



Briefing Note: **Cabinet paper – Strengthening Inclusion and Modernising Learning Support**

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Purpose

1. The purpose of this briefing note is to provide you with talking points, and Questions and Answers, to support your discussion of the Cabinet paper ***Strengthening Inclusion and Modernising Learning Support*** at the Cabinet Social Policy Committee meeting on 29 June 2016.

Key Talking points

2. I am asking the Committee to endorse the direction I am taking to improve the learning support (or special education) system so that it is easy to access, child-focused and more efficient.
3. The current system is fragmented and difficult to access, information about demand, and outcomes are not good, and accountability needs to be strengthened.
4. There also needs to be better analysis of the overall investment, so funding can shift to where it is needed and to interventions that are showing good results.

Vulnerable children

5. We must ensure that the system is servicing the needs of all children especially our most vulnerable.
6. At the moment we invest about \$590 million in learning support. A third of this funding is controlled directly by the Ministry – the rest is allocated to schools including residential and special schools.

7. Early analysis suggests that ~
 - 13% of CYF children in care in 2015 also received specialist services directly from the Ministry
 - 6% of children with CYF care and protection notifications in 2015 also received support
8. We expect a much higher number of vulnerable children will be receiving support directly from schools.

Changes

9. I am recommending change in four broad areas:

A. *Measuring performance and improving accountability (paragraph 25-29 and Appendix 1)*

10. A stronger outcomes framework with measurable goals for learning support will be put in place to better measure the performance of the learning support system.
11. This will give a better whole of system picture of achievement and also help measure the effectiveness of different programmes.

B. *Improving investment decisions (paragraphs 30 – 35 and Appendix 2)*

12. We must make sure learning supports children and young people receive are the best possible, most suitable and well matched to needs.
13. Investment analysis will help us direct resources to where they are most needed and most effective.
14. Funding arrangements should support this by allowing resources to shift to where they are needed.
15. The Ministry is undertaking investment analysis to inform future decisions on funding arrangements, assisted by Treasury and the Social Investment Unit.
16. I am asking the committee to agree to the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme, especially for those over 18 years, Communication Services and Behaviour Services being reviewed as a priority.
17. There are opportunities to improve the effectiveness and flexibility of these services.

C. *Delivering services more effectively (paragraphs 36 – 4 and, Appendix 3)*

18. The Ministry has developed a high level model to simplify and improve service delivery and I am seeking your support to the direction proposed.
19. Key features are a child-centred model with:

- An early triage to identify individual needs, information and support for families and mobilise resources. This will replace the multiple assessment and referral points which have been a feature of the system for a long time.
- Learning support plans documenting actions, resources and goals using a collaborative process. Plans will evolve and move with the child.
- A lead practitioner will act as a contact point and champion for the child and family to make sure the plan happens, and is adjusted and reviewed as needed.

D. *Changing our language (paragraphs 45 – 47)*

20. I want to move away from terminology such as special needs and special education. This can act as a barrier to development of a fully inclusive system.
21. Learning support is a more inclusive term.

Alignment with New Children’s Entity (paragraphs 49 – 53)

22. The Ministry will be working on changes to learning support at the same time as the New Children’s Entity (NCE) is being established.
23. As my proposed approach is for a child-centred model, the CYF target population who need additional learning support will receive it. The learning support changes will be further developed and adapted as necessary to support the establishment of the NCE.
24. There will be a further report to SOC on links between the New Children’s Entity and Learning Support/Special Education in October.

Recommendations

25. I am seeking Cabinet’s agreement to the recommendations as specified in the Cabinet paper to support the changes so that the Update can move to the next stage.

Learning Support Update

Questions and answers

June 2016

Q. Who currently provides special education services?

Special education services are provided by the Ministry of Education (about a third of the total budget) and directly by schools (two thirds of the budget).

The Ministry mostly provides specialist services to individuals, for example, through the Communications Service, Early Intervention Service, Severe Behaviour Services and other support such as school transport allowance.

The two thirds administered by schools and contracted providers is directed at high intensity support (through the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme and special schools) and school funding for those with low to moderate learning challenges.

Q. What proportion of vulnerable children receive learning support?

Initial findings show that about 13% of children in the care of CYF are also receiving Ongoing Resource Scheme or specialist services delivered by Special Education.

Of the about 45,000 children we were able to identify with a CYF care and protection notification, 6% of children received learning support

We expect a much higher portion of vulnerable children will be receiving services directly from schools.

Q. What is the impact of the proposed changes on children and their whānau?

Access to learning support will be simpler and quicker for those children and their whānau who need it. Our focus will shift from referrals and ensuring they meet criteria to planning individual learning pathways through the education system.

An early triage and decision making process will replace the multiple referral points, a frustrating feature of the current system that creates barriers and makes it difficult for people to navigate.

We'll develop learning plans that involve the right people and are based on collaborative practices. There will be more accountability for progress and results.

Q. What is the impact of the proposed changes to Special Education programmes on schools and ECE? Could some lose access to some services?

The next stage of the process is to undertake detailed design based on the concepts in this paper. This will be a collaborative process and changes will be rolled out over time.

There will be no disruption to current services or significant changes to funding without further evidence-informed analysis and advice.

Over time schools will experience easier access to specialist support and be able to share specialist skills and expertise across Communities of Learning and groups of schools. We'll be better able to develop local solutions to the learning challenges children and young people face within their communities.

Q. What is the impact on special schools and residential special schools?

There will be no immediate impact. The focus is on encouraging collaboration across the system, so ECEs, schools and the Ministry work together with special and residential schools in the best interests of children, sharing expertise and knowledge of what works.

Q. What kinds of frontline specialist staff does the Ministry of Education employ to provide learning support?

The Ministry's services cost approximately one third of Government's total investment in Special Education. Of this third, about 20% of expenditure is on specialist FTEs.

The Ministry employs about 770 FTE specialist staff with a wide range of experience (see table below). Specialists include speech language specialists, early intervention teachers, advisers on deaf children, kaitakawaenga, occupational physiotherapists and psychologists (mostly educational, though there are clinical psychologists primarily working in the intensive wraparound service).

These staff support parents and whanau, caregivers, teachers and other specialists alongside working with the children and young people themselves.

The type, intensity and level of learning support children and young people need to achieve educationally is diverse.

Q. Will the changes require staffing changes for the Ministry and/or schools and ECE? If yes please describe.

The future shape of the Ministry's service delivery will become clearer as we progress the detailed service design in the coming months. We'll be engaging with our staff and stakeholders to identify the right changes. These will be phased in locally with the agreement and support of communities.

Schools will remain responsible for making decisions about their learning support staffing, using operational grants and other funding (eg for teachers aides). About a third of Special Education is currently delivered by Ministry-employed specialists however about two thirds is delivered by ECE, schools and other learning providers.

Of the Ministry's third of total Special Education expenditure, about 20% is invested in specialist staff FTEs. The Ministry will look at how it can make better and more flexible use of these staff, moving from siloed criteria and services.

Q. Will all learners currently receiving Special Education support continue to receive some support?

Yes. There will be no disruption to current services or significant changes to funding without further evidence-informed analysis and advice. Any changes to policy will be brought to Cabinet for decisions in March 2017.

Q. Will all learners who currently receive Special Education support get a single point of contact or navigator (or lead practitioner/professional)?

No, not every child or young person needs specialist learning support from outside their early learning centre or school.

Higher intensity cases will have a specialist lead practitioner responsible for a learning plan and making sure the plan happens. However many children and young people will continue to receive learning support through inclusive practices at their ECE, classroom, school or Community of Learning level.

We are improving the learning support the Ministry provides to schools and ECE together with support for individual learners. We're also improving system-wide accountability to deliver better results for learners, no matter where in the system the learning support is delivered from.

Q. When will schools and ECE first notice changes happening? What will they be?

Some schools and ECE are already working with the Ministry on local improvement projects. These are helping the Ministry quickly start improving services while redesigning the system – getting better support to kids at the right time.

The Ministry will work locally with staff and sector partners in the coming months to finalise the Ministry's service design and plan to implement changes, which will be phased in. We'll also engage more widely with education partners and others in communities.

The changes will be phased in from early 2017, with a focus on ensuring Ministry services are easier to access and building on Communities of Learning' achievement challenges.

Q. When will learners first notice changes happening? What will they be?

Learners in some locations are already starting to experience improvements (eg in the ECE to school transitions improvement projects, learners are experiencing seamless support; there is less rigidity around criteria for services and a stronger focus on immediate support for the learner and the adults around the child – parents, whānau, teachers and any other involved specialists).

The Ministry will carefully manage any future changes to support for learners, in close partnership with parents, whānau, teachers and any others who are or may need to be involved.

Q. How will establishing the new children's entity impact the Learning Support Update?

The Investing in Children changes will make a real difference for thousands of children and their whānau. We're working closely with other agencies to support this work, including contributing to the next Cabinet paper about establishing the new children's entity due in October 2016.

The direction of change proposed by introducing lead practitioners for high intensity cases, reducing bureaucracy by streamlining processes for accessing support and increasing accountability are aligned with the Investing in Children direction.

Q. One of the engagement findings was that better guidance and training for teachers was needed. What is happening in this area?

The Ministry's Professional Learning and Development (PLD) initiative is changing the way PLD is delivered to teachers, so that all children and students succeed personally and achieve educational success. The Ministry will also work with the Education Council to look at initial teacher education.

Recent initiatives to improve inclusive practice include a new inclusive education website and workshops on using the new online guidance. We have supplemented this recently with further new guidance on implementing an inclusive curriculum. We expect providers of PLD to draw on these resources as they work in and with ECE, schools, Ministry specialists and others to develop effective and inclusive teaching and learning programmes.

Several of the local improvement projects are currently looking at how the Ministry and RTLB can better coach, guide and support teachers. This will continue and inform both the detailed service design and the broader PLD initiative.

Q. How is learning support defined? Is it only Special Education?

I see the provision of learning support as a continuum with children and young people at the heart of our education system. We are supporting diverse children and young people's learning paths at all ages with the right support.

Learning support in an inclusive system is much broader than a focus on "Special Education". A wide range of factors can lead to the need for additional support - disability, health needs, social or emotional factors, family background and other circumstances.

The support needed will mostly be addressed in inclusive educational settings but more targeted support will be needed for some. This will come from people with specialist training or sometimes from groups of people, including cross-agency, for those with very high and complex needs.

Over time I want policy settings and funding mechanisms to enable additional support of whatever kind to be provided, when it is needed, not to inhibit it.

Q. Will the Government invest more money and resources in Special Education?

We have increased spending on Special Education by 29% since 2009.

The new approach will identify efficiencies and build in more flexibility so we can free up resources to invest in better learning support.

The investment analysis will look at areas where changes in policy might be needed so learning support can be provided more easily and earlier to those who need it.

Over time we will have better information about demand and outcomes. Evidence based analysis may indicate areas where more money is needed or, equally, identify areas where expenditure is ineffective and can be redeployed.

Q. Could changes to the operating model result in a surge in demand for learning support? Isn't the main problem inadequate funding of Special Education? Why isn't the Ministry seeking more funding for services?

We are already facing demand pressures. We are increasingly providing support at the system level to increase capability of schools and provide support to groups of children and young people, eg RTLB school wide initiatives. This is helping manage demand now.

The new operating model will create further efficiencies. It will be phased in over time so the impacts of changes can be monitored and managed.

Using resources more efficiently will help mitigate increase in demand and evidence based analysis will indicate areas where more money is needed or, equally, identify areas where expenditure is ineffective and can be redeployed. Early areas of flexibility have been identified and I am seeking Cabinet approval to look into these further to identify if greater flexibility can be achieved.

Q. How does the Learning Support Update fit with the Funding Review?

The Update and the Funding Review are both working towards a student-centred and outcomes focused inclusive education system, in which teachers and providers including the Ministry have individual and collective accountability to get all students succeeding.

The Funding Review is looking at how the funding system can be shifted so that all children and young people, especially those who are at greatest risk of educational underachievement, get the best possible education.

In parallel the Learning Support Update aims to simplify and modernise how learning support is delivered to children and students who need it. Together they will direct resources and support to where they're most needed, particularly for those most at risk of under-achievement.

Q. How will a social investment approach be applied?

The Learning Support Update will be based on the key ideas of the Government's social investment approach: setting clear, measurable goals; focusing on the needs of young people and their whānau, not services and silos; knowing what works well for whom; and investing early, when it has the greatest impact.

Q. What have the improvement projects achieved to date and how are these experiences reflected in the new approach?

The 22 local improvement projects are helping us quickly start improving services while redesigning the system – getting better support to kids at the right time. Project teams are developing innovative local solutions that fit their communities and agreed local priorities.

Many of the projects focus on three improvement areas: better transitions from ECE to school; simpler processes for parents; and earlier and better support for early childhood learners, their educators and parents.

It is still early days for the local projects, which are focusing on improved collaboration with RTLB, schools, ECE centres, parents and others. System and service changes and results will take some time.

Who are the Special Education field staff?

The background information sets out the key groups of field staff employed by the Ministry: advisors on deaf children, early intervention teachers, kaitakawaenga, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, regional school wide practitioners, special education advisors and speech language therapists. The only additional staff are managers and administration supporting these field workers. The collective agreement for these field staff has recently been settled.

It is important to note that a number of the services delivered by the Ministry (eg Early Intervention) are delivered by more than one group of field staff, so services are not 'discrete units' and staff go across these service delivery units.

In addition to the Ministry field staff, the schools employ staff to deliver services. The largest group is Resource Teachers Learning and Teaching. The national RTLB service is made up of 40 clusters; all state, state integrated and partnership schools all belong to a cluster; and RTLB are employed by the Board of Trustees of the lead school in the cluster. Special schools can also be seen as major providers of services outside the Ministry (although like other schools they are funded through the Ministry).

What will happen with Gifted and Talented if special ed becomes additional learning support?

Learning support is a continuum, and is available to diverse young people who may require support with disability, health needs and social or emotional factors.

At this point, the definition of learning support is deliberately broad, to allow for the Ministry to do further work for the Minister to consider. The specifics are around what was 'previously known as Special Education' but we do have the broader definition on our radar.

What does the update mean for building professional capacity in the workforce?

Professional Learning and Development (PLD) is changing, and learning support will be part of that change, as the Ministry works with the Education Council to improve Initial Teacher Education (ITE). We expect PLD providers to draw on Ministry resources and guidance on implementing an inclusive curriculum as they work with ECEs, schools, Ministry specialists and others. We are continuing to work together in this area, and further enhancements are likely.

The local improvement projects are coming up with ways that Ministry field staff and RTLB (employed by Boards) can better support teachers.

Background information

Front-line staff the Ministry employs in special education

The Ministry employs 771 FTE front-line specialist staff (30 June 2015)

Types of positions	FTE
Advisor On Deaf Children – <i>Advisers on deaf children work closely with parents, caregivers, head teachers and other specialists to help children and young people with hearing needs learn and develop</i>	27.48
Early Intervention Teacher - <i>Early intervention teachers work closely with parents/caregivers, head teachers and other specialists to help children with special education needs (and their families) prepare for, start and settle into school.</i>	107.99
Kaitakawaenga - <i>work proactively with Māori tamariki, mokopuna and their whanau, hapu/iwi, learning institutions and members of the Ministry of Education, Special Education to identify and eliminate barriers to learning for Māori students with special educational and developmental needs</i>	27.20
Occupational Therapist – <i>provide support for a child or young person with physical disabilities to perform daily living tasks and access learning in the classroom eg when a physical disability affects writing. They can also recommend or provide special equipment or changes that will help your child with these activities.</i>	32.10
Physiotherapist – <i>support children and young people aged between five and 21 who have high and very high physical needs. They help change school environments so children can learn. Mostly this involves modifying property, and providing advice and information to school staff.</i>	18.40
Psychologist - <i>work with parents, caregivers, teachers and other specialists to support children and young people with learning and behaviour needs.</i>	172.11
Regional School Wide Practitioner - <i>advisors and psychologists whose specific role is to train and support educators to implement the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L): School-Wide framework.</i>	20.60
Special Education Advisor - <i>work closely with a child’s wider support team to support the implementation of their individualised education programme, providing support and advice along the way.</i>	101.10
Speech Language Therapist – <i>work with parents, caregivers, teachers and other specialists to support children and young people with the development of speech (the sounds they make and how they produce them) and the expression and understanding of spoken language (the content of what they say and the way they say it)</i>	252.94
Other	11.60
Grand total	771.52

The Ministry also employs support workers including communication support workers and education support workers. At 30 June 2015 there were 134.32 FTE support workers employed to support children with special education needs.

Within schools there are:

- 917 Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour supported by 40 RTLB managers
- approximately 23,500 teacher aides/kaiāwhina employed (many part-time).