



LEARNING SUPPORT UPDATE

LOCAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Creating innovative, locally-led learning support pathways

July 2017

LEARNING SUPPORT UPDATE: LOCAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Executive summary

In 2015 the Ministry of Education initiated the Learning Support Update (previously known as the Special Education Update). The purpose of the Learning Support Update is to work with sector partners to strengthen inclusion and modernise how learning support is delivered across the education sector. As part of this update, local improvement projects were developed to explore new, innovative ways of working.

The projects have resulted in many examples of new ways of tailoring services and support. Each project has features which reflect the local community in which they are based and has been created within existing structures, service models and resources. Many of these projects focus on better transitions between early childhood and school with more joined-up and coordinated supports across a learner's pathway.

These new approaches to service delivery were discussed through a 'learning loop' process which began in November 2015. Conversations were guided by key features of the Learning Support Update including tailored and flexible approaches to support and clear systems and processes around transitions and early identification of need. Feedback informed the next steps in an iterative way. Early results demonstrated more joined-up ways of working with local communities. Practices within these projects also highlighted a clear shift towards a more proactive and flexible response to support.

Many of the processes which originated within the projects are now becoming part of everyday practices within local areas. Practices which involve collaboration, early identification and harnessing the rich skills and resources are features of many of the projects. Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako are enabling stronger opportunities to provide a seamless pathway for all students and therefore are fundamental in advancing the work of these projects.

Alongside noticeable improvements, there were challenges which became learning opportunities. Individual projects adapted their approaches in response to feedback as they arose. We learnt that in some projects there was a mismatch between reporting timeframes and the project's readiness for evaluation.

Our future work within Learning Support will be strengthened by co-design through partnering with families and whānau, the education sector and local communities. A quality improvement approach with members of local communities is fundamental to building stronger learning support services throughout New Zealand. These local improvement projects have helped us along this journey.

Introduction

1. This report highlights the features of the local improvement projects and outlines the key learnings from these projects.
2. The local improvement projects were designed as an immediate response to the key findings from the engagement process undertaken by Learning Support (then Special Education) in mid-2015. Learning Support consulted extensively with over 3,650 parents, whānau, school and early childhood educators and local communities to hear their views on working with them. The engagement forums provided six key areas for improvement:
 - Better guidance and training for teachers – from Early Childhood Education (ECE) onwards
 - Greater involvement of parents and whānau and better information for them
 - Much simpler and more transparent access to support
 - Better interagency coordination
 - Better transparency and more joined up services across the education system
 - Streamlined support when a child transitions – to primary or high school or to another school.
3. The purpose of the projects was to develop and test service improvements in local areas. The expectation was that these improvements could be put in place relatively quickly and would highlight local solutions for improving access to services and support for children and young people.
4. The improvement projects were established in local communities by staff who understood the needs within their educational communities. Ministry of Education (Ministry) managers led this work with the Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service as a key partner in many of the projects. ECE and schools also worked alongside the Ministry and RTLB in many of the projects.

Methodology

5. A learning loop process was developed to ensure that there was a collaborative approach to gather project data. It centred on recording the changes over time in each project and to identify the next steps together. The process was iterative and featured cycles of continuous quality improvement. The majority of the information within this report was gathered toward the end of 2016.

Overview of the improvement projects

6. This report features information from projects in Tai Tokerau, Auckland, Tauranga, Rotorua, Wellington, Manawatu, Taranaki, Porirua, Canterbury, Southland, Otago, Nelson, West Coast and Marlborough. The Post Learning Loop section also includes projects in Hamilton and Gisborne.

7. Each project has features which reflect the local community in which they are based. The scope of the projects varied. Some projects extended across a number of RTLB cluster boundaries and involved many children, while others involved smaller groups of children. These improvement projects were created within existing structures, service models and resources.
8. Throughout the process individual projects were adapted in response to feedback. This continuous improvement approach resulted in processes that were flexible and enabled easier access to services and support.
9. There are features within the improvement projects which led us towards designing supports with all children and learners in mind and away from a traditional service model in which special education sits separately from “education for all”. Within the improvement projects there are many examples of joined-up service provision. The conscious move away from criterion based, pre-determined service towards a more flexible, early and proactive response within a local educational community has meant that services are navigating new territory.

Partnership and collaboration

10. Project teams reported more positive co-working arrangements and partnerships with each other and education partners. A common practice shift involved RTLB working with Ministry staff well before children begin school. Central to partnership and collaboration is intentionally creating space and time to develop relationships which focus upon a clear and common goal. The improvement projects have enabled this time and space to listen and learn from each other.
11. In Cromwell, project team members emphasised the importance of this through developing a community of practice model with local ECE, schools, RTLB and the Ministry, which was focused on transitions from early childhood to school.
12. In Southland, RTLB and the Ministry have established two communities of practice involving schools, ECE, Kohanga Reo and Pasifika language nests, with the focus on increasing competence and capability to support the needs of all learners in their community. Senior teachers from Southland Kindergarten Association are working together with other education professionals to develop their own learning plans to progress stronger inclusive practices within their centres.
13. The Nelson Immediate Response Project (IR) has also identified strong shifts in collaboration and partnership, particularly between RTLB and the Ministry. Establishing a known contact for schools has resulted in more timely and accessible services being provided. 2016 survey data in Nelson, Marlborough and the West Coast found an improvement in ratings in RTLB and Ministry’s staff perceptions of partnership and collaboration between services.

14. There are many examples of RTLB working in early childhood services to support a seamless transition pathway. A joined-up database in the Manawatu, between RTLB and the Ministry, has enabled real-time information to guide decision making.
15. Another example of increased partnership through local forums is the parent engagement groups in the Wellington and Taranaki/Whanganui and Manawatu regions. Eight groups were established with the intention of increasing families and whānau knowledge of services, alongside collaborating and gathering ongoing feedback about services and supports.

Building adult capability

16. Building the skills and capabilities of key adults in children's lives was a focus of a number of the projects. There is a strong evidence base that illustrates positive changes to children's wellbeing and learning occurs when we focus on the skills and capabilities of key adults in their lives.
17. In Taranaki the Ministry team set up a key contact person for each ECE service within the project area. This has enabled more timely support for the ECE services. Having a strong practice focus on working with adults around the child and providing a 'least intrusive' model means that support is increasingly responsive to the environment and the needs of the teaching team in the first instance. As a consequence of this project, there have been 36 more systems-related 'pieces of work' undertaken in ECE services. The focus of this support from the Ministry is positively impacting on larger numbers of children.
18. Eight parent engagement groups have been established in Wellington, Whanganui and the Manawatu to help improve access to information. Initial survey data illustrates overall positive feedback from parents and whānau. Forums such as these have the potential to inform and influence future service delivery in a solution focused way.
19. In Tauranga, the Training Collaboration Project (TCP) weaved together content from different behaviour initiatives to create workshop content designed to support parents and educators. Both parents and educators reported increased confidence after attending the workshops.
20. Having an increased emphasis on co-working to support transitions has resulted in Ministry of Education staff and RTLB in Rotorua increasing their skills and knowledge base. Early Intervention staff are learning more about schools and the New Zealand Curriculum and RTLB are learning more about ECE and Te Whāriki.

Tailored and flexible approaches for Māori and Pasifika

21. Partnering with Māori and Pasifika has supported a tailored and flexible approach to services. This means our services are evolving and being shaped through feedback and involvement with our diverse communities.
22. Within Porirua, the Ministry's Early Access Support (EAS) project team is well positioned within the local community, learning about and responding to the needs of this community. There are high numbers of Māori and Pasifika families/whānau within this community. Staff proactively visit the local community centres and early childhood services to tailor approaches to meet local needs. As part of the services provided, a number of workshops and parent evenings have been held at the request of the centres. There are 59 centres within the scope of the project and feedback from teachers involved indicates a stronger connection between ECE and local Ministry team members.
23. In Nelson, their flexible, proactive and tailored service model targets students at risk of disengagement at school. Just under half of the students in the initial group identified as Māori. Staff involved in this project have worked hard on enabling a clearer pathway to access support which is timely, proactive and without complicated criteria or referral processes. Emerging data illustrates most young people involved in this work are attending school.
24. Some of the projects are partnering with local Kōhanga Reo and Pasifika language nests. For example, Franklin's Early Response team has partnered with local Puna Reo. The ECE teacher is welcome within this setting which is a key first step.
25. In Southland, within the local communities of practice, a co-delivery model has been developed with Kaitakawaenga and Pasifika Ministry staff. Cultural protocols, tīkanga and creating opportunities to share cultural links are key elements of the community of practice. As a consequence of this work the Ministry has received requests for support from local Kōhanga Reo and Pasifika language nests. These requests have not occurred in the past.

Clear systems and process including transitions and early identification

26. Within the improvement projects there are many working examples of engaging with children early in their lives and early within the presenting need. There has been a conscious move away from criterion-based services to a more flexible approach. A number of project teams have identified the positive impact of co-constructing processes with their education partners.
27. Porirua's EAS project received feedback from ECE services indicating they liked the presence of a single point of contact and up-to-date information to help inform them about services. This is an example of a clearer system and process which is founded upon relationships and 'kanohi ki te kanohi'. There are now ECE services partnering with the Ministry who have not referred children to the Ministry in the past.

28. In Franklin, an early childhood teacher, who is based within a local ECE service, is now the contact person working alongside the local Ministry office. This role responds to requests for support from ECE services within the project enabling a more timely and flexible response. With this simplified process ECE services are reporting earlier access to support.
29. Within the Rotorua and Auckland transition projects, RTLB are becoming involved earlier, before children transition to school. This has led to a stronger understanding of the strengths and needs of children transitioning into school from early childhood education and enables a more seamless service without the previous 'stop-start' process. Nelson, Marlborough and West Coast's transitions projects also highlight the improvements of having one clear process between RTLB and the Ministry.
30. In Kaikohe, where services and support are being decided in consultation with the local community, Ministry staff have said there is a strong community network. Goals of this work are to strengthen seamless support pathways from ECE to secondary school, with clear systems and processes. Like many other projects, RTLB are involved from an earlier stage in early childhood.
31. As part of the Taranaki project, each ECE service within the project has a key contact person. This has resulted in Ministry staff reporting an increase in proactive contact before children start ECE.
32. In many projects there is one service document shared by the practitioners involved in support. No longer are there multiple documents and reports, which can duplicate a process and add complexity for people involved.
33. In Canterbury the *We Are Ready* project has developed a transition framework with strong links to Te Whāriki and the New Zealand Curriculum. For children involved in Ministry services, there is now one transition to school process which incorporates strengths and needs within a *Framework of Wellbeing and Achievement*. RTLB are engaged with this framework too, alongside Early Intervention Teachers. Furthermore, ECE teachers within the Canterbury Kindergarten Association have led this work for a number of children transitioning to school. Feedback and examples illustrate how plans can be tailored, removing complexity and fragmentation. Reports from families of children transitioning to school have indicated they feel more empowered to make informed decisions and feel more involved in the transition process.

Tailored and flexible approaches

34. Providing a tailored and flexible service delivery model was a feature that had the most significant positive shift from project teams around the country. As mentioned previously, the most common example of one process involves RTLB beginning their involvement earlier with the Ministry, schools, ECE services and families. A more joined-up approach from the outset cuts out duplicate conversations and overlaps. Instead it includes everyone who needs to be involved in the one plan.

35. In the Canterbury *We Are Ready* project, practitioners have reported that parents are enjoying feeling more involved in the process. This process, which involves the development of one plan, enables family and whānau hopes and aspirations to be clearly heard.
36. Within Kaikohe, services are tailored and set up around the local needs of the community. This is resulting in more accessible service delivery for children, whānau and educators. Educational facilities have a support plan in which educational leaders design support in partnership with the Ministry and RTLB. This moves away from traditional pre-determined support services.
37. Where projects have adapted services and support to meet the needs of local communities, early feedback has illustrated that services are beginning to better respond to local communities as they evolve.

Lessons learned

38. This section highlights how the local improvement projects have contributed to overall learning opportunities for our service delivery model.
39. There was variation across projects about the prioritisation of providing targeted and tailored services for Māori and Pasifika. This emphasises the importance of ensuring that from the outset of any service design work, engagement and planning with Māori and Pasifika communities occurs. Collaboration and partnership relies upon principles of trust, responsibility, accountability and willingness to share information, and this was identified as a work in progress with project teams coming from varying starting points.
40. Systems of sharing information do not define quality practice on its own. However when there is a common and easy way of sharing information through technology, there is more timely and seamless communication and decision making. This area is a work in progress and future design will need to build in the technology to enable reciprocal sharing of information, particularly between the Ministry and RTLB.
41. Collaboration needs to include partnering with families and whānau around the varying roles, particularly in times of transition and the early identification of need. This is an area to build on, ensuring that we design our services to meet the needs of those who require our services the most. This will mean optimising opportunities for children, families and whānau to have an active voice within the design and evaluation.
42. A number of projects indicated that in the early stages of preparation and implementation there was an impact on staff time and roles. As projects evolved and positive changes were evident the understanding of what was considered 'core work' shifted. Future design thinking will need to consider how we define our services, and what our 'core work' encompasses.

43. There was variable involvement of Ministry staff, RTLB and our sector partners within certain projects. This was in part due to the need to have projects established reasonably quickly, and also highlighted that in areas where there were existing strong collaborative relationships, projects were up and running quite smoothly. In other areas this took longer and recognises the importance of placing value on the time and effort needed to grow and sustain collaboration and partnerships through strong local leadership.
44. In some projects there was a mismatch between learning loop timeframes and the project's readiness for evaluation. Co-design with local areas to include suitable timeframes and 'best fit' approaches to evaluation within their communities should be a key feature of future design thinking.
45. When available, feedback from families and whānau was included in the process. However families and whānau were not represented on the project teams. The inclusion of children, young people and families' perspectives is a recommended priority area to help guide future planning and implementation.

Post Learning Loop

Following the original drafting of this summary, additional information has been gathered.

46. The Ministry of Education Special Education has now become Learning Support and there have been subsequent changes with geographic boundaries and some changes in staff. Despite this, many projects have continued and some have been 'scaled up' to increase their spread. Certain projects involving transition from early childhood to school now view this work as business as usual.
47. In Gisborne, two projects were established which focused on oral language in ECE and on increasing collaboration and a single process between Ministry of Education and RTLB. While these projects were not part of the final learning loop, information gathered illustrates progress being made and a focus this year on extending the work. Within the oral language project, partnership between Gisborne Kindergarten Association and the Ministry occurred to deliver training together within their local community. Within the Ministry and RTLB project there has been a continuation of regular hui to jointly decide on next steps for support, as well as regular meetings with teachers involved to plan and deliver professional learning and development together.
48. In the Fairfield Community of Learning I Kāhui Ako in Hamilton there is now a joint process established to promptly prioritise needs with RTLB and Ministry involvement. This process was co-designed with the Community of Learning I Kāhui Ako in their agreed timeframes and therefore was not part of the learning loop process.
49. Certain projects have developed their own evaluation processes and continue to shape the support provided through feedback. Discussions are occurring in certain areas with managers about next steps and directions.

50. In Canterbury, Ministry staff and three RTLB clusters engaged with the *Wellbeing and Achievement Framework* to guide transitions from early childhood to school. This work is now embedded into service delivery and feedback continues to be generally very positive, particularly noting the holistic, strength based and joined up approach. Opportunities to extend this work in other service areas are being considered.
51. There are other examples of projects focused on transition between early childhood and school which have now become embedded in transition practices and protocols. These include within the Rotorua and Auckland areas.
52. In Tauranga, the model within Training and Collaboration Project (TCP) is being considered within Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako and a wider range of schools.
53. Extending the features of projects into a local service delivery model is also occurring in Taranaki. Teams in the Ministry are now grouped around their local Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako. The key contact role has now been extended to each Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako. Work is underway to align services with each Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako achievement challenges so that services map local needs and priorities. Scaling up the delivery model to include other geographic areas within this education region is beginning. Furthermore, professional learning and development around inclusive practice and capability building has continued with 100 kindergarten teachers participating in workshops.
54. In Cromwell, the community of practice established as part of the improvement project has now developed a shared process between ECE services, schools, RTLB and the Ministry to support transitions. A similar project has since developed in Milton in conjunction with the RTLB service. All ECE services and schools are represented within this community of practice and there is now a consistent process for the sharing of information between ECE services and schools. The local public health nurse has also been included in this process, enabling more B4 School Check information to be shared to support transitions. As part of 'scaling up' this project work into other areas, the Ministry has also developed a flexible response/liaison role for groups of kindergartens in Oamaru, Taieri and South Dunedin.
55. Nelson's Immediate Response (IR) project has continued with its quick and collaborative response between RTLB and Ministry. The service is for young people at risk of disengagement at secondary school and the majority of young people who received this support during 2016 remained in education with a plan of support.
56. Franklin's Early Response project has received positive feedback from centres and whānau often about quick responses and early support. During last year, the project was 'scaled up' to include other parts of Manukau and an additional teacher. This project is continuing in the Franklin area. Data from 2016 illustrated over half of the children receiving the Early Response service did not require ongoing support from early intervention services.
57. Planning is currently underway to extend Porirua's EAS model to include the Hutt Valley.

Conclusion

58. These projects have created the opportunity to work in different ways to improve access to support and services. An intention of the local improvement projects was to identify key elements that have the potential to be 'scaled up' to inform future service design. Support has started to move away from a 'stop-start' approach, with differing criteria and processes, to one that is flexible and tailored to respond to unique needs within local communities.
59. The following features have been identified for further consideration around future service design.
- Having strong local leadership, supported nationally, that demonstrates and promotes a co-design and collaborative approach to working with parents/whānau, the sector and other providers.
 - Having a joined up approach between RTLB, Ministry, ECE services and schools, within Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako to support seamless transitions. To be able to shift to this model to a wider scale it will be essential to develop local protocols and technology which will enable ease of information sharing.
 - Prioritising a single point of contact:
 - to enable one agreed process and one plan of support
 - to work alongside schools, ECE services, Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako - to strengthen our focus on building the capability of adults – including through the provision of PLD.
 - Working with schools, ECE services, Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako in more proactive ways to identify needs and develop a flexible and tailored plan to respond to local communities.
 - Prioritising and building into the design a continuous quality improvement approach, with strong regional and national connections.