kura kaupapa and state schools. Outcomes for disabled children could be better understood if this data was collected. Disaggregated disability data could be used to evaluate interventions, understand children's learning outcomes, monitor attendance, and target resources.

14. A synthesis of evidence suggests the greatest changes to enable disabled children's inclusion, wellbeing and learning in education would be achieved by:

- supporting access to, and resourcing delivery of quality curricula
- collecting disability specific data on enrolment, attendance, and progress/achievement to inform decision making
- enforcing the legal requirement that disabled children can enrol in their local school and attend all the hours the school is open for instruction
- repurposing RSS funding into more equitable and effective means of supporting disabled children's learning in their home community.

## **What is important to disabled people**

15. To assist this paper, a young disabled adult discussed what teachers could have done to improve their schooling experiences. The points identified are features of effective teacher practice and important for every child:

- know me
- know my interests and follow them
- give me opportunities
- keep me safe
- teach me literacy and numeracy because I can learn.<sup>9</sup>

## **Background**

**Quality education is essential to improve outcomes for disabled people.**

16. Education is important for all children and young people, and has long-term influence on health,

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<sup>9</sup> Noddings, N. (2018). *Philosophy of education*. Routledge.

Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best evidence synthesis June 2003*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Wearmouth, J., Peter, M., & Clapham, S. (2012). Professional development, changes in teacher practice and improvements in Indigenous students' educational performance: A case study from New Zealand. *Teaching and teacher education*, 28(5), 694-705.  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20180415022735id\\_/https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/7705/BES-quality-teaching-diverse-students.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20180415022735id_/https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/7705/BES-quality-teaching-diverse-students.pdf)

wellbeing and future employment choices and income. This influence is even more critical for disabled children who have lower attendance, participation, and achievement at school, and are less likely to continue with further education and employment than their peers who are not disabled.<sup>10</sup>

17. Education outcomes vary between different groups of disabled children, cultural identities, and geographical locations. Education Review Office research showed very poor education outcomes for Tāngata whaikaha Māori.<sup>11</sup>

18. The Minister for Education's vision is for "every child to be inspired and engaged in their learning so they can achieve to the best of their ability".<sup>12</sup> In practice, this means teachers are confident and capable, and all disabled children are appropriately supported to learn and belong in their local community school.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Scott, D. (2020). Education and earnings, a New Zealand update, Education Counts. <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/80898/education-and-earnings#:~:text=Degree%20and%20higher%2Dlevel%20education,finished%20with%20NCEA%20Level%202.>

<sup>11</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Thriving at School? Education for Disabled Learners in Schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> New Zealand Government, (2024). Education Priorities focused on lifting achievement. <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/education-priorities-focused-lifting-achievement>

<sup>13</sup> Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) requires State parties to ensure persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. UNCRPD (2006) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

19. Limited availability of educational data, disaggregated by disability, makes it difficult to know how many children need support to succeed, the efficacy of current interventions and gaps around unmet need.<sup>14</sup>
20. The Ministry of Education's Highest Needs Review of Learning Support Services found that "for every seven students who receive support, there's around three who may have a potential unmet high need at some point during their education journey".<sup>15</sup> The Highest Needs Review did not include data about disabled children who require additional support but are not considered to have the highest needs. The Household Disability Survey 2023<sup>16</sup> noted that, while 67% of disabled children in school rated the school's responsiveness to specific needs highly (4 to 5, out of 5), half of disabled children in schools reported having unmet needs.<sup>17</sup>

## **Four key issues for disabled children in state education**

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<sup>14</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Missing Out: Why Aren't Our Children Going to School? <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/2hxp1qi5/missing-out-why-arent-our-children-going-to-school.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Education, (2024). Highest Needs Review: Report back to Cabinet. [https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-03/523.-Progress-Update-on-the-Highest-Needs-Change-Programme\\_0.pdf?VersionId=M3EspIP6MCEQIhEY1qmiQqMMh8U00tXg](https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-03/523.-Progress-Update-on-the-Highest-Needs-Change-Programme_0.pdf?VersionId=M3EspIP6MCEQIhEY1qmiQqMMh8U00tXg)

<sup>16</sup> For the purposes of the Household Disability Survey 2023, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities definition of disability is used. Disability is defined as "... People who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others". <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Statistics New Zealand, (2025). Household Disability Survey 2023 – findings, definitions, and design summary. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/household-disability-survey-2023-findings-definitions-and-design-summary/>

21. Four key issues affecting the experiences and outcomes of disabled children in education have been identified as a focus for this work. These are discussed in the body of this paper and summarised below:

1. **Enrolment and attendance** - enrolment and attendance in education is not straightforward for many disabled children and their whānau
2. **Curriculum and teacher capability** - many educators want support to adapt the Curriculum so disabled children in their class can progress their learning
3. **Learning support and reasonable accommodations** - provision of timely, appropriate accommodations, interventions and resources is pivotal to enabling children's participation, progress and achievement
4. **Data** and monitoring – outcomes data for learning support interventions such as speech language therapy would provide evidence to understand intervention efficacy and support decision-making.

22. Outcomes of these four issues are inconsistent for disabled children depending on school culture and leadership, area, available support, and specialist knowledge. Some disabled children are welcomed, included, achieve learning goals, and are supported

appropriately by skilled and culturally responsive educators. For other children, every aspect of their education is fraught with challenge, complexity, rejection and often failure to uphold the child's right to education.<sup>18</sup>

## **Issue 1: Enrolment and attendance in education is not straightforward for many disabled children and their whānau<sup>19</sup>**

23. Attendance is crucial for higher achievement, wellbeing, and positive long-term outcomes.<sup>20</sup> In New Zealand, regular school attendance is defined as attending more than 90% of the time, although there is no "safe" level of non-attendance that does not impact children's achievement. The Government has set a target for 80% of children to attend more than 90% of the term by 2030.<sup>21</sup>

24. In term 4, 2024, only 58.1% of all students had regular attendance, with Māori children at 44.1% and 42.4%

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<sup>18</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/a-great-start-education-for-disabled-children-in-early-childhood>

<sup>19</sup> Much of the statistical data in this report is drawn from two 2022 Education Review Office reports - A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood and Thriving at School? Education for Disabled Learners in Schools. Surveys and in-depth interviews were used to gather data for these reports. These statistics are an analysis of data provided by participants. Ministry of Education does not collect statistical data about disabled children's learning in Early Childhood Centres or schools. Most statistics are not part of a national data set.

<sup>20</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Missing Out: Why Aren't Our Children Going to School? <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/2hxp1qi5/missing-out-why-arent-our-children-going-to-school.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2024). Target6. Increased student attendance. <https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2025-03/qt-factsheet-target-6-dec24.pdf>

for Pacific Island children.<sup>22</sup> Attendance data for disabled children was not gathered.

## **Participation in quality early childhood education (ECE) is important for disabled children**

25. Participation in high-quality early learning positively impacts education and life outcomes for all children.
26. There are no differences in eligibility for ECE between disabled and non-disabled children, however research suggests many disabled children are not accepted into ECE.<sup>23</sup> Because early childhood education is not compulsory, it is not known how many disabled children have had enrolment in ECE rejected, are only able to attend minimal hours, or choose not to enrol.
27. For disabled children who do attend, most parents report that their child enjoys early learning and is well-cared for.<sup>24</sup>
28. However, preschoolers with complex needs experience exclusion more, and their parents are less likely to report that their child feels safe and that they belong.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Education, (2024) Attendance, Education Counts.  
<https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/attendance>

<sup>23</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood.  
<https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/a-great-start-education-for-disabled-children-in-early-childhood>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

**Disabled children have significantly lower school attendance, are discouraged from enrolling and attending, and are more likely to be stood down or suspended.**

29. Data from the Household Disability Survey showed that for disabled people enrolled at school, 89% were enrolled at a local school, 6% were enrolled at a specialist school, and 6% were enrolled in another form of school (including Te Kura - the Correspondence school and home school).<sup>26</sup>

30. Disabled youth surveyed in 2021 reported lower attendance rates in school.<sup>27</sup> Other than this, there is no disaggregated data about the attendance of disabled children at school, what their needs are, and the efficacy of the services and supports they access. However, parent reporting shows that 21% of disabled children have been discouraged from enrolling in their local school, and 27% have been asked to keep their child home at least once due to resourcing issues. This

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<sup>26</sup> Statistics New Zealand, (2025). Household Disability Survey 2023: Final content. <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.stats.govt.nz%2Fassets%2FREports%2FHousehold-Disability-Survey-2023-Final-content%2FDownload-data%2Fhousehold-disability-survey-2023-final-content.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

<sup>27</sup> Accessed at [What About Me - The biggest survey of your generation](#)

negatively impacts children's achievement and sense of belonging.<sup>28</sup>

31. Disabled learners are also 2 to 3 times more likely to face stand-downs, suspensions and frequent school transfers than their non-disabled peers.<sup>29</sup>

**Factors for low attendance of disabled children include unmet needs, a lack of appropriate equipment, and social difficulties**

32. Parents of disabled children report several factors contributing to low attendance, such as lack of appropriate equipment (27% compared with 11% for non-disabled children), transportation difficulties (17% compared with 9%), schoolwork being too challenging (27% compared with 11%), dislike of being around classmates (11% compared with 4%), and mental health or anxiety issues (35% compared with 7%).<sup>30</sup>

33. The 2023 Household Disability Survey shows there were 100,000 disabled people enrolled in school education with 51% citing unmet needs. These needs include:

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<sup>28</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Thriving at School? Education for Disabled Learners in Schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Thriving at School? Education for Disabled Learners in Schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Missing Out: Why Aren't Our Children Going to School? <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/missing-out-why-aren-t-our-children-going-to-school>

- a resource teacher or teacher aide (38%)
- a health professional at school (20%)
- assistive technology or equipment to help with schoolwork (16%)
- accessible features at school (10%)
- adapted classroom materials (8%).<sup>31</sup>

34. Data shows many disabled children experienced difficulties affecting attendance at some point during their schooling. These difficulties include:

- being bullied at school (62%)
- making friends (46%)
- taking part in sports or games (38%)
- being included in group activities (36%)
- going to school events or outings (28%)
- being unable to attend school for several weeks because of health issues (24%)
- having to change schools because of a disability, condition, or health problem (16%).<sup>32</sup>

35. A Ministry of Education survey focusing on student well-being in years 7 to 13, drew 9,820 responses from students and revealed 19.7% of students self-identified

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<sup>31</sup> Stats New Zealand, (2025). Household disability survey 2023.  
<https://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/household-disability-survey-2023-findings-definitions-and-design-summary/>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

as having learning support needs.<sup>33</sup> All students, including disabled students, identified key well-being themes as feeling safe at school, which included feeling included, having friends, and having great teachers. Themes specific to disabled students' well-being included being given every opportunity to learn and practice new skills, to grow and demonstrate their independence, and to be given time to process unexpected routine changes. The survey is being developed for progressive implementation and will be a useful well-being check for schools. It would be useful to understand well-being from primary school children's perspective, as this would support effective use of resources. Children's voice is an important component of learning stories in early childhood education, and it would be useful to include children's voice more specifically in these stories.<sup>34</sup>

## **Alternative options to attending local schools do not always lead to the best outcomes**

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<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Education, (2023). Understanding student wellbeing in the educational setting. Education Counts. <file:///corp.ssi.govt.nz/users/a/amcil003/Documents/A-M%20Working%20Folder/Education/Position%20paper%20educaton%20Whaikaha/References/Student-Wellbeing-Measures-Report.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Smith, A. B. (2007). Children's rights and early childhood education: Links to theory and advocacy. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 32(3), 1-8.

Carr, M., Jones, C., & Lee, W. (2005). Beyond listening: can assessment practice play a part? In *Beyond listening* (pp. 129-150). Policy Press.

36. Challenges experienced in local community schools have led some disabled children and their families to choose options other than the local school, which creates complexity in monitoring and understanding attendance trends. There may be disabled children whose attendance is less than expected due to health concerns such as the impact of long Covid. Access to such information could enable provision of additional support to prevent the young person from slipping behind in their learning.

## Home Education

37. As at 1 July 2024, there were 10,757 children being homeschooled in New Zealand. This equates to 1.3% of total school enrolments.<sup>35</sup> There is no data to indicate how many of these homeschooled children are disabled and what level of engagement or learning outcomes are present.<sup>36</sup> However, data from the 2023 Disability Survey showed that 6% of disabled people enrolled in school education were not enrolled in mainstream or specialist schools, but in other forms of school education (including Te kura and home school).

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<sup>35</sup> Education Counts (2025) Homeschooling.  
<https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/homeschooling>

<sup>36</sup> Education and Training Act, (2020). Long-term exemptions from enrolment, 38.1.b.  
<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2020/0038/latest/LMS176208.html>

## Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura)

38. Te Kura is New Zealand's largest school with over 28,000 annual enrolments, including many disabled children who struggle in their community schools. However, these children do not receive the same level of learning support or specialist expertise as they would in their community school.<sup>37</sup>
39. Although Te Kura students are counted as attending full-time, learning engagement varies. Concerns have been raised about low participation, with 35% of Te Kura students referred by the Ministry of Education or Oranga Tamariki failing to submit any work during 2024 (as of October 2024).<sup>38</sup> There is no formal review or data about engagement levels.

Alternative Education can be inequitable and ineffective for disabled young people

40. Every year, over 2,000 disengaged young people are referred for enrolment in the Alternative Education (AE) system, which aims to provide them with quality education and support them back into education,

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<sup>37</sup> Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (2025) State Distance Education. [https://www.tekura.school.nz/about-us/about-us/#:~:text=Te%20Aho%20o%20Te%20Kura%20Pounamu%20\(Te%20Kura\)%20is%20New,diverse%20communities%20throughout%20New%20Zealand.](https://www.tekura.school.nz/about-us/about-us/#:~:text=Te%20Aho%20o%20Te%20Kura%20Pounamu%20(Te%20Kura)%20is%20New,diverse%20communities%20throughout%20New%20Zealand.)

<sup>38</sup> John Gerritsen (2024) 'Inquiry call over correspondence school Te Kura after reports of disengagement' New Zealand Herald, Oct 29, 2024, sourced from: [Inquiry call over correspondence school Te Kura after reports of disengagement - NZ Herald](#)

training, or work. There are several models of provision, but young people are generally taught in small groups, often off school grounds, with greater flexibility.

41. Young people in AE are more likely to be neurodiverse and are three times more likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Just under a third of young people in AE have a mental health need, and most have behaviour and learning challenges.<sup>39</sup>

42. Young people have positive experiences in AE, but their education outcomes are significantly worse than their peers, including others with similarly high needs who did not attend AE. Most young people who have been through alternative education leave the education system without the skills and qualifications to have positive outcomes in life.<sup>40</sup> Neurodiverse and other disabled young people are often at AE because their school requested it. However, the young people feel lonely more often, are less likely to see education as

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<sup>39</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). An alternative education? Support for our most disengaged young people. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/3af1zvvgg/an-alternative-education-support-for-our-most-disengaged-young-people.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

important for their future and are less positive about their learning progress.<sup>41</sup>

## **Accessibility of educational facilities impacts attendance**

43. Physical accessibility is essential for inclusive education.

Many older school buildings lack necessary modifications, such as ramps, lifts, and accessible toilets to accommodate children with physical disabilities.

44. The Ministry of Education provides funding for accessibility improvements at state schools, with schools responsible for minor modifications under \$2,500. New builds and major renovations must meet accessibility standards.<sup>42</sup>

45. Early childhood education modification processes to create accessibility and improve attendance are often lengthy.<sup>43</sup> Applying for modifications early prevents children being left behind in their learning.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Education, (2024). Funding for accessibility at school. <https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/schools-year-0-13/property/funding-accessibility-school>

Ministry of Education (2022). Designing Schools in Aotearoa New Zealand School Property Design Standards. [https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-10/Designing-Schools-in-Aotearoa-NZ.pdf?VersionId=ldVfNNZVjGwpriiz\\_ZEXP3TONpbxV8lx](https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-10/Designing-Schools-in-Aotearoa-NZ.pdf?VersionId=ldVfNNZVjGwpriiz_ZEXP3TONpbxV8lx)

<sup>43</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood Education. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/gpaicxcd/a-great-start-education-for-disabled-children-in-early-childhood-education.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Modern Learning Environments can be challenging for disabled children

46. Modern Learning Environments mostly in primary schools, can be challenging spaces for children and can impact engagement and attendance at school.<sup>45</sup>

He is very articulate and loves reading, but the modern learning environment is very challenging for him, and the teachers weren't prepared for it. He was suspended by the primary school. (Parent p.74).<sup>46</sup>

47. Many teachers find MLEs difficult teaching spaces.<sup>47</sup>

Teachers may lack knowledge to support diverse learners in these environments. A 2022 ERO report found that 43% of teachers lacked confidence in arranging their classrooms to support disabled children.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Armstrong, C. (2014). Ministry of Education talks about modern learning environments. *Collected Magazine*, (12), 9-10.

Page, A. & Davis, A. (2023). The alignment of innovative learning environments and inclusive education: How effective is the new learning environment in meeting the needs of special education learners?. *Teachers' Work*, 20(2), 316-333. <https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/teachers-work/article/view/612>

O'Brien, A. (2024). The failure of modern learning environments in New Zealand. <https://tonyobriencoach.substack.com/p/the-failure-of-modern-learning-environments>

<sup>46</sup> Education Review Office, (2022) Thriving at School? Education for Disabled Learners in Schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> Redmond, A. (2017). Teachers struggle with modern learning environments. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/90983510/teachers-struggle-with-modern-learning-environments>

<sup>48</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Thriving at School? Education for disabled learners in schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

## **Physical accessibility is a key issue for disabled tertiary students**

48. A focus on making the physical environment, facilities, and equipment more accessible is an important part of the Disability Action Plans that the Tertiary Education Commission requires of Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) they fund. However, TEOs have identified building accessibility as a main challenge.<sup>49</sup>
49. Disability support services in TEOs support enrolled disabled students with their accessibility needs. However, disabled learners have reported challenges to accessing support services due to lack of diagnoses, financial pressures, under-resourcing, and inaccessibility.<sup>50</sup>
50. Many historic university buildings are inaccessible and are exempt from making accessibility changes based on age or historic classification.

## **Issue 2: Curriculum and teacher capability - Many educators want support to adapt the Curriculum so they can build their confidence teaching disabled children**

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<sup>49</sup> TEC. (2023). Services and supports for disabled learners in tertiary education. <https://www.tec.govt.nz/assets/Reports/2023-Services-and-Supports-for-Disabled-Learner-report.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> NDA, MoE, NZQA, TEC. (2024). Let's Get Accessible: Disabled students' experiences navigating the tertiary education system. [https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/244757/1-LGA-Final-Report.pdf](https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/244757/1-LGA-Final-Report.pdf)

## **Teaching of the Curriculum must be accessible for engagement and learning to occur**

51. The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) (2007) is the official policy relating to teaching and learning in English medium New Zealand schools. Te Marautanga o Aotearoa (2008) serves the same function for Māori medium schools and Te Whāriki (2017) for early childhood education.<sup>51</sup> The national curricula which include direction on teaching content, are implemented and interpreted through early learning service, school and kura teaching and learning programmes.
52. The Curricula are clear that all children are capable and can make measurable progress, at their pace, building on their strengths in the learning areas.<sup>52</sup>
53. There is no pre-level one in the NZC. All children begin school ready and able to learn. Some disabled children may spend much of their schooling progressing at lower levels of the Curriculum. Some disabled children may

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<sup>51</sup> Ministry of Education, (2007). The New Zealand Curriculum.  
[file:///C:/Users/amcil003/Downloads/Curr%20-TEXT%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/amcil003/Downloads/Curr%20-TEXT%20(2).pdf)

Ministry of Education, (2008). Te Marautanga o Aotearoa.  
<https://kauwhatareo.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/kauwhata-reo/curricula/national-curriculum/te-t-rewa-marautanga-o-aotearoa/5637154333.c>

Ministry of Education, (2017). Te Whariki Early Childhood Curriculum.  
<https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/Early-Childhood/ELS-Te-Whariki-Early-Childhood-Curriculum-ENG-Web.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Curriculum with a capital 'C' refers to the policy documents used in state education. Curriculum with a lower case 'c' refers to the rich programmes the schools and early learning centres put in place that include the community context and need interpreted through the Curriculum and represented in the vision, planning and content delivery.

be working across levels, for example at level two in English and simultaneously at level eight in art.

## **Confident teaching of the Curriculum means disabled children can be recognised as capable learners**

54. Lack of confidence among teachers is a significant issue: 49% of teachers reported a lack of confidence in adapting the Curriculum and including disabled children in the full range of classroom activities.<sup>53</sup> A study in 2018 revealed the professional development teachers most wanted was how to teach “students with special needs.”<sup>54</sup> Some teachers are also challenged in using evidence-based assessment to account for disabled children’s learning. Research supports that when teachers do not assess children’s learning, they become less likely to plan for their learning, less likely to include them in class and school activities, and the children become less visible in the Curriculum, and are less likely to be seen as capable learners.<sup>55</sup> Some

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<sup>53</sup> ERO (2022) Thriving at School. Education for Disabled Learners in Schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Education, (2018). 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey - years 7 to 10 teachers training and professional development. [https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/194849/TALIS-2018-Teacher-training-and-professional-development.pdf](https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/194849/TALIS-2018-Teacher-training-and-professional-development.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British educational research journal*, 37(5), 813-828.

Morton, M., & Guerin, A. (2016). 11 Examining Assessment for Students with Special Education. *World Yearbook of Education 2017: Assessment Inequalities*, 198.

Morton, M., & MacArthur, J. (2024). Using narrative assessment to support secondary school teachers’ inclusive practices.

senior students require adaptations to standardised assessments in order to engage in or complete the assessment. This may involve extra time, enlarged text or a reader writer for example. Accessing such support for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement assessments (NCEA) can be difficult and may prevent some students from attending exams.<sup>56</sup>

### **Principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can support teachers to adapt and differentiate learning areas of the Curriculum**

55. Children perceive, interpret, and share information differently. Responsiveness to this variability can be built into the curriculum through a Universal Design for Learning approach to meet the diverse needs of all children, not just disabled children. The principles of UDL are for educators to offer multiple ways of engaging children, to represent information in multiple ways, and provide options for children to express and act on their learning. These principles are particularly important for making the curriculum accessible for all children, including disabled children.

56. An example of UDL might be around workspace design in a classroom. There might be tables for group

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<sup>56</sup> New Zealand Qualifications Authority (n.d.) Special Assessment Conditions.  
<https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/ncea-for-teachers-and-schools/special-assessment-conditions/>

learning, spaces for quiet individual work, space to spread out on the floor, and children can choose what is best for their learning.

57. The Ministry of Education provides an informative guide for educators<sup>57</sup>, but the ERO report on education for disabled learners at school showed 49% of teachers had not heard about the principles of universal design for teaching and learning programmes.<sup>58</sup>

### **Capacity and capability are critical for an education system to support disabled children's learning and belonging**

58. Capacity includes the education system's ability to meet the needs of all disabled children, and provide the environment and resources needed to ensure children have access to learning and socialisation alongside their peers.

59. Teaching capability comes when teachers understand inclusion, can adapt how they teach and assess the curriculum, and can access both theoretical and practical support.<sup>59</sup> Building teacher capability requires

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<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Education, Te kete Ipurangi, Universal Design for Learning.  
<https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/>

<sup>58</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Thriving at School? Education for disabled learners in schools.  
<https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> Alton-Lee, A. (2003). Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best evidence synthesis June 2003. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

high-quality initial teacher education and ongoing professional development that is effectively implemented in the classroom.<sup>60</sup>

60. A commitment to teaching all children means teachers seek and welcome opportunities to build their capability and confidence in teaching disabled children.<sup>61</sup>

61. Inclusive education means that all children are welcomed and valued in their local place of learning and are enabled to participate and succeed.<sup>62</sup>

## **The early learning sector has a significant capacity issue**

62. As indicated earlier, a significant proportion of parents and whānau are discouraged from enrolling their disabled child in ECE and schools, with some being asked to keep their child home during specific activities or times. Over a third of tamariki whaikaha Māori whānau and half of Pacific Island disabled children's parents reported being discouraged from enrolling their

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<sup>60</sup> Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2008). Teacher professional learning and development (Vol. 18). International Academy of Education.

Education Review Office, (2022). Education for disabled learners in schools: examples of good practice for teachers. Education Evaluation Centre. <https://Evidence.Ero.Govt.nz/Media/Raqbdcs0/Education-For-Disabled-Learners-In-Schools-Examples-Of-Good-Practice-For-Teachers.pdf>

Noddings, N. (2001). The caring teacher. Handbook of research on teaching, 4, 99-105.

<sup>61</sup> Rutherford, G. (2023). Teacher education: doing justice to UNCRPD Article 24? International Journal of Inclusive Education, 27(10), 1133-1147.

Ainscow, M. (2024). *Developing inclusive schools: pathways to success*. Taylor & Francis.

<sup>62</sup> Ministry of Education, (2025). Te puna tautoko i te ako Learning support <https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/schools-year-0-13/learning-support>

child in English medium ECE settings. However, if children find a welcoming service, they feel safe and accepted.<sup>63</sup>

63. The Ministry of Education provides targeted support for disabled children through the Early Intervention Service, which works consultatively with whānau and kaiāko to develop plans for children's participation and learning.<sup>64</sup> The need for specialist support exceeds availability, resulting in very lengthy wait lists, particularly for input from a speech language therapist.

64. Proposed regulatory changes would mean that early childhood centres could reduce the proportion of qualified teachers to other staff. In 2022, a research report showed more than a third of early childhood educators were not confident to include disabled children in centre outings.<sup>65</sup> Fewer skilled staff in centres risks impacting the learning and participation of disabled children and their access to early intervention support. If ECE staff are not skilled in recognising the need for additional learning support, they may miss

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<sup>63</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood Education, <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/gpaicxcd/a-great-start-education-for-disabled-children-in-early-childhood-education.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Ministry of Education. (2025). <https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/early-learning/learning-support/learning-support-early-years>

<sup>65</sup> ERO (2022) Thriving at School. Education for Disabled Learners in Schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

identifying and seeking support for a child who would benefit from specialist input.

## **The schooling sector has large capability gaps in teaching disabled children**

65. Some families are opting to keep their child in ECE until their sixth year to better secure support before starting school, as some schools and families are hesitant to begin without guaranteed support. Some schools refuse enrolment of disabled children without ORS funding in place.<sup>66</sup> This enrolment restriction is unlawful.
66. Most disabled children (81%) report having teachers who are kind, helpful and care about them. However, many disabled children are discouraged from enrolling or taking part in wider school activities.<sup>67</sup> Only 50% of the participating parents and whānau felt their child was progressing well.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Missing Out: Why Aren't Our Children Going to School? <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/missing-out-why-aren-t-our-children-going-to-school>

<sup>67</sup> ERO (2022) Thriving at School. Education for Disabled Learners in Schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

ERO (2022) data was gathered from 2301 survey responses, in-depth interviews (approx. 50), site visits and observations of teaching and learning.

<sup>68</sup> ERO (2022) Thriving at School. Education for Disabled Learners in Schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

67. Many disabled children spend excessive time with teacher aides.<sup>69</sup> This means children who require the most skilled teaching are taught by those with the least formal training.<sup>70</sup>

68. Survey data from participants in the same study identifies significant gaps in educator capability.<sup>71</sup>

- Secondary school teachers reported fewer opportunities to improve their skills in teaching disabled learners than primary teachers.
- A third (34 percent) of teachers thought that expectations for inclusion of disabled learners are unclear and that there are no guidelines<sup>73</sup> 73% of teachers and 69% of Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) had not undertaken additional specialised study focused on teaching disabled learners.<sup>72</sup>
- 31% of teacher's aides indicated that previous work experience and/or qualifications in the education

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<sup>69</sup> Rutherford, G. (2011). "Doing Right By": Teacher Aides, Students with Disabilities, and Relational Social Justice. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81(1), 95-119.

<http://ereserve.library.utah.edu/Annual/ELP/7480/Parker/doing.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> Rutherford, G. J. (2012). In, out or somewhere in between? Disabled students' and teacher aides' experiences of school. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(8), 757-774.

Rutherford, G. (2024). 'He's actually learning': an Appreciative Inquiry story of a student with complex learning characteristics. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 54(1), 89-105.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> ERO (2022) Thriving at School. Education for Disabled Learners in Schools.

<https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

sector have prepared them well to work as teacher aides.

- 64% of teachers reported low confidence in working in a culturally responsive way with Māori disabled children
- 65% of teachers reported low confidence in supporting disabled children to manage their behaviour.
- 64% of teachers reported low confidence in using assistive technology to support children
- 54% of teachers reported low confidence in contributing to IEPs or individual learning goal meetings
- more than half of teachers lack confidence in teaching disabled children
- 52% of principals were satisfied or very satisfied with access to professional learning and resources for teaching disabled children and 19% were dissatisfied.
- 45% of teachers are confident to report on disabled children's progress and achievement
- 43% of principals said their school leadership does not have a full understanding of their legal

obligations and therefore do not have robust policies in place to support disabled children.<sup>73</sup>

**Schools with high numbers of Māori children, with Māori leadership and in poorer parts of New Zealand were described as more inclusive.**

69. The ERO 2022 report found schools in low decile regions were more inclusive and welcoming of disabled children and their families than some schools in more affluent areas.<sup>74</sup> It reported strong inclusive leadership and superior communication skills with whānau from Māori principals, which translated to positive schooling experiences for tangata whaikaha Māori and their whānau.

We chose a low decile, primarily Māori whānau approach at this school because the teachers have the heart for the kids ... Not all about hand-outs. About doing with what they have, heart for the community.

(parent, p.77)<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Thriving at school? Education for disabled learners in schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

70. However, some tangata whaikaha Māori still experience exclusion and poor outcomes, with 21% of families reporting feeling discouraged from enrolling their child at a local school, and 24% being asked to keep their child at home.<sup>76</sup>

Beginning teachers don't always feel equipped to teach disabled children.

71. An ERO 2024 report 49% of new teachers and 60% of principles reported that the new teachers were prepared when starting their first term of teaching.<sup>77</sup> Areas that new teachers felt least capable in include many that are of particular relevance to disabled children, including managing behaviour, working with parents, adapting teaching and implementing assessment.

72. The Teaching Council introduced new requirements for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in 2019.<sup>78</sup> These require ITE providers to build the capability of new teachers to meet the needs of disabled children.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Education Review Office, (2024). Ready, set, teach: How prepared and supported are new teachers? <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/s4hh1mq0/ready-set-teach-how-well-prepared-and-supported-are-new-teachers-report.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> Teaching Council of Aotearoa, (2019). ITE Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review Requirements. <https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/ITE/ITE-Programme-Approval-Monitoring-and-Review-Requirements.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> Teaching Council of Aotearoa (2019) Creating an equitable future-focused Initial Teacher Education (ITE) system. <https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/ITE/ITE-Programme-Approval-Monitoring-and-Review-Requirements.pdf>

73. New teachers undergo a two-year Induction and Mentoring Programme, which helps build confidence, particularly in managing behaviour and engaging with parents. Despite this, 13% still feel unprepared after two years.<sup>80</sup>

### **Supports for quality teaching practice are available but not consistently used**

74. The Ministry of Education offers a wide range of resources to support inclusive education practices for educators and for whānau, such as guidance on teaching children with dyspraxia, or children with an acquired brain injury. These very useful resources are available online.<sup>81</sup>

75. Another example is He Pikorua, the practice framework to support inclusive education within the Learning Support Delivery Model, using a flexible and culturally responsive approach in a partnership with children, educators and whānau.<sup>82</sup> This framework supports teachers to implement what is learned in the Inclusive Education Guides. It is also used to underpin additional

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<sup>80</sup> Education Review Office (2024) Ready, Set, Teach: How prepared and supported are new teachers? <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/s4hh1mq0/ready-set-teach-how-well-prepared-and-supported-are-new-teachers-report.pdf>

<sup>81</sup> Ministry of Education, (2025). Tāhūrangi – New Zealand Curriculum Diversity in the Classroom. <https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/new-zealand-curriculum-online/teaching-support/diversity-in-the-classroom/5637144676.c>

<sup>82</sup> Ministry of Education, (2024). He Pikorua Our Practice Framework. <https://hepikorua.education.govt.nz/>

curriculum supports (e.g. to support progress in literacy and maths) and the integration of flexible supports in day-to-day teaching and learning.

76. It is also noteworthy that there is no supporting material for disabled teachers on either the Ministry of Education or the Teaching Council websites.

77. There is a wide range of resources available to support teacher pedagogy related to inclusive education, which are discussed later in this paper.

### **The tertiary sector is developing system capability to support disabled students.**

78. The TEC collects data on the services and supports provided to disabled young people in tertiary education. In 2024, the TEC required all TEOs receiving over \$5 million in funding to create, implement and report on a Disability Action Plan (DAP) and supported the development of a toolkit, Kia Ōrite<sup>83</sup> and a New Zealand Code of Practice (2021-22) to support TEOs to develop and implement DAPs.<sup>84</sup>

79. The proposals to disestablish Te Pūkenga and reorganise the Vocational Education and Training

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<sup>83</sup> Tertiary Education Commission, (2022). Kia Ōrite Toolkit – achieving equity for disabled learners <https://www.tec.govt.nz/oritetanga-learner-success/new-oritetanga-tertiary-success-for-everyone/resources-to-help-support-your-learners/disability-action-plans/kia-orite-toolkit-achieving-equity-for-disabled-learners>

<sup>84</sup> Achieve (2022). NZ Code of Practice 2021-22 <https://www.achieve.org.nz/kia-orite-toolkit/nz-code-of-practice-2021-22/>

system could have an impact on attendance and achievement of disabled learners, as there is discussion about reallocation of funding used to support disabled students.<sup>85</sup> Lack of disability resource could limit participation and learning opportunities for disabled students.

### **Issue 3: Learning support and reasonable accommodations are necessary to support belonging and learning.**

**The lack of available appropriate specialist resources to support disabled children has a negative effect on outcomes.**

80. Schools are identifying increasingly more children requiring specialist support, but long waitlists and strict eligibility criteria create barriers to learning. Speech language therapy input is critical for some children to communicate and demonstrate their capability.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ministry of Education, (2024), Redesign of the vocational education and training system <https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-08/VET-Consultation-document-as-at-31-July-2024.pdf?VersionId=JebKGfHu4N.Cgcp5s0wWLFkKi95dwFFe> Note on the proposal to reallocate funding used to support disabled students, April 2026: Disabled learners and learners with low prior achievement continue to be a category in the Learner Component fund, and funding has not been reduced for this group.

<sup>86</sup> Timpe, E. M., Kent-Walsh, J., Binger, C., Hahs-Vaughn, D., Harrington, N., & Schwartz, J. B. (2021). Using the ImPAACT program with preschoolers with Down syndrome: a hybrid service-delivery model. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 37(2), 113-128. [Using-the-ImPAACT-program-with-preschoolers-with-Down-syndrome-a-hybrid-service-delivery-model.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354111111_Using-the-ImPAACT-program-with-preschoolers-with-Down-syndrome-a-hybrid-service-delivery-model)

Equitable access to specialists and support for those living rurally is particularly problematic. Access to support is even more challenging for Māori and Pacific children where available supports may be culturally disconnected. Pacific Island children are more likely to have their learning support needs identified after starting school. The importance of teachers connecting with family and building relationships to understand what the family hope for their child is critical to effectively supporting Pacific Island children's success in education.

"There are so many vacancies in our rural region that our children don't have access ... to a MoE physio or OT [occupational therapist]. There is not enough resourcing of Speech Language Therapists ... I feel for our families who feel very isolated by the lack of support services around them. They look to schools because lots of time no one else is visible ... the vacancies limit everything."

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Maksimović, S., Marisavljević, M., Stanojević, N., Ćirović, M., Punišić, S., Adamović, T., ... & Subotić, M. (2023). Importance of early intervention in reducing autistic symptoms and speech-language deficits in children with autism spectrum disorder. *Children*, 10(1), 122.  
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2767186950?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>

(School Special Education Needs Coordinator  
p.127)<sup>87</sup>

81. While training more specialists is part of the solution, many new graduates leave for overseas roles due to heavy workloads and low pay in New Zealand.<sup>88</sup> In response to staffing shortages, some New Zealand tertiary providers are shifting on-site training programmes to distance learning to accommodate students who are not able to relocate for study.<sup>89</sup>

**The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme can support inclusion, but is a sought after, difficult to secure and highly contested resource package.**

82. The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) provides ongoing specialist support for children with the highest needs until their 21st year while they are enrolled in school. As of 1 July 2024, there were 11,510 children receiving ORS funding. These children represented

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<sup>87</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Thriving at school? Education for disabled learners in schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

<sup>88</sup> Wylie, C. (2022). Highest Needs Review: What matters to stakeholders, NZCER. <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fweb-assets.education.govt.nz%2Fs3fs-public%2F2024-10%2FHighest-Needs-Review-What-matters-to-stakeholders-NZCER.docx%3FVersionId%3DXDs3n5kdEySyfDMYhmkG7tmjNvtEITJa&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

<sup>89</sup> Massey University, Bachelor of Speech and Language Therapy (distance study) <https://www.massey.ac.nz/study/all-qualifications-and-degrees/bachelor-of-speech-and-language-therapy-with-honours-UHSPL/>

1.4% of the total schooling population. Boys made up 69% of children receiving ORS funding. There were 8,743 children (76%) funded at High Need and 2,767 children (24%) funded at Very High Need.<sup>90</sup> The service receives approximately \$140 million annually.<sup>91</sup> The application process for ORS funding has been criticized by schools and families since 1996 as difficult and a negative experience.<sup>92</sup> Data from the 2023 Household Disability Survey shows that 9% of disabled people (9000 people) in school education had had an ORS application granted, and 4% (4000 people) had made an application that was not granted.<sup>93</sup> It is not known what percentage had lost an appeal process.

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<sup>90</sup> Ministry of Education, (2024). Education Counts  
<https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/ongoing-resourcing-scheme>

<sup>91</sup> Office of the Auditor-General, (2025), About the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes  
<https://oag.parliament.nz/2009/special-education/appendix1.htm#:~:text=How%20much%20funding%20is%20involved,funding%20to%20support%20more%20students>.

<sup>92</sup> Brown, C. (2014). Section 10 Appeals: A Safety Net or a Holey Promise? Parents Reflect on the Appeal Process. Tales from School Learning Disability and State Education after Administrative Reform. R. Wills, M. Morton, M. MacLean, M. Stephenson and R. Slee. Rotterdam, Sense Publishers: 83-90.

Macfarlane, A., et al. (2012). Inclusive education and Māori communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Teaching in Inclusive School Communities. S. Carrington and J. Macarthur. Milton, Queensland, John Wiley and Sons Australia, Limited: 163-185.

Macartney, B. and Morton, M., (2013). "Kinds of participation: teacher and special education perceptions and practices of 'inclusion' in early childhood and primary school settings." International Journal of Inclusive Education 17(8): 776-792.

Wylie, C. (2022). Highest Needs Review: What matters to stakeholders, NZCER  
<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fweb-assets.education.govt.nz%2Fs3fs-public%2F2024-10%2FHighest-Needs-Review-What-matters-to-stakeholders-NZCER.docx%3FVersionId%3DXDs3n5kdEySyfDMYhmkG7tmjNvtEITJa&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

<sup>93</sup> Stats New Zealand, (2025). Household disability survey 2023.  
<https://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/household-disability-survey-2023-findings-definitions-and-design-summary/>

83. Twenty-seven specialist day schools<sup>94</sup> across New Zealand serve disabled children with ORS funding.<sup>95</sup> These schools exist largely because of unmet needs in regular schools, or family beliefs that a regular community school cannot meet the needs of their child. Some day specialist schools run satellite classes where a class from the day special school co-locates with a regular school. Some day specialist schools operate outreach services, supporting inclusion of children with ORS funding in community schools.
84. Vote Education funds the dual system of specialist schools and regular schools for disabled children. This investment in a dual system can be seen as contributing to the resourcing and capability challenges facing Learning Support. It is not cost effective to fund both schooling choices.<sup>96</sup>

## **Residential Specialist Schools do not provide inclusive education.**

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<sup>94</sup> Ministry of Education, (2023). Specialist Schools. <https://www.education.govt.nz/parents-and-caregivers/schools-year-0-13/learning-support/specialist-schools>

Special Education Principals Association New Zealand. <https://www.sepanz.org.nz/>

Education Review Office, (2024). Built in, not bolted on - Evaluation of education at specialist day schools <https://ero.govt.nz/news/ero-releases-new-report-on-specialist-day-schools>

<sup>95</sup> Ministry of Education, (2023). Specialist schools <https://www.education.govt.nz/parents-and-caregivers/schools-year-0-13/learning-support/specialist-schools>

<sup>96</sup> IHC, (2024), \$90 million investment for specialist schools only supports 0.6 percent disabled learners <https://www.ihc.org.nz/news/90-million-investment-for-specialist-schools-only-supports-0-6-percent-disabled-learners>

85. New Zealand's three remaining residential specialist schools (RSS) are the most expensive learning support intervention on a per-child basis.<sup>97</sup> There are serious concerns about the safety and well-being of children, a lack of focus on educational outcomes, and the long-term impact for children of being disconnected from family and whānau. Māori children are disproportionately represented in these schools. RSS have the highest national rates of physical restraint against children.<sup>98</sup> These concerns have been raised by the community and in reports over several years from the Education Review Office, IHC, the Committee on the UNCRPD and the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCOI) on Abuse in State and Faith-Based Care.
86. Children who attend RSS are not children with the highest levels of need. The children usually come from a local school, and it is intended that they return there after time in RSS. Evidence shows supporting children locally is more effective and enables greater numbers of disabled children to receive resources and support.
87. RSS rolls have dropped significantly in the last 15 years as local interventions have become increasingly

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<sup>97</sup> RSS rolls fluctuate weekly, and currently hover around 50% capacity

<sup>98</sup> IHC, (2022). Physical restraint in Residential Specialist Schools.

<https://www.ihc.org.nz/publications/physical-restraint-in-residential-specialist-schools>

available. The RSSs are fully funded for 84 children in total but are usually well under 50% capacity.

88. International research shows RSS are outdated and ineffective.<sup>99</sup> A study found 72% of RSS applications cited family respite needs as a priority rationale for enrolment.<sup>100</sup> Respite care, while important and needed is a service outside the Ministry of Education's remit.
89. The UNCRPD committee recommended a closure plan for these institutions, emphasizing the need for adequate support for disabled children to return to their families and access inclusive education.<sup>101</sup> This is expanded in Appendix 1. The RCOI (2024) also recommended the RSSs be closed.<sup>102</sup> The RCOI said RSS by their nature are institutions and evidence shows they continue to harm children, with lifelong consequences.<sup>103</sup> The Disabled Persons Organisation Coalition has also publicly expressed concern about inequity and risk in these schools. The Ministry of

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<sup>99</sup> Jain, N., Morton, M., & Webber, M. (2022). International literature review on residential specialist schools for learning and behaviour. (p.32) <https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/our-work/information-releases/responses-to-Official-Information-Act-requests/1284544-Appendix-A.pdf>

<sup>100</sup> Morton, M., Cliffe-Tautari, T., Guerin, A. & Skelling, J. (2023). Residential Specialist Schools Pathway Evaluation Report, Education Counts. <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/learning-support/residential-specialist-schools-pathway-evaluation-report>

<sup>101</sup> UNCRPD 2022 recommendations  
<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g22/502/91/pdf/g2250291.pdf>

<sup>102</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry, (2024). Abuse in Care. Summary of key findings.  
<https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia/preliminaries/summary-of-key-findings>

<sup>103</sup> Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry, (2024). Whanaketia – Through pain and trauma, from darkness to light <https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia>

Education is preparing advice to the Minister of Education responding to these UNCRPD recommendations.

90. RSS have been under consecutive review since the 1980s, and declining in number with the move to inclusive, mainstream schooling and the introduction of intensive wrap-around supports in schools. The most recent RSS to close was Waimokoia in 2010, with its funding redirected to Te Kahu Tōi, the Ministry of Education's Intensive Wraparound Service.<sup>104</sup>

### **The Ministry of Education offers an Intensive Wraparound Service – Te Kahu Tōi – for disabled children with complex needs**

91. Te Kahu Tōi supports children with the most complex needs in their community for up to two years, and uses data to track and enhance individual, regional and national outcomes. Te Kahu Tōi wraps support around the child in school, at home, and in the community to create systemic change and is a very effective service with sustained positive outcomes for children.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ministry of Education, (2024). Te Kahu Tōi Intensive Wraparound Service <https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/schools-year-0-13/learning-support/te-kahu-toi-intensive-wraparound-service>

<sup>105</sup> Lightfoot, L. R., de Terte, I., Ross, K., Etheredge, R., & Gammon, R. (2022). Wraparound: An adaptable, promising intervention to support isolated youth or those at risk of Stress, social support, and the buffering. In *Youth Without Family to Lean On* (pp. 259-277). Routledge.

McNatty, G. (2017). " Becoming the spoke in the wheel": Wraparound and the Theory of Change: an investigation into what promotes changes within Wraparound: a thesis presented in partial fulfilment of

92. Te Kahu Tōi is the next most expensive intervention after RSS. However, it is significantly more cost-effective than RSS. Data from 2023 shows:

- Te Kahu Tōi supported 448 children in local communities.
- RSS were fully funded for 84 children but only 40 were enrolled in schools away from their families.
- Government funding for RSS in 2023 was \$14.96 million.
- Based on the funding for RSS and the actual number of students enrolled, the annual costs per child were \$40,000 for Te Kahu Tōi compared with \$374,000 for RSS.

### **There is inconsistent access and insufficient availability of Learning Support resources to support disabled children at school**

93. Learning Support is currently a complex system. There are many services and supports available from the Ministry of Education to support disabled children's

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the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand (Doctoral dissertation, Massey University).

<https://mro.massey.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/4fcb9adb-42e6-43e4-bb1c-5a6766c66b85/content>

Shailer, J., Gammon, R., & De Terte, I. (2013). Youth with serious mental health disorders: Wraparound as a promising intervention in New Zealand. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 34(3), 186-213.

Shailer, J., Gammon, R., & De Terte, I. (2017). An Investigation of the Fidelity to a Wraparound Process in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 46(2).

learning and participation. Resources to support schools such as the Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour Service (RTLBS), High Complex Needs (HCN), and Intensive Behaviour Services are available, but are short-term, criteria driven and unevenly spread across the country. The lack of access and outcomes data makes it difficult to assess the efficacy of resource investments for these supports.

94. Blind and Low Vision Education Network New Zealand (BLENNZ) and Ko Taku Reo: Deaf Education Services New Zealand both offer programmes for small numbers of children for short-term residential placements. In the case of BLENNZ this is less than one percent of their roll. These placements focus on specific skills around communication and mobility. The sensory schools support large numbers of children throughout their time at school through their nationwide outreach services.

**Issue 4: Data about disabled children's learning and belonging in education would provide evidence to support decision making**

**Quality disaggregated data is needed to improve disabled children's experiences, learning and outcomes in education**

95. Early childhood education centres, schools and tertiary institutions do not currently gather access and outcomes data about learning support in a systematic way that can be used to inform effective resource allocation and system changes for disabled learners.
96. Gathering, analysing, and sharing the right data about children would ensure that all teachers and education services that they interact with have the same information and understand how best to support each person's learning. If this is done well, at a systems level, the data can be used to benchmark and monitor progress over time, identify areas in the system for improvement, target funding allocation and evaluate initiatives.
97. Having data on the number of children in each school requiring learning support beyond what the class teacher can realistically provide, and the outcomes of current resource allocation would enable more targeted budgeting of this resource. Learning Support is the second biggest investment in education after capital costs of school buildings. Around \$1.2 billion is spent each year on learning support in its broadest sense, to support children and young people to access the

curriculum to achieve positive education outcomes.<sup>106</sup> It is worth investing in data and evidence to understand the impact of this investment, and how it could be improved.

The Ministry of Education collects data about every child enrolled in state education.

98. Children get a National Student Number (NSN) when they first enrol with an education provider and it follows them through their education. NSNs are allocated and stored in the National Student Index (NSI). Access to NSI data is controlled so children's privacy and personal information are protected when data is anonymously disaggregated. The system has capacity to hold more data such as learning supports and health needs. The Ministry of Education's work creating a Standardised Learning Support Register intended to capture school information related to disability etc. was stopped as schools and families were not confident in the security and use of information across settings and over time. The systems to safely store data are available; the work with the sector to collect the data is a barrier to progressing this mahi.

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<sup>106</sup> Budget 2024 New Zealand, (2024). Vote Education.  
<https://budget.govt.nz/budget/pdfs/suppestimates/suppest24educ.pdf>

## Data on young disabled children in Early Childhood Education is limited

99. Many ECE centres demonstrate strength in gathering and responding to the voices of young children.<sup>107</sup> However, there is no national data base recording the number of disabled children enrolled in ECE, what support they are receiving and what their learning outcomes are.

100. Only 65% of parents were satisfied with information sharing processes when transitioning their disabled child between ECE services. Transition to the school sector was even more challenging, where data sharing was cited as the biggest barrier.<sup>108</sup>

## Data about disabled children in the schooling system is limited and inconsistent

101. We know that as adults, disabled people have worse outcomes across many education and employment measures, however, there is currently no consistently-applied way to identify disabled children

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<sup>107</sup> Carr, M., & Lee, W. (2019). Learning stories: Pedagogic practices and provocations. In Understanding Pedagogic Documentation in Early Childhood Education (pp. 4-31). Routledge.

The Education Hub, (2020). How to use learning stories in early childhood education assessment <https://theeducationhub.org.nz/how-to-use-learning-stories-in-ece-assessment-2/>

<sup>108</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/a-great-start-education-for-disabled-children-in-early-childhood>

and young people in the education system other than those who receive support through ORS or similar funding streams.<sup>109</sup> Disabled children who do not meet funding eligibility criteria are invisible. The ERO 2022 report states “While robust expectations for disabled learners are set at a high level, disabled learners are not specifically and consistently identified in education data on learning, progress and achievement.”<sup>110</sup>

102. Some data is collected about deaf children by Ko Taku Reo and this data suggests learning targets for deaf children in bilingual units were not achieved.<sup>111</sup> Although outdated, 2015 data suggested most students (70%) were achieving well below curriculum expectations for reading and writing.<sup>112</sup> Data on the achievement outcomes of children supported by Ko Taku Reo in local settings is not collected.

103. Individual Education Plans (IEP) provide an opportunity for the most fundamental level of data gathering, where children’s perspectives are part of their personalised learning plans. However, children

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<sup>109</sup> Ministry of Education (2020) He Whaakaro, The Educational Experiences of Disabled Learners. Retrieved from [He-Whakaaro-the-educational-experiences-of-disabled-learners.pdf](#)

<sup>110</sup> Education Review Office (2022) Thriving at School, p.107. [thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf](#)

<sup>111</sup> Ko Taku Reo – Deaf Education Centre (2023). Charter 2023. [https://www.kotakureo.school.nz/assets/pdfs/CHARTER-2023\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.kotakureo.school.nz/assets/pdfs/CHARTER-2023_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>112</sup> NZSL@School (2015). Te Reo-a-Tohu kei roto i nga kura o Aotearoa Report. Ministry of Education, van Asch and Kelston Deaf Education Centres. <https://www.nzsl.govt.nz/news/nzsl-youth-project-full-report>

rarely attend their IEP meetings, and their voice is seldom included in the planning. Child and family voice should be central to the IEP process.<sup>113</sup>

I hated the IEP meetings when I was at school. The teachers would talk to my Mum, they didn't talk to me, didn't take into account what I wanted to do, unless I spoke up. I didn't say anything. We are taught to just go with what everyone says.

(disabled learner, p.68)<sup>114</sup>

Information about disabled learners in tertiary sector is collected but can be inconsistent and limited

104. The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) collects data from tertiary organisations about the services and supports they provide for disabled learners. They have been collecting this data since 2018, and in 2024 the scope was increased to provide a system-wide view of

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<sup>113</sup> Gladstone, C. (2014). The search for a good life: young people with learning disability and the transition from school. <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/50c85bc9-b051-4eb1-a8f3-92d888ae0c8d/content>

Guerin, A. (2008). It's the small things that count: making sense of working in a partnership to support the inclusion of a child with autism spectrum disorder. <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/0cdf40f1-de63-4cce-bd82-d4e723d0504f/content>

<sup>114</sup> Education Review Office, (2022). Thriving at school? Education for disabled learners in schools. <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/cvqeq54g/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf>

supports. In March 2024, data was collected from 45 tertiary organisations.<sup>115</sup>

105. The TEC notes that it is difficult to compare data gathered by tertiary organisations about the progress of their Disability Action Plans or on the services and supports accessed by disabled learners, as providers collect and categorise data in different ways.<sup>116</sup> Tertiary organisations have reported that the lack of quality data about disabled learners is a key challenge and improving this is a priority.<sup>117</sup>

Better data is needed to understand the compounding effect of disadvantage for Māori and Pacific disabled learners.

106. Tamariki whaikaha Māori continue to be disadvantaged by the impacts of colonisation in system design.<sup>118</sup> Learning Support processes designed for children to fit current structures cannot adequately

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<sup>115</sup> Tertiary Education Commission, (2024). Disabled learners still face barriers in tertiary education, <https://www.tec.govt.nz/news-and-consultations/disabled-learners-still-face-barriers-in-tertiary-education>

<sup>116</sup> TEC (2023). Services and supports for disabled learners in tertiary education. <https://www.tec.govt.nz/assets/Reports/2023-Services-and-Supports-for-Disabled-Learner-report.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> TEC (2023) Disability Action Plans 2023 – A report back to the tertiary education sector. <https://www.tec.govt.nz/assets/Oritetanga/Disability-Action-Plans-2023-Report-back-to-the-sector.pdf>

<sup>118</sup> Hickey, H. (2020). A Personal Reflection on Indigeneity, Colonisation and the CRPD. In: Kakoullis, E.J., Johnson, K. (eds) Recognising Human Rights in Different Cultural Contexts. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0786-1\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0786-1_5)

Jones, B., King, P., Baker, G., Nikora, L., Hickey, H., Perry, M, Pouwhare, R. & Ingham, T. (2024). Karanga rua, karanga maha: Māori with lived experience of disability self-determining their own identities. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 19(1), 45-64. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1177083X.2023.2224422>

respond to beliefs about centrality of family and strengths-based approaches to building capability. There is a disconnect between beliefs about the importance of independence in comparison to the importance of interdependence. Although there is a lack of data, we know that fewer learning supports are applied for, received and are effective for Māori. Te Kahu Tōi evidence shows that when Māori children help determine their goals and how best to achieve them with family school and community, goals are achieved, and outcomes are sustained.<sup>119</sup>

107. New Zealand's education system could better respond to the intersectionality of disability with other factors such as ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background. Having a disability can have a multiplying effect on the educational differences between demographic groups. Evidence has shown that an understanding of cross-sectional data leads to better coordinated supports and is more cost effective.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Macfarlane, A., Macfarlane, S., & Gillon, G. (2014). Inclusion, disability and culture: The nexus of potential and opportunity for policy development. In *Tales from school: Learning disability and state education after administrative reform* (pp. 255-270). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

<sup>120</sup> House of Lords' Select Committee on Public Services. Making every adult matter – written evidence (PSR0087).  
<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/8227/pdf/#:~:text=People%20facing%20multiple%20disadvantage%20experience,problems%20and%20lead%20fulfilling%20lives>

There are some known risks and issues associated with data collection.

108. Increased data collection processes and analysis for disability could require clear labels and definitions, which might be problematic for individuals who do not wish to be labelled or placed in a category that doesn't reflect their specific context. This could also lead to higher demand for diagnoses and assessments, potentially shifting services to become more diagnosis-dependent. Additionally, ensuring data privacy, sovereignty, and learner safety must be carefully planned, with ongoing training and best practices shared across sectors.

**Work is underway to address issues contributing to poor education outcomes among disabled children**  
**Government priorities and targets aim to improve the experience and outcomes of children, including disabled children**

109. The Government announced six education priorities to raise education standards.<sup>121</sup> Priority 5 is

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<sup>121</sup> Education priorities focused on lifting achievement, (2024), <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/education-priorities-focused-lifting-achievement>

about targeting effective support interventions for children with additional needs.

110. The other five priorities also have an important role in strengthening learning for disabled children. A clearer curriculum (Priority 1), better approach to literacy and numeracy (Priority 2), and smarter assessment and reporting (Priority 3) connect to children's learning experiences. Greater use of data (Priority 6) is critical to understanding outcomes of learning support interventions and resources. Improved teacher training (Priority 4) and knowledge of inclusive education and curriculum adaptation are essential components of effective teaching and learning for disabled children.

Government Target Six is to increase children's attendance at school

111. Additionally, nine Government targets focus the public sector on achieving improved results in health, education, law and order, work, housing and the environment.<sup>122</sup> Target Six is to increase attendance at school.

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<sup>122</sup> [Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet \(DPMC\)](https://www.dPMC.govt.nz/publications/government-targets-quarterly-reports-december-2024) (2024) Government Targets Quarterly reports. <https://www.dPMC.govt.nz/publications/government-targets-quarterly-reports-december-2024>

112. The target is set at 80% of children to be present for more than 90% of the term. In 2024 the focus to increase attendance was on:

- weekly publishing of attendance data
- communications campaign to improve awareness of the importance of students attending school from Term 2 2024
- updating public health guidance to help schools and parents to decide if a student is well enough to attend school
- clarifying attendance expectations to school boards.

113. Attendance is improving but not at the rate expected. The efficacy of the attendance action plan stage 1 is not known. To increase attendance towards the target, stage 2 initiatives are underway. Current actions being progressed include:

- mandatory daily attendance reporting (Term 1, 2025)
- internal review of existing supports and services
- schools required to have an attendance management plan
- consistent processes for Ministry of Education prosecution processes for children with very poor attendance

- ongoing social media activity to shift attitudes re-attendance.

Missing from these initiatives is the importance of reminding school principals and boards of trustees that disabled children are entitled to attend school every hour the school is open for instruction. As noted earlier, the practice of limiting disabled children's attendance at school is unlawful.<sup>123</sup> Collecting attendance data across all the school day for every child and disaggregating it to shine a light on disabled children's attendance will quantify the scale of this problem.

Target Seven is more students at expected curriculum levels

114. Target Seven is set at '80% of year eight children at or above the expected curriculum level for their age in reading, writing and maths by December 2030'.<sup>124</sup>

The work to meet this target is visible on the online Ministry of Education curriculum hub Tāhūrangi.<sup>125</sup>

There is an opportunity to ensure all disabled children have learning programmes and assessments that

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<sup>123</sup> New Zealand Government, The Education and Training Act, (2020). <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2020/0038/150.0/LMS170676.html>

<sup>124</sup> Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, (2024). Target 7 More students at expected curriculum levels. <https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2024-12/gt-factsheet-target-7-sep24.pdf>

<sup>125</sup> Ministry of Education, (2024). Tāhūrangi (online curriculum hub). <https://tahurangi.education.govt.nz/>

recognise their progress and achievement in literacy and numeracy goals in the Curriculum. This means ensuring teachers have access to professional development and support to grow their capability and confidence to teach disabled children in their classes.

The Government priorities and targets are an opportunity to improve education outcomes for disabled learners

115. The Government's education priorities emphasis on the English and maths curriculum, including assessment and reporting, and greater use of data are areas where disabled children need to be visible. The targets provide opportunities to develop and strengthen resources to build inclusive education practice knowledge.

116. Work towards the priorities and targets is outlined below.

### **Education agencies have work planned or underway towards meeting the Government priorities and targets**

Ministry of Education Curriculum and assessment changes

117. Since June 2024, the Ministry of Education has focused on a curriculum refresh of English and

maths.<sup>126</sup> Information about change to the national curriculum does not comment on children who require support to access and achieve in the New Zealand Curriculum.<sup>127</sup> As of term 1 this year, schools and kura must teach the updated English and Te Reo Rangatira curriculum for Years 0 to 6, and maths and pāngarau for Years 0 to 8. This includes all disabled children, whose learning outcomes must be visible as schools report progress.

## Teaching Council – Inclusion framework

118. The Teaching Council has created an inclusion competency framework. Initially intended to be focused on teaching to include disabled children, the framework is now more generally about inclusion. It is a framework for teachers to critically reflect on their beliefs and assumptions. It is anticipated that this framework will be piloted in schools from April 2025.

The Ministry of Education is planning more focused data collection

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<sup>126</sup> Ministry of Education, (2024). New Zealand Curriculum Refresh.  
<https://this.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/new-zealand-curriculum-online/new-zealand-curriculum/new-zealand-curriculum-refresh/5637144667.c#:~:text=New%20Zealand%20Curriculum%20Refresh,the%20fully%20refreshed%20national%20curriculum>

<sup>127</sup> Ministry of Education, (2024). The National Curriculum Our Story.  
<https://tahurangi.education.govt.nz/our-story>

119. The Government's sixth priority for education on greater use of data affirms the importance of evidence as a driver of improved outcomes for children. The Ministry of Disabled People is particularly interested to know more about disabled children in education. Understanding access to and outcomes from learning support interventions enables more targeted use of resources, directs budget bids, and focuses areas for development.
120. Connected Ako: Digital and Data for Learning is a Ministry of Education 10-year strategy (2023 – 2033) to guide the digital and data direction of New Zealand Government education agencies.<sup>128</sup> It draws from the Government's Digital Strategy for Aotearoa to explore the opportunities and challenges for the education sector. It is led by the Ministry of Education, New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and will form a plan of action based on the strategy. The strategy is high level and does not explicitly refer to disabled children or disabled teachers.

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<sup>128</sup> Ministry of Education, (2023). Connected Ako: Digital and Data for Learning. <https://www.education.govt.nz/news/connected-ako-digital-and-data-learning>

System level Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) resources to support the success of disabled learners in tertiary education

121. There is considerable work happening in this space. The TEC Disability Action Plan (DAP), pending release, is a strategy to improve outcomes for disabled and neurodiverse learners through education.<sup>129</sup> Tahatū Career Navigator is a new accessible career planning website being developed for student use by the Tertiary Education Commission and is due for completion late 2025.<sup>130</sup>

122. Tertiary institutions develop their own processes to support inclusive education and equity. As an example, University of Auckland has a position for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Experience Lead with a focus on removing institutional barriers.<sup>131</sup>

## **Other government agencies can have a role supporting better education outcomes for disabled learners**

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<sup>129</sup> Tertiary Education Commission, (2024). Disability Action Plans. <https://www.tec.govt.nz/oritetanga-learner-success/new-oritetanga-tertiary-success-for-everyone/resources-to-help-support-your-learners/disability-action-plans>

<sup>130</sup> Tahatū Career Navigator. <https://www.tec.govt.nz/focus/our-focus/national-careers-system-strategy/tahatu-career-navigator/tahatu-career-navigator-faqs#:~:text=Tahat%C5%AB%20Career%20Navigator%20is%20the%20next%20generation%20of%20the%20careers,the%20National%20Careers%20System%20Strategy>

<sup>131</sup> TEC example of equity. <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about-us/about-the-university/equity-at-the-university/equity-information-for-staff/staff-with-disabilities-and-impairments/staff-disabilities-impairments.html>

## Oranga Tamariki Gateway

123. It is estimated that between 47% to 87% of children placed in state care are disabled. Challenges around diagnosis and definition mean definitive statistical data is not available.<sup>132</sup> Children's education is frequently disturbed when a care placement is made. Gateway is a programme with input from both health and education, that can support children at risk of entering or exiting state care. Education has a particular role in the assessment of the children identified.<sup>133</sup> This programme is being reviewed, including consideration of funding to progress new Gateway processes.

## **Addressing the issues: Opportunities for change to support disabled children to thrive in the education system**

124. In April 2024, the Minister of Education outlined her aspiration for a world-leading education system that sets children up for success, where every child is

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<sup>132</sup> Oranga Tamariki, (2023) Primary healthcare needs of disabled children in care. <https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/about-us/research/our-research/primary-healthcare-needs-of-disabled-children-in-care/>

<sup>133</sup> Ministry of Education. (2015). Gateway Assessments Supporting Information for Education Professionals, Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour. <file:///C:/Users/amcil003/Downloads/Gateway%20Guide%20for%20Education%20Professionals.pdf>

inspired and engaged in their learning so they can achieve to the best of their ability.

125. The Minister has stated a focus on strengthening educational outcomes and achievement for tamariki Māori.<sup>134</sup> Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Education and Training Act 2020 commit to giving all learners a high-quality, equitable, culturally responsive and seamless inclusive education.

126. There are education action plans for Māori children and for Pacific Island children.<sup>135</sup> These plans make clear the principles and values that are culturally responsive and include ways of thinking about disability.

127. Some of the resources and supports available for disabled children are based on models that are not culturally responsive. Cultural disconnects and alternative ways of supporting children and their families can be considered as new approaches are developed as part of priority 5 in the Government plan to lift achievement for all children.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> New Zealand Government, (2024). Māori Education Action Plan.  
<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2024-12/M%C4%81ori%20Education%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

<sup>135</sup> Ministry of Education, (2023). Action Plan for 2020-2023, 2023 Refresh.  
[https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fweb-assets.education.govt.nz%2Fs3fs-public%2F2024-04%2F2023-Action-Plan-for-Pacific-Education-Full-APPE-Accessible-format.docx%3FVersionId%3D8kWU7WNs7ZKu\\_0IuGOyCxq4VSqsGIj6q&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fweb-assets.education.govt.nz%2Fs3fs-public%2F2024-04%2F2023-Action-Plan-for-Pacific-Education-Full-APPE-Accessible-format.docx%3FVersionId%3D8kWU7WNs7ZKu_0IuGOyCxq4VSqsGIj6q&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)

<sup>136</sup> New Zealand Government, (2024). Education priorities focused on lifting achievement.  
<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/education-priorities-focused-lifting-achievement>

128. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights the need for continuous and evolving progress towards inclusive education.<sup>137</sup>
129. Internationally, there is no best practice model of inclusive education that could be directly applied to the New Zealand context. However, New Zealand can learn from international examples and work collaboratively to develop a culturally responsive, systems-level approach that supports disabled tamariki as successful learners in schools and early childhood centres.

### **Issue 1: Opportunities to improve disabled children's enrolment and attendance in education**

130. Ensuring full participation and attendance of disabled children in education requires a comprehensive approach. If schools report the attendance of every child, adapting enrolment codes and criteria to accurately reflect their presence throughout the entire school day disaggregated for disabled children, the system would enable disabled children's attendance to be understood and accountability actions to be put in place. This would need to take into consideration the

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<sup>137</sup> United Nations, (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24, Education. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Article 24 Education. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/article-24-education>

specific needs of those enrolled in Te Kura. There is also an opportunity to raise awareness across the education sector to reinforcing the legal right of all disabled children to attend state schools for all hours the school is open for learning.<sup>138</sup>

131. There is an opportunity to ensure that school buildings, classrooms, and equipment are fully accessible for all students. Equally important is tackling attitudinal barriers by promoting successful inclusive practices. Sharing examples through easily navigable platforms provides professional development that integrates inclusive theory with effective strategies. Creating spaces for disabled children to share their experiences will enhance teaching pedagogy and foster a more inclusive education system.

## **Issue 2: Helping educators to adapt and deliver a more accessible Curriculum to support disabled children's learning**

132. The Curriculum change work provides multiple opportunities to support teachers to teach all children in their classes. Professional development in curriculum
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should include how to embed adaptation of resources and processes to teach disabled children, supported by a range of practice examples. This could include planning, teaching, and assessment examples across the learning areas. This would be particularly helpful for teachers who may have a significant range of learning levels in their class.

133. There are opportunities within the structured literacy approach to ensure disabled children have access to literacy goals. This means ensuring teachers have access to evidence-based literacy approaches for children for whom structured literacy may not be accessible, such as profoundly deaf children and children with sensory processing disorders who are visual learners.

134. Refreshing and raising teacher understanding in the areas of peer tutoring<sup>139</sup> and tuakana teina as well as providing professional development, and Initial Teacher Education around universal design for learning principles would strengthen teacher pedagogy.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Johnson, K. L. (2016). Benefits of peer tutoring students with disabilities in a secondary school setting. Brigham Young University.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7235&context=etd>

Topping, K., Duran, D., & Van Keer, H. (2015). Using peer tutoring to improve reading skills: a practical guide for teachers. Routledge.

<sup>140</sup> Smith, G. (2017). Tuakana-teina What is it? 4 Different Ways You Can Use It Positively in Education in New Zealand. <https://thisisgraeme.me/2017/03/06/approaches-what-is-tuakana-teina/>

135. Professional development examples that show teacher's aides supporting teachers to enact curriculum in their classrooms so children learn together would be of benefit as well as sharing evidence-based assessment that makes visible the learning progress of children who may work for a considerable time at the lower levels of the curriculum. Overall, there is an opportunity to socialise clear expectations that all disabled children belong in their local school community, can learn and can be successful in the Curricula.
136. Improving education experiences and outcomes for disabled children is connected to teacher capability and confidence. Building systemic capability and capacity by equipping teachers and leaders with the knowledge, skills, and understanding; and having access to evidence-based resources is a priority action.
137. Providing professional development for teachers and school leaders is important and could include:
- effective and equitable use of teacher aides (potentially enhance current TA learning modules on the Ministry of Education website)
  - whole school development based on the understanding educators share responsibility for all children

- build capability to plan for and respond to learner variability, including using principles of universal design
- compulsory micro credentials for those in learning support leadership roles to build educator capability to combine theory and practice.

138. There are opportunities for resource development to support professional development for teachers, and increase knowledge for parents, so that partnering will be more effective.

139. Making available inclusive education resources including examples of planning, assessment, and IEPs, particularly showing the intersection of culture and disability for tamariki whaikaha Māori and Pacific Island disabled children, is critical. To facilitate this there is an opportunity to create a single education site for inclusive education disability related information for parents and educators. The site could contain information and administrative forms, and link to examples of curriculum adaptation including plans and assessment examples on Tāhūrangi.

140. To further deepen the home-school partnership there is an opportunity to develop information sharing processes that enable parental knowledge and previous supports to inform teaching and programme planning.

141. There are opportunities to incentivise teachers and schools to build capability. For instance, micro-credentials and post graduate qualifications could be incentivised with remuneration benefits or status. Inclusive education could be mandatory content in all Initial Teacher Education programmes that is closely monitored with graduate outcomes measured. Inclusive practice could also become a requirement of ongoing teacher registration.
142. There are other ways that the current systems can be leveraged to build school wide capability. For example, specialist trained ORS funded teachers could release and support the classroom teacher to teach the disabled child within the in the 0.1 or 0.2 FTE ORS teacher hours. This has the advantage of already developed relationships being deepened, seamless programme provision, and building of the school's overall capability in meeting the needs of disabled children.

### **Issue 3: Providing timely, responsive learning support and reasonable accommodations**

143. Working alongside disability communities to bring their voices and perspectives on inclusive education

together is imperative to growing a sustainable system. Co-constructing ways forward that begin with and are embedded in te ao Māori means belonging or inclusion (mana whenua) is at the heart of all system design.

144. There is an opportunity to ensure that the communication capability of every disabled child is enabled, shared and understood. This is critical to enacting human rights and would also allow space for intersectionality, culture and the voice of disabled children. Asking disabled children what they think would best help them to feel happy, could be used to inform teaching and learning processes. Particularly important is partnering with whānau and including the voices of all children in their IEP process.
145. There is opportunity to enhance some current practices to make them widely accessible, for instance prioritising resource to enhance NZSL use in all state schools that teach deaf children and young people, requiring all ECE centres, schools and tertiary institutes to include accessibility strategies and plans in Te Whakangārahu Ngātahi – Planning Together and adding features to Modern Learning Environments that allow teachers to adapt the space to the needs of their class.
146. Transition supports between all education settings and into employment could be strengthened if the RTL

service was extended to include ECE, Primary and all Secondary years.

147. Enacting the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Abuse in State Care (2024) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2022) in relation to RSS provision in New Zealand could provide more children access to better education options that support them to remain at home and connected to their community.
148. It would be helpful to resurface discussions about a complaints process/dispute resolution where whānau and families can be supported to resolve grievances with schools in relation to their disabled child.
149. Creating and sharing a record of reasonable accommodations required for each disabled child with tracking of the implementation and outcomes would help with efficiency and fit for purpose solutions that include the voices of children.

#### **Issue 4 – Improving and using data about disabled children’s education to support decision-making**

150. We need systemwide data about disabled children’s learning and belonging in education. The data would enable more targeted and equitable use of

resources and accountability for the \$1.2 billion spent annually on learning support and alternative education.

151. Data would assist in understanding:

- the number of children in ECE and the state schooling system who require sustained additional support beyond what a classroom teacher can provide as part of daily teaching practice. This will indicate the number of children with learning support needs at any given point in time
- learning outcomes for disabled children based on curriculum progress e.g. phonics checks, running records, narrative assessment
- as part of collecting daily attendance data, include the number of disabled children enrolled in Te Kura and Alternative Education, and the hours of engaged learning for every child with a trained teacher and teacher's aide per week
- track all successful and unsuccessful applications for learning support resources and assess the related outcomes for disabled children.

152. In developing robust integrated data infrastructure, an understanding of the needs and pathways to restart work on a standardised Learning

Support Register integrated with Te Rito could be achieved.<sup>141</sup>

## **Priority opportunities to grow inclusive education across the system**

153. A synthesis of evidence suggests the below selected priorities will create the greatest change to support disabled children's inclusion, wellbeing and learning in education:
- i. Collect disability-specific data on enrolment, attendance, and progress/achievement to inform decision making
  - ii. Enforce the legal requirement that disabled children can enrol in their local school and attend all the hours the school is open for instruction
  - iii. Support curriculum learning for disabled children through teaching and assessment tools, examples and professional development
  - iv. Repurpose RSS funding into more equitable and effective means of supporting disabled children's learning in their home community.

## **Appendices**

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<sup>141</sup> Te Rito is a national information-sharing platform.

## Appendix 1 – UNCRPD recommendations re RSS

## **Appendix 1 UNCRPD Review 2022**

On 26 September 2022 the UNCRPD committee provided concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of New Zealand.<sup>142</sup> The committee tasked New Zealand with key actions around residential schools.

40 (b) Develop a comprehensive deinstitutionalization strategy, with specific time frames and adequate budgets, to close all residential institutions, including group homes and residential specialist schools, to provide community supports for persons with disabilities to live independently in the community;

40 (d) Take measures to cease investment in residential specialist schools for children with disabilities and establish a deinstitutionalization process that ensures adequate support is provided for children with disabilities to return to their families and exercise their right to an inclusive education;

47 (b) Withdraw the proposal to change entry requirements for enrolment in residential specialist schools and redirect funding and resources into an inclusive education system;

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<sup>142</sup> UNCRPD 2022 recommendations.

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g22/502/91/pdf/g2250291.pdf>

- 47 (c) Develop specific culturally appropriate strategies to address the high proportion of Māori children with disabilities in residential specialist schools, including the provision of supports to remain with whānau (extended family networks) in their local communities.