




Thriving at School?

Education for Disabled Learners
in Schools





I am now 16 years old and go to school in Whangarei.
I use a computer, talkie device and sign to communicate
but it is very hard for most people to understand me
I use a powerchair to get around school
my biggest wish would be to do the same as everybody else
I have cp (cerebral palsy) because I wasn't breathing when I was born,
Mum and Dad say I am a miracle.

I feel sad about having my disabilities because I can't move the same
way everyone else does.
This puts up a barrier as many people don't know how to interact with me.
I feel frustrated because I can't express myself as well as others do.
As I can't just speak what I am feeling.

Having a disability hasn't stopped me from doing things though.
I attended a normal school, went to regular classes and did the
everyday school work.
I love my drama class and even got to go to Wellington to perform
in front of hundreds of people and go on an airplane which was a
big deal. I didn't think I'd ever go on one.


MAX THOMPSON-BAILEY





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Executive summary

The Education Review Office (ERO), in partnership with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Office for Disability Issues (ODI), looked at how well the education system is supporting disabled learners in schools. We found that we need to improve education for disabled learners so they can thrive. This report describes what we found and what is needed to significantly improve education for these priority learners.

Disabled children and young people have the same rights to enrol and receive quality, inclusive education in state schools as other learners^a. To thrive, they need to be fully included in all aspects of education and for education to be adapted to their needs. Like all learners, they need to receive quality teaching, in supportive environments, and with strong partnerships with their parents and whānau.

This study looked at the quality and inclusiveness of education provision for disabled learners in schools. It answers four key questions:

- 1) How well are disabled learners doing?
- 2) What is the quality and inclusiveness of education provision (including teaching and learning practice)?
- 3) How strong are the system enablers that support more inclusive and higher quality education?
- 4) What key actions could lead to improved outcomes for disabled learners?

^a The right to inclusive education has been strengthened in the Education and Training Act 2020 to reflect New Zealand's commitment to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

How well are disabled learners doing?

Disabled learners are still experiencing exclusion. We found that many disabled learners are being discouraged from enrolling in their local schools, asked to stay home due to resourcing issues, stood down, and are having to move schools. Too many students are also not supported to take part in wider school activities.

Disabled learners are enjoying school, but too many are not progressing sufficiently. We found most (two in three) learners enjoy learning at their school. However, disabled learners are more than twice as likely to leave school with no qualifications. One in four disabled learners at secondary school also indicated that they were not supported to take the courses that interested them most. Only half of parents and whānau thought their disabled child was progressing well as a learner. Some expressed frustration that the school is not engaging their child or setting expectations at the right level.

A significant proportion of disabled learners do not feel accepted or that they belong. We found most (81 percent) disabled learners reported having teachers who are kind, helpful and care about them. However, a significant proportion do not feel accepted or that they belong at school. Some experience bullying and, sadly, do not have close friends at school.

Disabled learners with more complex needs have poorer experiences and outcomes than other disabled learners. We found that disabled learners with more complex needs reported poorer experiences and outcomes than learners with mostly physical or sensory impairments.

What are the differences between schools?

Disabled learners in schools serving lower socio-economic communities report better outcomes. Not all schools are welcoming of disabled learners, resulting in inequities for disabled learners. Disabled learners in low decile^b schools reported more positive outcomes on a range of measures than those at high decile schools. Their parents and whānau are also more satisfied with how the school is supporting their child's learning.

Schools with high numbers of Māori students have a stronger culture of inclusion of disabled learners and their whānau. We found that parents and whānau whose disabled learner is in a school with a high Māori roll are more positive about how the school includes their child and are more satisfied with how the school deals with any issues/concerns about their child's learning. Teachers in these schools also reported greater inclusion.

^b In this report we use school decile as a proxy for the socio-economic status of the communities a school serves. We note the Ministry of Education is currently rolling out a new Equity Index to replace the school decile system.

Which areas of education for disabled learners could be strengthened?

We found many committed schools, and a range of good practice in providing education for disabled learners. But we also found six areas that could be strengthened.

- 1) **Leaders in schools do not fully understand what is expected.** There are robust expectations in legislation, and we found most schools have a commitment to welcoming disabled learners. Many schools are also prioritising support for disabled learners. However, nearly half (43 percent) of school principals and Boards do not yet have a full understanding of legal obligations and not all schools' policies support disabled learners. Nationally, there is no tracking of progress for disabled learners.
- 2) **Many teachers are not confident in teaching disabled learners.** One in three disabled learners do not feel supported to learn in a way that suits them. Among whānau of disabled learners, a similar proportion are not happy with the quality of their child's schooling. More than half of teachers lack confidence in teaching disabled learners, particularly those with complex needs who require significant adaptations (including at NZ Curriculum Level 1). Confidence among secondary school teachers is particularly low.
- 3) **Guidelines and tools for disabled learners are not being used by teachers.** The national curriculum and assessment framework is flexible and supports education for disabled learners. However, teachers are not always confident in tailoring the curriculum and assessment to the needs of disabled learners. Most of the guidelines and tools are not well-aligned or easy to access and are hardly ever used by teachers.
- 4) **Partnerships with learners and their parents and whānau can be strengthened.** Parents and whānau of disabled learners find it easy to talk to teachers about their child's learning. However, we found insufficient involvement of disabled learners and their parents and whānau in planning their learning. Few (20 percent) schools had good processes for gathering feedback from disabled learners and their parents and whānau about how well the school is meeting their needs and how to improve. Some parents and whānau are, worryingly, not aware of their child's education rights or how to raise concerns.
- 5) **Support for disabled learners to move on from school is not well coordinated.** While the majority of parents and whānau are satisfied with how the school helped their child start school, 21 percent are not satisfied with how the school is supporting their child to leave school and access pathways beyond school. Lack of information sharing between agencies and schools impacts on pathways for learners.
- 6) **School buildings and facilities are mostly accessible but schools with older buildings still face challenges.** The process for making alterations can be complex and slow. Some parents and whānau reported that modern learning environments with large open classrooms can create sensory overload for some disabled learners, in particular neurodivergent learners.

Recommendations

In the last 18 years, ERO has undertaken 11 evaluations of provision for disabled learners. But still we have found that education is not delivering for all disabled learners, and improvements are needed. Based on this evaluation, we have identified four areas to raise the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled learners.

Area 1: To strengthen prioritisation of disabled learners in schools, and accountability for how well they are doing, ERO recommends the following:

- 1) Report nationally and annually on education experiences and outcomes for disabled learners.
- 2) Provide guidance to Boards and schools on expectations for education for disabled learners.
- 3) Include education for disabled learners as a focus for all ERO school evaluations.
- 4) Require all schools to report annually on their plans and progress for disabled learners.
- 5) Require all Boards to report on provision for disabled learners as part of Board Assurance Statements.
- 6) Act when a school persistently discourages enrolment of disabled learners.

Area 2: To increase disabled learners' sense of belonging and acceptance in school, and teachers' capability in teaching disabled learners, ERO recommends the following:

- 7) Strengthen new principal and initial teacher education.
- 8) Strengthen Beginner Teacher Induction and mentoring.
- 9) Ensure guidance on professional standards for teaching are explicit on expectations for inclusion of disabled learners.
- 10) Make disability a priority for Professional Learning and Development (PLD) for principals and teachers.
- 11) Review the quality of disability PLD for principals and teachers.
- 12) Put in place, and increase use of, guidelines, resources, and supports for teachers of disabled learners.

Area 3: To increase disabled learners' and parents' and whānau understanding of their education rights, how to raise concerns or make a complaint, or get someone to advocate on their behalf, ERO recommends the following:

- 13) Provide an accessible resource for learners and whānau on their education rights and entitlements, and ensure there is access to advocacy support if they need it.
- 14) Put in place an independent mechanism for complaints and report annually.
- 15) Investigate and act when a school persistently fails to meet the needs of disabled learners.

Area 4: To improve the coordination of supports for disabled learners, and pathways both in and beyond school, ERO recommends the following:

- 16) Clearly define specialist roles and ensure working as a joined-up team to assess and support disabled learners.
- 17) Ensure that information follows disabled learners across education settings.
- 18) Improve coordination across agencies on supporting disabled learners' education.
- 19) Schools to more strongly collaborate and share resources and expertise.

Conclusion

Together, these recommendations have the potential to significantly improve education experiences and outcomes for disabled learners. Improving education for these learners can, in turn, dramatically improve their lives and life course. It will take coordinated and focused work across the relevant agencies to take these recommendations forward and ensure change occurs. We recommend that agencies report to Ministers on progress in July 2023.



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- Professor Missy Morton, University of Auckland
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About this report

In 1989, disabled learners gained the right to enrol at their local school. Today, they are still experiencing exclusion and are amongst the most at risk of poor outcomes in education and later in life. When disabled learners receive a quality, inclusive education this can change; they are more likely to achieve better social and learning outcomes, to complete secondary schooling, and go on to post-secondary study and employment. This report looks at how good the quality of education is for disabled learners and how it can be improved.

The Education Review Office (ERO) is responsible for reviewing and reporting on the performance of early learning services, kura, and schools. As part of this role, ERO looks at how the education system supports learners' outcomes – in this case on education for disabled learners in schools.

This report describes what we found about the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled learners in schools, including the strengths and weaknesses of education provision. We also suggest areas for improvement for these learners.

The voices of disabled learners and their whānau are highlighted throughout this report. We describe their experience of participation and learning, their outcomes, and how teaching practices impact on their learning and lives.

We partnered with others and drew on expertise

For this evaluation, ERO has partnered with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) to pool our collective expertise and independent advisory roles.

The Human Rights Commission is Aotearoa New Zealand's national human rights institution. It is independent of government and monitors the progress that Aotearoa New Zealand is making towards the realisation of human rights. One of its commissioners is the Disability Rights Commissioner who has a broad mandate to protect and promote the rights of disabled New Zealanders.

The Office for Disability Issues is part of the newly established Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People and is the focal point in government for disability issues. The Office for Disability Issues supports the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

We also worked closely with an Expert Advisory Group with a range of expertise, including people with lived experience of disability, whānau, academics, practitioners, and agency officials.

ERO regularly evaluates the quality of education for disabled learners

As part of ERO's mandate, we undertake national evaluations on education for disabled learners in schools and early learning. In the last 18 years, ERO has undertaken 11 evaluations of education provision for disabled learners – the last one was in 2015.

This evaluation builds on ERO's previous studies. It places a greater emphasis on the quality and effectiveness of school practices and outcomes for disabled learners and whānau. It is intended to assist the system as a whole to address the issues and concerns highlighted through the evaluation.

What we looked at

This evaluation looked at the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled learners in schools. Four key questions were explored:

- 1) How well are disabled learners doing in terms of learning, wellbeing, experience, and engagement in schools?
- 2) What is the quality and inclusiveness of education provision (including teaching and learning practice) for disabled learners?
- 3) How strong are the system enablers that support more inclusive and higher quality education?
- 4) What key actions could lead to improved outcomes for disabled learners?

Where we looked

Disabled learners attend a range of education settings. This report focuses on disabled learners in state and state-integrated (non-specialist) primary and secondary schools in English medium (commonly referred to as mainstream schools).

There is a companion report on education provision for disabled learners in early learning settings. ERO also has separate work under way on education provision for disabled learners in special schools, and a broad work programme on provision in Māori medium schools.

How we evaluated education provision

We have taken a robust, mixed-method approach to deliver breadth and depth in this evaluation.

To understand how good the quality of education is for disabled learners we gathered information through multiple ways:

- surveys with responses from 355 disabled learners and 509 parents and whānau
- surveys of 772 teachers, 448 teacher aides, 101 principals, and 125 Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs)/Learning Support Coordinators (LSC)/school learning support leaders
- in-depth interviews with disabled learners and their whānau

- site visits and observations of teaching and learning at eight schools
- in-depth interviews with principals, SENCOs/LSCs, teachers, and teacher aides at 21 schools, and Board Chairs from eight school
- analysis of school policies, strategic documents, learning support reports, and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) from 21 case study schools
- interviews with key experts, practitioners and agencies supporting inclusive education.

Further details on the methods are in Appendix 2.

How this fits with other work

This report provides an up-to-date picture to help inform future provision, including the Ministry of Education's Highest Needs Review.

Report structure

This report has 11 parts.

- Part 1 sets out who disabled learners are and the system that supports their education.
- Part 2 sets out what sort of education provision drives good outcomes for disabled learners.
- Part 3 sets out our findings on how well disabled learners are doing.
- Part 4 sets out differences between groups of disabled learners.
- Part 5 sets out our findings on how good the quality of education provision is for disabled learners.
- Part 6 sets out how the quality and inclusiveness of education varies between schools.
- Part 7 sets out our findings on how Māori disabled learners are doing (aspects related to Māori whānau are also highlighted throughout the report).
- Part 8 sets out our findings on how Pacific disabled learners are doing.
- Part 9 sets out our findings on how strong the supports are for education for disabled learners.
- Part 10 sets out our key findings and areas for action.
- Part 11 sets out proposed next steps.



Part 1: Who are disabled learners and what is the system that supports their education?

Education for disabled children and young people has changed significantly over time. Today, they have the same right to attend school as non-disabled learners. In this section, we describe who the disabled learners we are focusing on are and the historical context of disabled learners in education. We also look at where disabled learners are in the education system and provide a brief overview of the support they receive in education.

Who are disabled learners?

Disabled learners are defined, in this report, as all children and young people with significant needs for ongoing support and adaptations or accommodations to enable them to thrive in education.

The term ‘disabled learners’ is used as it is consistent with the New Zealand Disability Strategy^c which defines disability as something that happens when people with impairments face barriers in society. This is referred to as the social model of disability and is consistent with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Disabled learners are a highly diverse group of children and young people. Examples include:

- learners with physical impairments (such as Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy) that have significant challenges, for example, walking or climbing steps
- learners with intellectual or cognitive impairments caused by genetic disorders (such as Down Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome, Prader-Willi Syndrome) and that have significant challenges, for example, learning things at school
- learners with sensory impairments (such as deafblind, blind, low vision, deaf, and hard of hearing) that have significant challenges, for example, seeing or hearing

^c The NZ Disability Strategy recognises that not all members of their community identify with this language and that each person has a right to choose the terminology they prefer.

→ neurodivergent^d learners (such as those relating to dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder) that have significant challenges, for example, managing their emotions or relating to others.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, it is estimated that 11 percent of children aged under 15 years are disabled.¹ There is a higher rate of disability amongst Māori; the disability rate for Māori children is estimated to be 14 percent, compared to 11 percent for all children.²

How has education for disabled learners changed over time?

Attitudes to disability have changed significantly over time in Aotearoa New Zealand

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, disability in a Western paradigm was thought to be a problem inherent in individuals. This was commonly known as the medical model, where disability was seen as being something wrong with a person, which could be cured or at least contained.³

In contrast, Te Ao Māori (a Māori worldview) view disabled people as taonga (treasures), often adorned with a set of gifts that are unique.⁴ Māori academics⁵ talk about the impact of colonisation and a shift away, over time, from the traditional strengths-based Māori view of disability towards deficit views of disability, prevalent in Western models at the time.

How society thinks about disability has evolved. Today, the prominent view of disability is the social model, used in the New Zealand Disability Strategy and the UNCRPD, as well as the strengths based Whānau Hauā^e model, developed by Māori disability experts and informed by mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge).

There has been a shift from institutionalising disabled learners to giving them equal rights to attend their local school and learn alongside other children

During the twentieth century, parents of disabled children in Aotearoa New Zealand faced considerable pressure to place their children into state institutions by the age of five.⁶ Disabled children only started attending special classes in mainstream schools from the 1960s, and it was not until 1989 that disabled children gained the right to enrol at their local school. This right was further strengthened in the Education and Training Act 2020, which requires all schools to be inclusive of disabled learners.

See Table 1 for a high-level summary of the evolution of education rights for disabled learners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

^d The Ministry of Education's Learning Support Action Plan 2019-2025 describes neurodiversity as "a broad term that includes (but is not limited to) dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, autism spectrum disorder, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, trauma related disorders, and auditory or visual processing disorders.

^e The Whānau Hauā model locates the individual disabled learner within their whānau or their family setting, and recognises the challenges the environment presents for the disabled learner and their whānau who navigate those challenges with them.

More learners are now identified as disabled than previously

There is evidence of greater identification and reported prevalence of disability over time. This increase in reported prevalence is, in part, due to our ability to better identify, describe, and differentiate impairments. There has also been a significant increase over time in diagnoses of some impairments, in particular Autism Spectrum Disorder, Developmental Delay, Language Delay and Speech Delay.⁷

Table 1. *Timeline of the historical context of education for disabled learners in New Zealand⁸*

Te Ao Māori concept of disabled people as differently abled and valued underwent significant change with the establishment of Mission Schools in 1814. ⁹	Early 19th century
Education Act established free, compulsory, and secular education for all Pākehā New Zealand children.	1877
First special education facilities open – Sumner Institute for the Deaf in 1880 in Christchurch and Jubilee Institute for the Blind in 1881 in Auckland. ¹⁰	1880-1891
Education Act made it obligatory to report “mentally defective” children.	1914
Special classes for disabled children were opened in a few primary and secondary schools in Auckland and Wellington.	1960s
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons.	1971
Introduction of Early Intervention Services (EIS) to provide support for children with additional needs from birth, until they transition in to school.	1980s
Education Act affords equal rights to primary and secondary education. Children with special educational needs now have the right to enrol at their local school.	1989
Special Education 2000 was designed to fund and support programmes for children with learning, communication, and behavioural needs, with the introduction of Special Education Grant, Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS), Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs). A core element of the reform was to ensure that resources were portable and followed the learner rather than being tied to special schools, units and classes.	1995-2002

The government developed the New Zealand Disability Strategy based on the social model of disability.	2000/2001
The government established the Office for Disability Issues.	2002
New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) becomes third official language of New Zealand.	2006
New Zealand signs the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.	2007
Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success (Māori Education Strategy) sets direction for improving educational outcomes for Māori learners including those with special education needs/disabilities.	2008
Introduction of the Incredible Years (IY) programme for parents to support their children (including neurodiverse children) with social and emotional competence and communication skills.	2011
The government revised the New Zealand Disability Strategy and included education as an outcome.	2016
Learning Support Action Plan (2019-2025) developed by the Ministry of Education, which included introduction of Learning Support Coordinators.	2019
Education and Training Act requires all schools to be inclusive of disabled learners.	2020

Where are disabled learners in education settings?

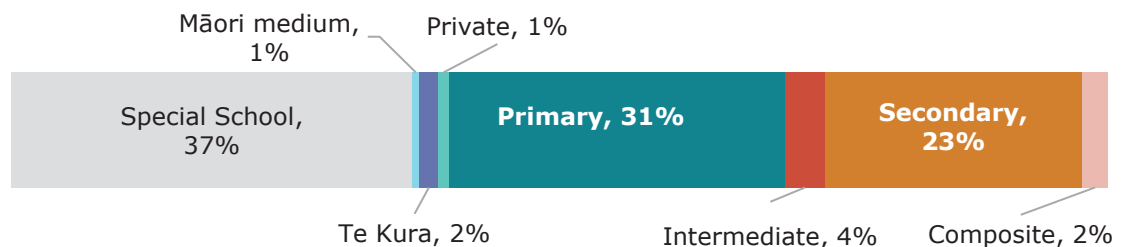
Disabled learners are mostly in state and state-integrated schools, with their non-disabled peers, and a third are in special schools

There is currently very limited data on disabled learners across the school system. To estimate where disabled learners are, we had to rely on data of those who are receiving learning support. The largest, and most easily identified, group of disabled learners receiving learning support are those who are funded by the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS). This is a group of disabled learners identified by the Ministry of Education as having the highest needs. To qualify for ORS funding, disabled learners need to be assessed as meeting specific criteria set by the Ministry of Education.

In 2021, there were 10,496 ORS funded disabled learners. Of these (see Figure 1):

- about twice the number were male compared to females (68 percent males compared to 32 percent females)
- 26 percent were Māori (an increase from 19 percent in 2005) and 12 percent were Pacific (an increase from 9 percent in 2005)
- 2 percent were in Te Kura, the state-funded distance education school (formerly known as the Correspondence School). Whilst this is a small number of students (144), it has, however, doubled since 2005.

Figure 1: *ORS funded learners in 2021 by school type*

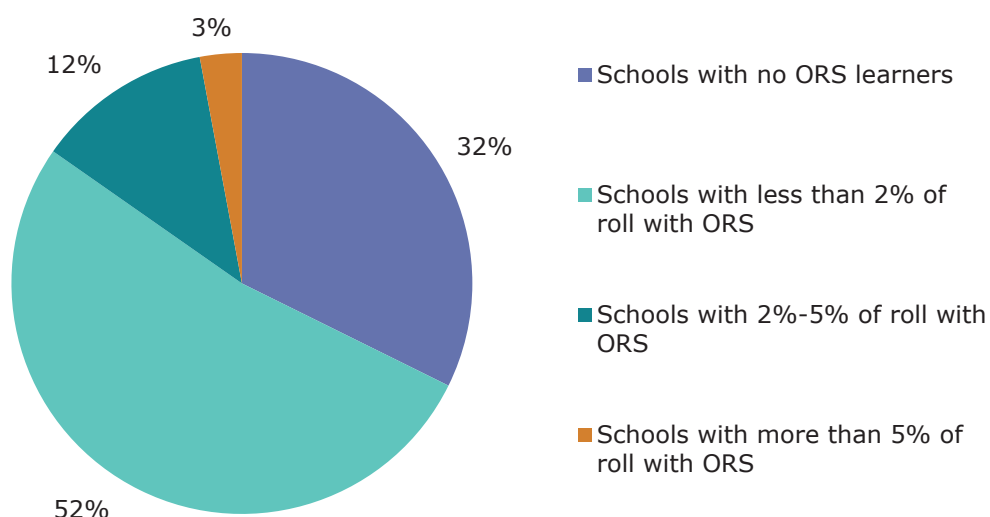


Data source: Ministry of Education

The distribution of disabled learners across mainstream schools is uneven; lower decile schools have more disabled learners than higher decile schools

The distribution of disabled learners is uneven across schools. Ministry of Education data show that about one third of mainstream English medium schools across the country did not have any high needs (ORS funded) disabled learners in 2021 (see Figure 2).

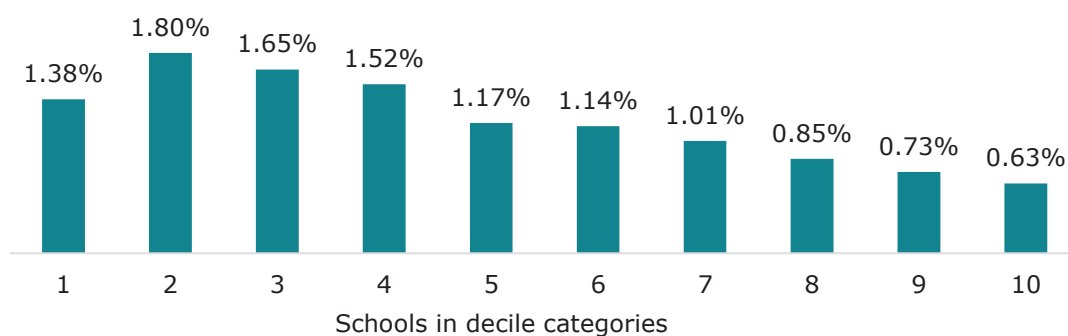
Figure 2: *Proportion of ORS learners in school roll*



Data source: Ministry of Education

Higher decile schools have fewer ORS funded disabled learners (as a proportion of their student roll) than lower decile schools (see Figure 3). Over the last 15 years, there has consistently been a lower proportion of ORS learners in Decile 10 schools. In Decile 2 and 4 schools, there has been an increase in the proportion of ORS learners over the past five to six years.¹¹

Figure 3: *ORS learners as a proportion of total student roll: Analysis by school decile*



Data source: Ministry of Education

How are disabled learners supported in education?

Each year the government spends over \$1 billion in additional support for disabled learners and others with educational needs, including:

- \$406 million for interventions for Target Student Groups, which includes ORS and funding for behaviour and communication services
- \$645 million for Learning Support and Alternative Education.

This section briefly describes the main learning support services that the Ministry of Education and schools provide to disabled learners.

Support for disabled learners varies, reflecting differing impairment types and levels of need

There are a range of learning support services provided in the education system. The type and level of support varies depending on a disabled learner's impairment(s) and the level of support they need to enable them to join in and learn alongside other children in their class.

There are specific services related to communication, behaviour, physical therapy, learning, hearing and vision, and health needs. Support also includes: the provision of specialised equipment, the modification of buildings, advice to teachers and development of individualised programmes, specialist teaching and/or therapy, personal care, and teacher aide support. (For more detail on the types of learning support see Appendix 6.)

When parents and whānau or a school is concerned that a child is having difficulty with some area of their learning or development, the school can request support from the Ministry of Education. This process usually involves discussions with the whānau, teachers and the school's learning support team, as well as observations, interactions with the child, and specific assessment activities.

Table 2: *Learning support provided based on level of need*

Level of need	Type of support
Highest level needs 3% of school-aged children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Ongoing Resourcing Scheme → School High Health Needs Fund → Severe Behaviour Service → Communication Service
Moderate to high-level needs 4% of school-aged children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) → Special Education Grant → Regional Health Schools → Moderate support for Physical, Hearing, Vision
Mild to moderate-level needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Special Education Grant

Source: How the Ministry's learning support works – Parents.education.govt.nz – Practical information about education for parents and carers

Mild to moderate needs learners: Most learners assessed as having mild or moderate needs are expected to be supported by their local school. All schools receive a Special Education Grant as part of their overall funding to help them do this. The school may use this to fund a special education needs coordinator (SENCO) and teacher aides, teacher release time to plan and adapt teaching and learning to meet the needs of the learner, or other groups or individual intervention programmes. Schools can define the size of their learning support team and their specific roles and allocate resources to them based on how they assess their learners' needs and staffing capacity. Teacher aides are a key part of school learning support teams.

For learners with moderate needs, the school may request additional support from specialist services such as RTLBs, hearing and vision, and physical disability services. Depending on the need, these specialist teachers may work directly with learners but are more likely to be involved in advising teachers, and in developing programmes for teachers and teacher aides to deliver.

High needs learners: High needs learners are likely to have longer term funding that follows them through their years in schooling. It is designed to support a higher level of individualised and specialist therapy, teaching, and learning support. A small number of schools with a higher proportion of disabled learners on their rolls are directly funded to employ their own specialists (i.e., physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and speech language therapists). All other schools access specialists employed by the Ministry of Education's learning support service.

Decisions about the type and amount of support can also be influenced by regional differences. Regional managers of Learning Support work with clusters of schools, iwi, Māori, and other service providers (such as RTLBs) to ensure resources are allocated equitably and reflects regional priorities.

The Ministry of Education is also funding Learning Support Coordinators (LSCs) to work in schools to improve the identification of learners with additional needs, including disabled learners, and to ensure access to appropriate services.





Part 2: What sort of education provision drives good outcomes for disabled learners?

Aotearoa New Zealand has signed international and national commitments that set high level expectations for education for disabled learners. To understand what quality, inclusive education looks like for disabled learners in schools, we reviewed national and international literature on best practice evidence. This section sets out the key components of education provision that drives good outcomes for disabled learners. We used these components to evaluate how good the education disabled learners are receiving is and how strong the supports are for it.

What we mean by quality, inclusive education for disabled learners

Our understanding of expectations for education for disabled learners is informed by international and national commitments to disability.

Under article 24 of the UNCPRD^f, disabled children have the right to access and receive a quality, inclusive and free primary and secondary education in the communities where they live. This means, among other things, that:

- sufficient numbers of schools must be **available** throughout the country
- schools must be **accessible** for all children with disabilities. This includes buildings (all new buildings must be accessible), transport, playgrounds, hygiene and toilets facilities, communications, curriculum, education materials, teaching methods, assessment, support services, and reasonable accommodations in all educational environments, including sport and recreational programmes and facilities
- education services must be **acceptable** to the requirements, cultures, and languages of all students with disabilities
- schools should **adapt** to the needs of students with different learning requirements.

^f Elaborated in General Comment No. 4 to Article 24 which examines how inclusion and reasonable accommodation could and should operate at all levels of an education system.

The vision for the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016–2026 is “a non-disabling society – a place where disabled people have an equal opportunity to achieve their goals and aspirations, and all of New Zealand works together to make this happen”.¹² Education is one of the eight outcomes identified as contributing towards achieving the vision of the Strategy. The aspiration for the education outcome is that disabled people get an excellent education and achieve their potential throughout their lives. This means that:

- Disabled people are consulted on and actively involved in the development and implementation of legislation and policies concerning education, including early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education.
- Access to mainstream education is inclusive (including policy, practice and pedagogy).
- Services that are specific to disabled people are high quality, available and accessible.
- Inclusive education is a core competency for all teachers and educators.
- Decision-making on issues regarding education of disabled people is informed by robust data and evidence.

The Education and Training Act 2020 states that students who have special education needs (including disabled learners), “*have the same rights to enrol and receive education at State schools as people who do not.*”¹³ Sections 33 and 34 of the Act explicitly state the right of all enrolled students, including those with learning support needs and disabilities, is to attend school during all hours the school is open for instruction^g.

The key principles that underpin this evaluation are summarised in Appendix 3.

Why quality, inclusive education matters

International research¹⁴ consistently highlights the following benefits of high quality, inclusive education for disabled learners:

- better social outcomes for disabled learners and their non-disabled peers
- better academic outcomes for disabled learners
- higher rates of attendance of disabled learners
- more likely to complete secondary schooling
- more likely to enrol in post-secondary education and enter employment.

When disabled learners have access to the full breadth of the school curriculum, including access to physical and outdoor education, they are more likely to have better wellbeing and social outcomes, and make better progress in learning and achievement.¹⁵

^g Section 42 of the Act also enables a student’s parent or full-time caregiver to request and agree with the principal and the Secretary for Education to vary the student’s hours of attendance as part of a transitional plan, where the particular needs of the student require this. The plan must be considered by all parties involved to be in the child’s best interest.

When they are included in their learning goal setting and pathway planning, disabled learners are also more likely to complete secondary school qualifications, and progress to higher education and/or enter employment after school.¹⁶

What outcomes matter for disabled learners?

Evidence shows that the best outcomes for disabled learners in education are the same as those for non-disabled learners. These include:

- attending school, feeling that they belong, are included, and have a voice
- progressing in learning and achievement
- being confident in their identities, languages, and cultures
- being safe and free from ableism, racism, discrimination, and bullying
- having the social and emotional skills they need to thrive.

What are the components of quality, inclusive education practice in schools?

To understand what quality, inclusive education looks like for disabled learners, we carried out an extensive review of national and international literature on best practice evidence. We then worked with an Expert Advisory Group, made up of people with lived experience of disability, whānau, academics, practitioners, and agency officials, to identify four key components of quality, inclusive education practice.

Components of quality, inclusive education practice

- 1) Effective leadership that has strong expectations for inclusion
- 2) Quality teaching (including curriculum and assessment) and supportive environments
- 3) Strong partnerships with learners and whānau
- 4) Accessible school environments

For each component of quality, inclusive practice, we used the evidence^h to define what good looks like and a four-point scale for judging provision. Indicators around culturally responsive factors, like working with whānau and prioritising Te Tiriti o Waitangi, were embedded throughout these components. (For further details on the components of quality, inclusive practice, see Appendix 4.)

At the system level, what supports schools to provide quality, inclusive education for disabled learners?

Schools need support to provide quality, inclusive education for disabled learners. Our analysis identified four key enablers. For each enabler, we identified what needs to be in place to support education for disabled learners. (For further details on the system enablers, see Appendix 4.)

^h See Appendix 5 for an annotated bibliography of the evidence that informed the components of quality, inclusive education practice.

System level enablers supporting schools to provide quality, inclusive education for disabled learners

- 1) System level expectations and accountability
- 2) National curriculum and assessment
- 3) Workforce capability
- 4) Coordination and collaboration for transitions, pathways, and services



Part 3: What are the education experiences and outcomes for disabled learners?

While many disabled learners are positive about going to school and their learning, a significant proportion experience exclusion and poor outcomes. Not all schools are welcoming of disabled learners and, as a result, some disabled learners are being discouraged from enrolling in their local school. This section describes disabled learners' experiences of participation, learning, and wellbeing at school.

How we gathered information

To understand disabled learners' experiences and outcomes, we asked them and their parents and whānau about their experiences at school. In both an online survey and a set of interviews, we asked questions about their:

- 1) participation
- 2) learning
- 3) wellbeing and sense of belonging.

More details about the survey and interviews are set out in Appendix 2.

We also looked at:

- available data on learning and progress achievement for disabled learners
- analysis carried out by the Ministry of Education in 2020, using Statistics New Zealand's Integrated Data Infrastructure, on the educational experiences of disabled learners.

What we found: an overview

Disabled learners are still experiencing exclusion. We found that many disabled learners are being discouraged from enrolling in their local schools, asked to stay home due to resourcing issues, stood down, and are having to move schools. Too many disabled learners are also not supported to take part in wider school activities.

Disabled learners enjoy learning at school, but too many are not progressing sufficiently. We found most disabled learners enjoy learning at their school and almost half report that learning new things is one of the things they most like about school. However, disabled learners are more than twice as likely as non-disabled learners to leave school with no qualifications. Only half of parents and whānau thought their child is progressing well as a learner. Some expressed frustration that the school is not engaging their child or setting expectations at the right level.

Disabled learners enjoy going to school and feel safe, but a significant proportion do not feel accepted or that they belong. We found most disabled learners are positive about going to school and feel safe while there. Most also report having teachers who are kind, helpful, and care about them. However, a significant proportion do not feel accepted or that they belong. Some experience bullying and, concerningly, do not have close friends at school.

Our findings for learners' experiences and outcomes are set out in detail below.

1) Participation

This sections looks at:

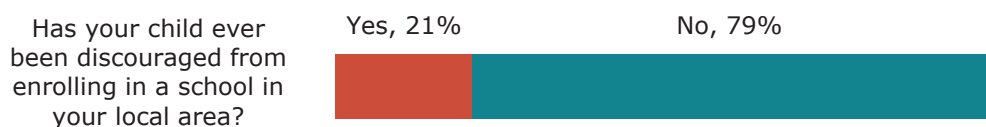
- a) enrolments
- b) attendance
- c) stand downs and suspensions
- d) changing schools
- e) taking part in activities at school.

a) Enrolment

Too many disabled learners are still experiencing exclusion

Disappointingly, many parents and whānau we heard from reported that they have been discouraged from enrolling their child in a local school. In our survey, 21 percent of parents and whānau of disabled learners have been discouraged from enrolling their child in a school in their local area (see Figure 4). This is despite legislation stating that disabled learners have the same right to enrol and receive education at state schools as learners who are not disabled.

Figure 4: *Discouraged from enrolling in a local school: Parent survey*



In our interviews and survey responses, parents and whānau recounted a range of reasons given by the school for why they could not enrol their disabled child, including lack of teacher aides and physical access constraints (for example, wheelchair access). Some schools placed conditions on a disabled child’s enrolment, typically requiring them to have ORS funding in place.

“School discouraged enrolment of our child even when we already have an older child in the local school.”
PARENT

b) Attendance

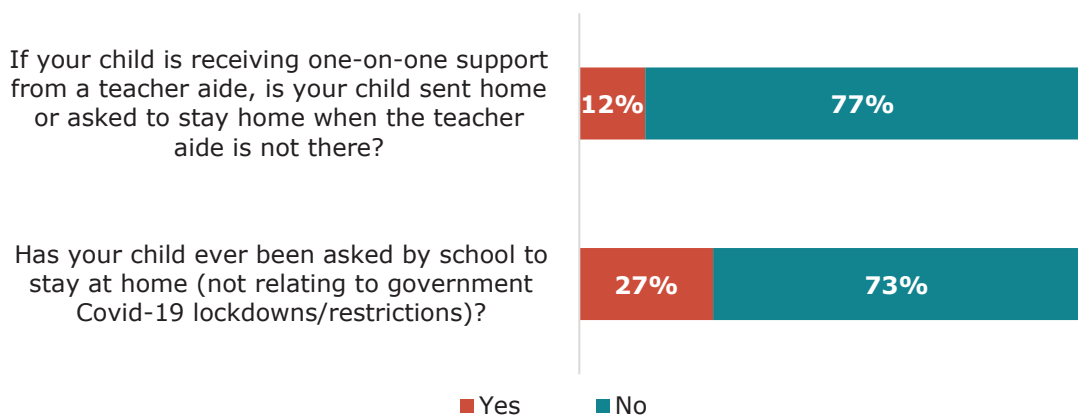
Disabled learners are facing barriers to attendance

We found that disabled learners are sometimes sent home or are asked by the school to stay at home due to resourcing issues. In our survey (see Figure 5):

- 27 percent of parents and whānau have been asked to keep their disabled child at home at least once (not related to government Covid-19 restrictions)
- 12 percent have been sent home or asked to stay home when their teacher aide is not there.

Among our survey respondents, 9 percent of parents and whānau reported that their disabled child attends school for less than four hours on a typical day. Of those who reported shorter days at school, 56 percent was at the request of the parent, but 44 percent was at the suggestion of the school.

Figure 5: *Sent home by school or asked to stay home: Parent survey*



Absences from school can have a negative effect on disabled learners’ learning and sense of belonging at school.

“I always get left out. And I always get sent home. It’s hard to learn when I don’t get the chance.”

DISABLED LEARNER

For working parents and whānau, the uncertainty of whether they would need to keep their child home from school, or collect them during the day, presented major challenges. From our interviews, we heard examples where parents and whānau had to give up their jobs so they were available to pick their child up early as the school often struggled to support their child.

“At primary and intermediate levels, I was regularly called in to collect my child due to inadequate teacher aide cover.”

PARENT

c) Stand downs and suspensions

Disabled learners are more likely to be stood down or suspended

Secondary school-age disabled learners are between two and three times more likely to be stood down or suspended compared to non-disabled learners.¹⁷ A learner who is stood down or suspended is not allowed to attend school for a specified period of time and this can also have longer-term consequences for learners.

d) Changing schools

Disabled learners are more likely to change schools, which can disrupt their education

Disabled learners at primary school are three times more likely than non-disabled learners to change schools, multiple times (outside the year levels where changing schools would be expected).¹⁸

In our survey (see Figure 6):

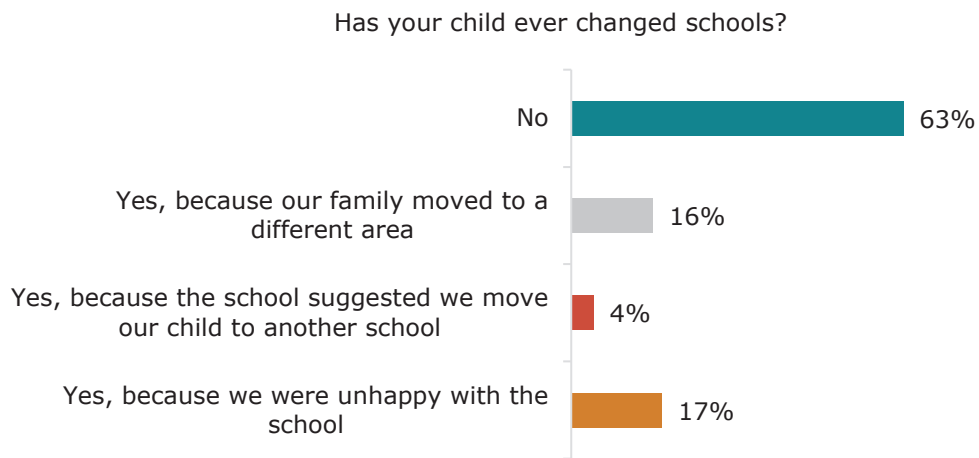
- 17 percent of parents and whānau have moved their child because they were unhappy with the school
- a small proportion (4 percent) have changed school because the school had suggested they move.

These findings were reflected in our interviews where we heard examples where schools had threatened suspension if the disabled learner did not leave the school.

“We were forced to move him to a special school.”

PARENT

Figure 6: *Reasons for changing schools: Parent survey*



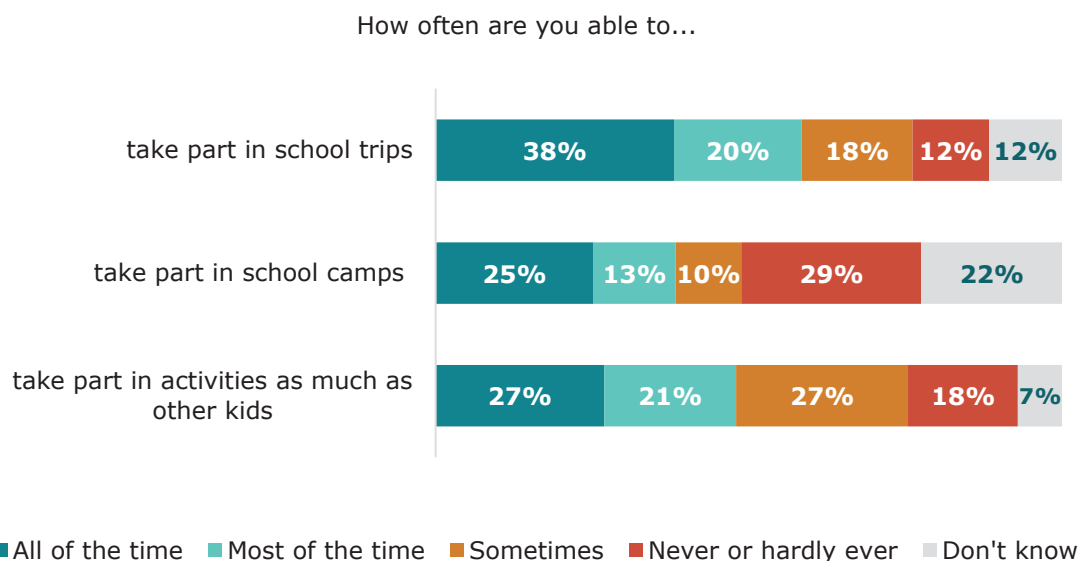
e) Taking part in school activities

Too many disabled learners are not able to take part in school activities as much as other learners

Many disabled learners we heard from reported they were not able to take part in school activities as much as other students (see Figure 7). In the survey:

- less than half of disabled learners were able to take part in activities as much as other kids all or most of the time
- around a third of disabled learners were able to take part in school camps all or most of the time
- just over half were able to take part in school trips all or most of the time.

Figure 7: *Participation in school activities: Disabled learner survey*



Through interviews and survey comments, we also heard of instances where learners have experienced exclusion from activities, school trips or camps, or that their attendance was on the condition that their parent also attended.

“My mum had to write a long letter to the school as they would not allow me on a school trip to the local beach.”

DISABLED LEARNER

“I get excluded from some activities. I’m not allowed to go swimming and that’s my favourite thing to do. ... I hate being left out when everyone else is swimming.”

DISABLED LEARNER

This exclusion from the broader life of school can impact severely on disabled learners’ sense of belonging.

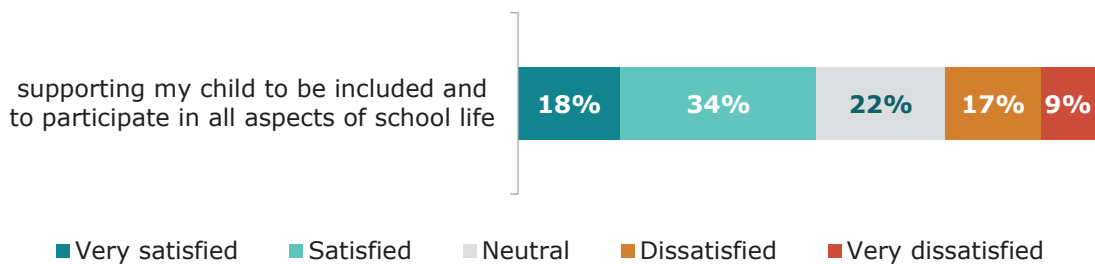
Only half (52 percent) of the parents and whānau in our survey were satisfied with how well the school is supporting their disabled child to be included and to participate in school life (see Figure 8).

“School leaves everything to the learning centre; they don’t consider her in any of the usual peer group activities. The regular teachers have no contact [with her].”

PARENT

Figure 8: *How well the school is supporting inclusion and participation: Parent survey*

How satisfied are you with how well the school is...



In our interviews, we heard that the disabled learners who enjoy school most are learning in classroom environments that are inclusive.

“Because the teachers are so inclusive the whole school vibe is inclusive.”
PARENT

“His class has started using some sign language to support his use of it.”
PARENT

Interestingly, in our survey teacher aides were more positive than disabled learners and their parents and whānau. The majority (73 percent) of teacher aides indicated that the disabled learners they work with always or often participate in sport, cultural and education outside the classroom (EOTC) activities alongside their non-disabled peers. However, in interviews with teacher aides we also heard examples of how some disabled learners are being excluded from classroom activities.

“Some of the teachers like us to take some of the learners away and work with them individually. I don’t, I keep them in the room, so they participate. He was missing out on karakia and waiata at start of day. I think it is important that they are there.”
TEACHER AIDE

2) Learning

This section looks at:

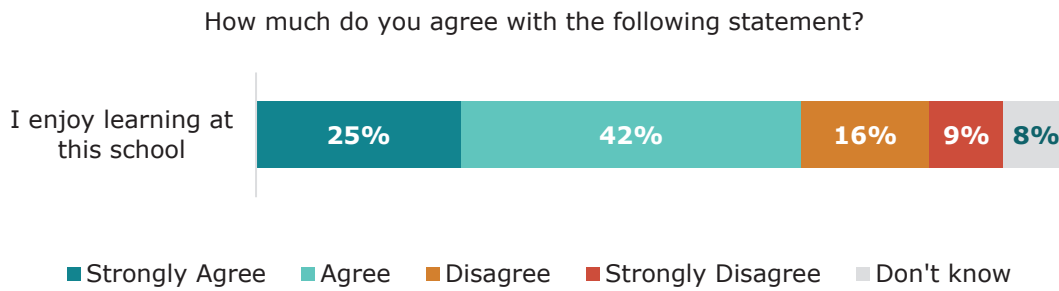
- a) enjoyment of learning
- b) progress in learning.

a) Enjoyment of learning

Many disabled learners enjoy learning at school

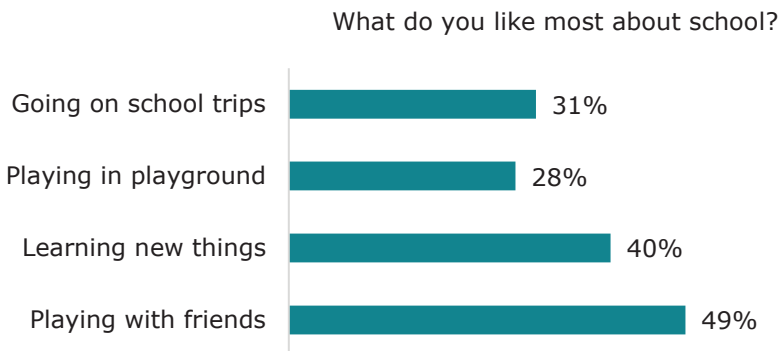
Over two thirds of disabled learners who responded to our survey indicated they enjoy learning at their school (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: *Enjoyment of learning at school: Disabled learner survey*



Almost half (40 percent) reported that “learning new things in class” is one of the things they most like about school (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: *What disabled learners like most about school: Disabled learner survey*



We also heard examples of disabled learners’ enjoyment of school in our interviews and survey comments.

“I just really love my new school. All the teachers are really kind and helpful, and they don’t get mad if I’m too slow. My teacher aide always helps me, and I also have a special room where I can go and sleep or rest if I feel tired after my treatments at the hospital. At my old school, I had to sleep in the sick bay and I hated it because no one was with me, and I felt scared and lonely by myself. I enjoy all my classes and teachers and I try my best. I’m really proud of myself in 2022, and one day I will be a prefect.”

DISABLED LEARNER



“There are great systems to support her. The occupational therapist supports her inclusion in outdoor activities and the school has equipment to allow her to be a part of the group work.”
PARENT

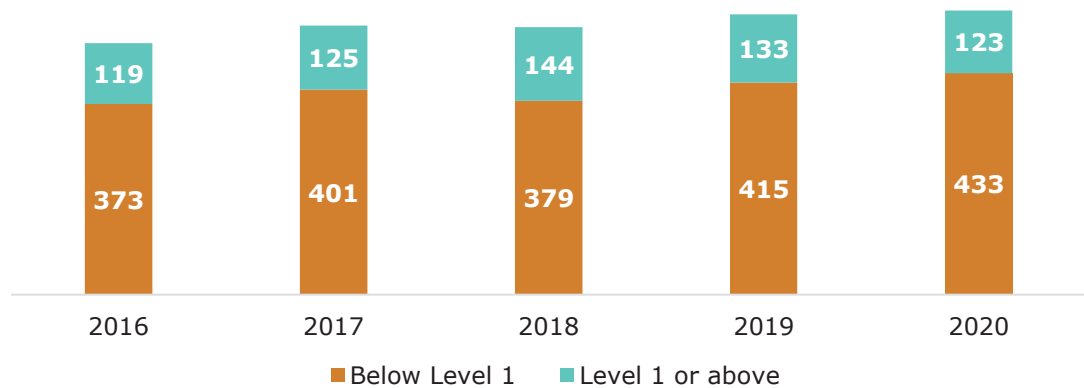
b) Progression in learning

Too many disabled learners are not progressing well in learning

Education data on learning and progress achievement does not specifically identify disabled learners. However, we know that disabled learners are more than twice as likely to leave school with no qualifications than non-disabled learners (17 percent versus 7 percent).¹⁹

Available data on ORS funded learners shows that over the past five years, 72 to 78 percent left school without gaining an NZCEA qualification²⁰ (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: *Number of ORS funded school leavers by highest attainment*



Data source: Ministry of Education

Only half of the parents and whānau in our survey thought their child is progressing well as a learner (see Figure 12). In interviews, some expressed frustration that the school is not engaging their child in meaningful learning, or not setting expectations at the right level.

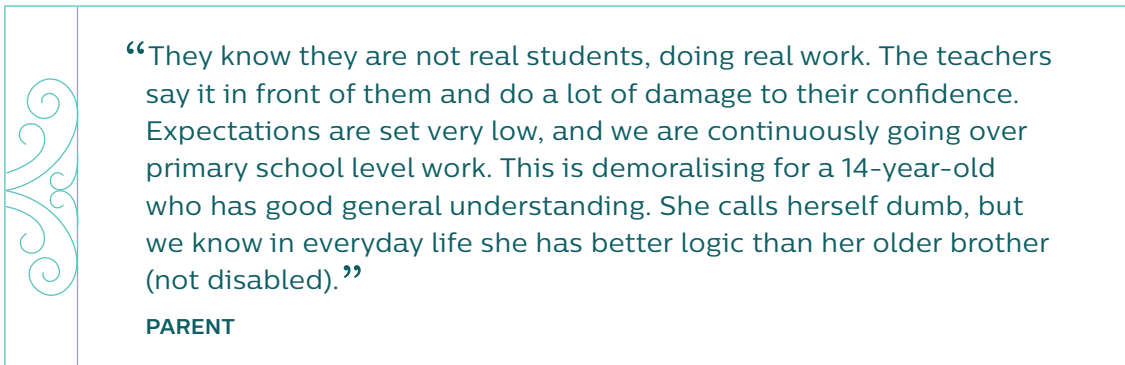
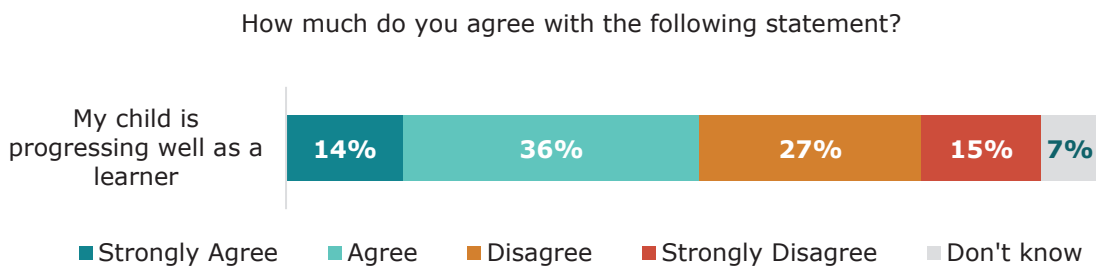


Figure 12: *Progressing well as a learner: Parent survey*



3) Wellbeing and belonging

This section looks at disabled learners’:

- a) enjoyment of school and feeling safe
- b) cultural identity
- c) being accepted and sense of belonging, including bullying, and friendships.

a) Enjoyment of school and feeling safe

Many disabled learners are positive about going to school and have teachers who are kind, helpful and care about them

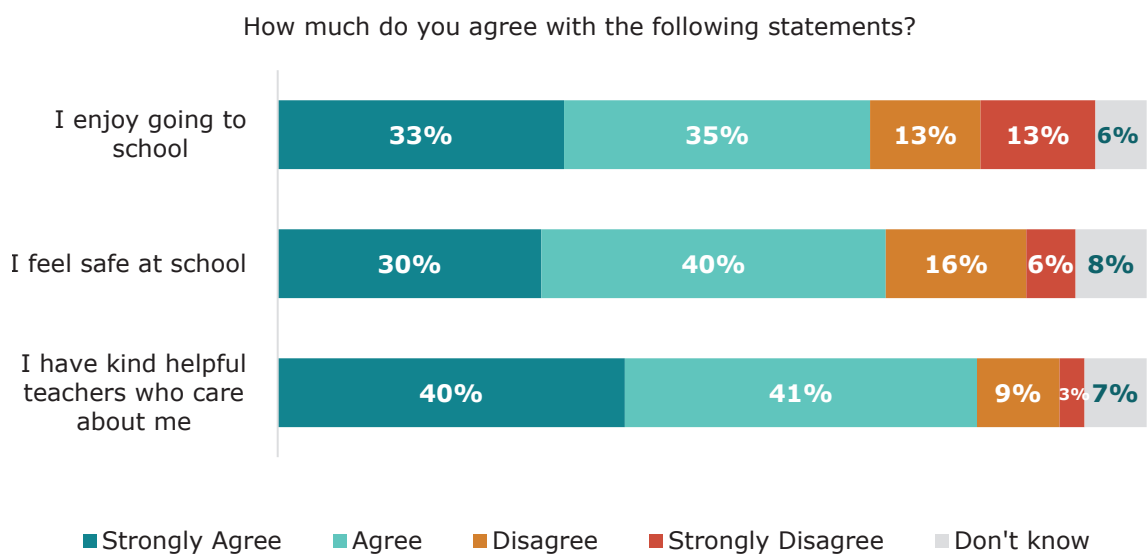
More than two thirds (68 percent) of the disabled learners who responded to the survey are positive about going to school, and 70 percent reported feeling safe while there. Most (81 percent) agreed they have kind, helpful teachers who care about them (see Figure 13).

“I love school, it’s great and my teachers are great. I love being with the other students. I love being treated the same way as them and given the same opportunities. It is important to me to be included in all aspects, not just being present.”

DISABLED LEARNER



Figure 13: *Wellbeing at school: Disabled learner survey*



b) Cultural identity

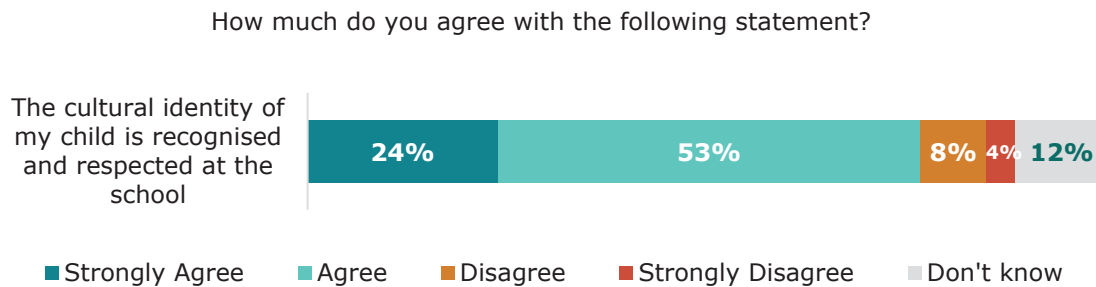
In our survey, the majority (85 percent) of parents and whānau feel their child’s cultural identity is recognised by the school. From our interviews, we heard examples of schools trying to match the learners with teachers and teacher aides who can speak their home language, especially in the case of non-verbal disabled learners (see Figure 14).



“Cultural responsiveness in the school is very high. There is a Muslim club once a week for the kids and his current teacher is Muslim and understands the cultural requirements.”

PARENT



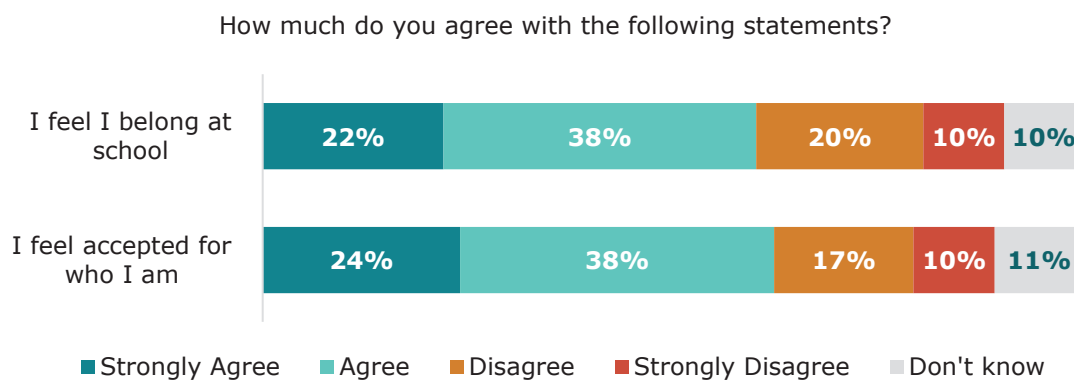
Figure 14: *Cultural identity is respected at school: Parent survey*

However, Māori and Pacific parents are more likely to disagree that their child's cultural identity is recognised and respected (17 percent Māori and 22 percent Pacific, compared with 12 percent of all parents and whānau).

c) Being accepted and having a sense of belonging

A significant proportion of disabled learners do not feel accepted or that they belong at school, and do not have close friends

Concerningly, more than a quarter (27 percent) of disabled learners we heard from do not feel accepted for who they are, and almost a third (30 percent) do not feel they belong at school (compared to 17 percent and 15 percent respectively from latest available data from a survey of New Zealand students²¹) (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: *Sense of belonging and acceptance at school: Disabled learner survey*

Some disabled learners recalled experiences of bullying or being picked on, and also of feeling too scared to tell anyone.

“Sometimes I get bullied because of my bumpy speech. I don’t like it. But sometimes I’m too scared to tell a teacher.”

DISABLED LEARNER

“Because I am quiet, no-one knows I am always picked on (including threats of physical harm, being followed home). I am too scared to do anything about it and I don’t want mum to interfere.”

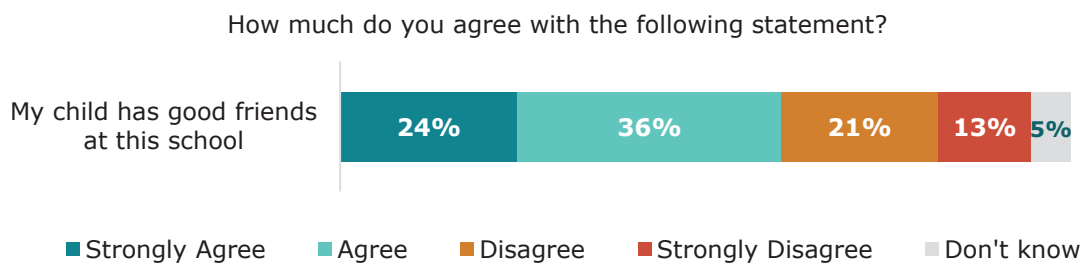
DISABLED LEARNER


“Last year I got picked on by some kids, which made me not want to go to school/my class.”

DISABLED LEARNER

In our interviews, we heard from parents and whānau how important it is for their child to have friends who help foster a sense of belonging for their child at school. Concerningly, a third of parents and whānau indicated in the survey that their child does not have close friends at school (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: *Having friends at school: Parent survey*





“He does not have any friends and the school has not done enough to create meaningful relationships. Despite being asked multiple times, the school was not willing to set up a buddy system during select break times to assist my son to develop social skills as they felt this impinged on students’ freedoms. It was disappointing they could not see that students could gain a lot from helping others and find ways to bridge the gaps that exist between people who are different from each other.”

PARENT

While many disabled learners and their parents and whānau reported not feeling accepted at school, the majority (73 percent) of teacher aides who responded to our survey reported that the disabled learners they work with are always or often included by other students, and get acknowledged for their contribution in school activities.

Conclusion

Most disabled learners we heard from enjoy going to school and are engaged in learning. However, despite strengthened legislation for inclusion of disabled learners, a significant proportion are still experiencing exclusion, poor experiences, and outcomes at school.



Part 4: How are different groups of disabled learners doing?

Disabled learners are a highly diverse group in terms of types of impairments, and level and complexity of needs. In this section we examine if some groups of disabled learners are doing better or worse than others at school. We found differences across groups of disabled learners in terms of their participation, learning, wellbeing, and belonging at school. Disabled learners with more complex needs reported poorer experiences and outcomes than learners with mostly physical or sensory impairments.

We compared five broad groups of disabled learners

Because the term disabled includes a wide range of impairments, needs, and complexity, we wanted to understand if some groups of disabled learners are doing better or worse than others at school. Based on international guidelines for disability identification,²² our survey asked parents and whānau to what extent their child experiences significant difficulties in a range of areas of functioning. We then grouped the survey respondents into five broad groups, which are outlined in the following table (for further details on these groups, see Appendix 7).

Table 3: *Disabled Learner needs for adaptations and supportsⁱ*

Group	Disabled Learner needs for adaptation and support
A	Mainly physical and sensory impairments
B	Neurodivergent
C	Mainly intellectual/cognitive impairments and support with communication needs
D	Most complex needs relating to intellectual/cognitive impairments, communication, self-care, neurodivergent , and requiring significant support
E	Complex needs relating to intellectual/cognitive impairments, and neurodivergent , and requiring significant support

ⁱ In this report we refer to disabled learners in Groups D and E as having more complex needs as they need significant adaptation of curriculum and teaching as well as support with managing their emotions and relating to others.

What we found: An overview

Disabled learners with more complex needs are more likely to report poor experiences and outcomes than other disabled learners. Those who are neurodivergent are also more likely to report being discouraged from enrolment or being asked by the school to stay home. Those with cognitive impairments, requiring significant curriculum and teaching adaptations, are less likely to learn in a way that suits them, and their parents and whānau are less happy with their learning progress. Learners with the most complex needs are less likely to feel they belong at school and are less able to participate in activities.

Disabled learners with more complex needs report poorer experiences and outcomes than other disabled learners

We compared survey responses of the five groups of disabled learners and found that those with more complex needs reported poorer experiences and outcomes at school than other disabled learners.

a) Participation

In terms of experiences of exclusion, disabled learners who are neurodiverse (groups B, D, and E) are:

- more likely to have been discouraged from enrolling in a school in their local area (see Figure 17)
- more likely to have been asked by school to stay home (see Figure 18).

Figure 17: *Discouraged from enrolling in local school: Parent survey*

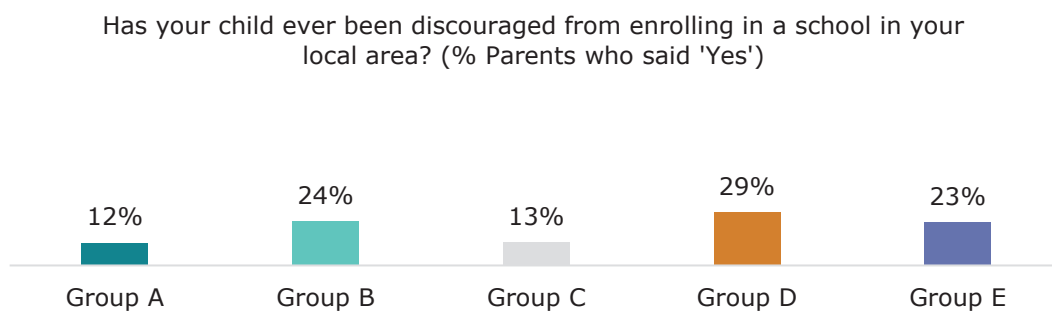
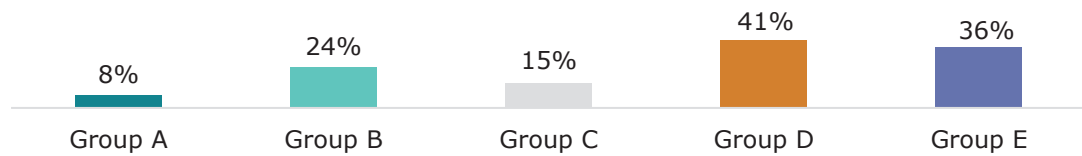



Figure 18: *Asked by school to stay home: Parent survey*

Has your child ever been asked by school to stay at home, not relating to government Covid-19 lockdowns/restrictions? (% Parents who said 'Yes')



In our interviews and survey comments, we also heard examples of exclusion experienced by disabled learners with complex needs.



“My child was one of three removed from their primary school in one year. Schools shouldn’t be able to refuse enrolment of pupils and they make life very difficult for families of children who don’t fit inside the perfect student box. There are also no statistics kept on how many neurodiverse children are excluded in New Zealand – that’s wrong.”

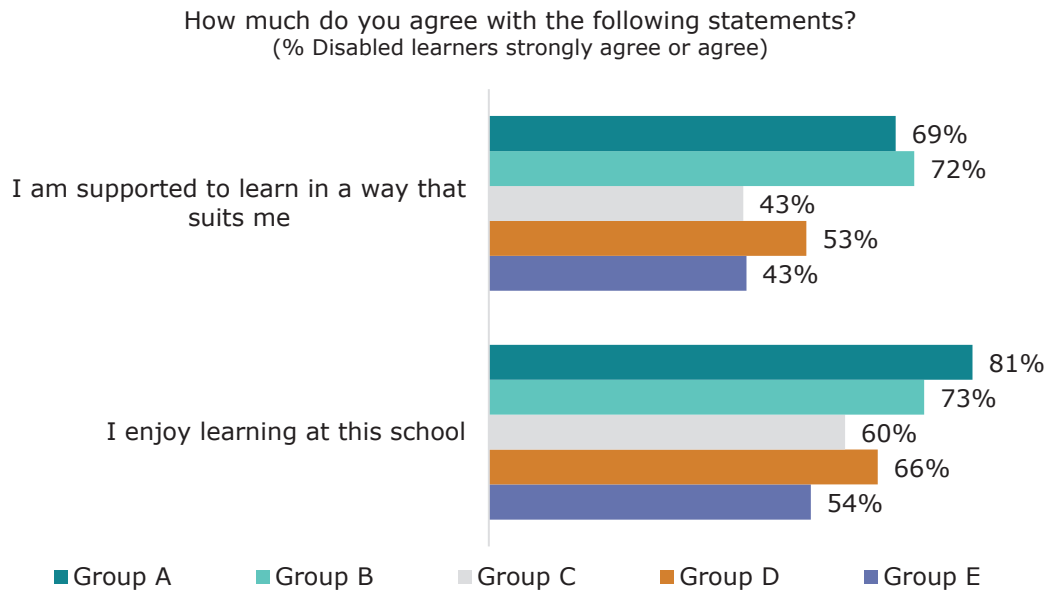
PARENT

b) Learning

In terms of learning at school, disabled learners who require significant curriculum and teaching adaptations (groups C, D, and E) are (see Figure 19):

- less likely to report they enjoy learning at school
- less likely to agree that they are supported to learn in a way that suits them.

Figure 19: *Disabled learners' view of learning at school:
Disabled learner survey*



In our survey comments, some learners with complex needs spoke of feeling stressed about learning and not feeling understood at school.

“Mostly I hate school, even though I want to really like it. It exhausts me and stresses me, and teacher aides don’t understand me. I want to feel understood.”

DISABLED LEARNER

“I hate school. I hate writing, reading and maths. School frustrates me. It’s so hard. I am dumb. I’m stupid. I’m scared of school.”

DISABLED LEARNER

“I don’t like it that I have had to miss out on so much because of Covid and less teacher aides. I struggle to understand all the changes and I get upset and frustrated. It’s confusing when what I understand changes all the time, then I become anxious, my behaviour changes and its difficult for those around me.”

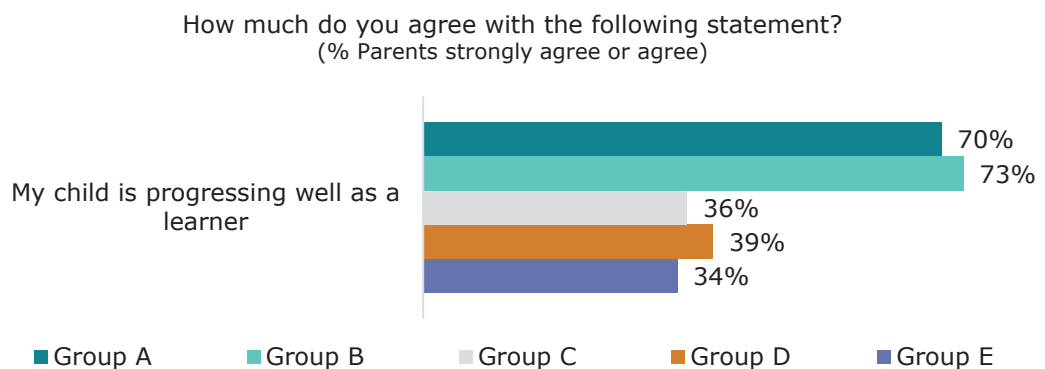
DISABLED LEARNER

“They just think I’m a naughty kid.”

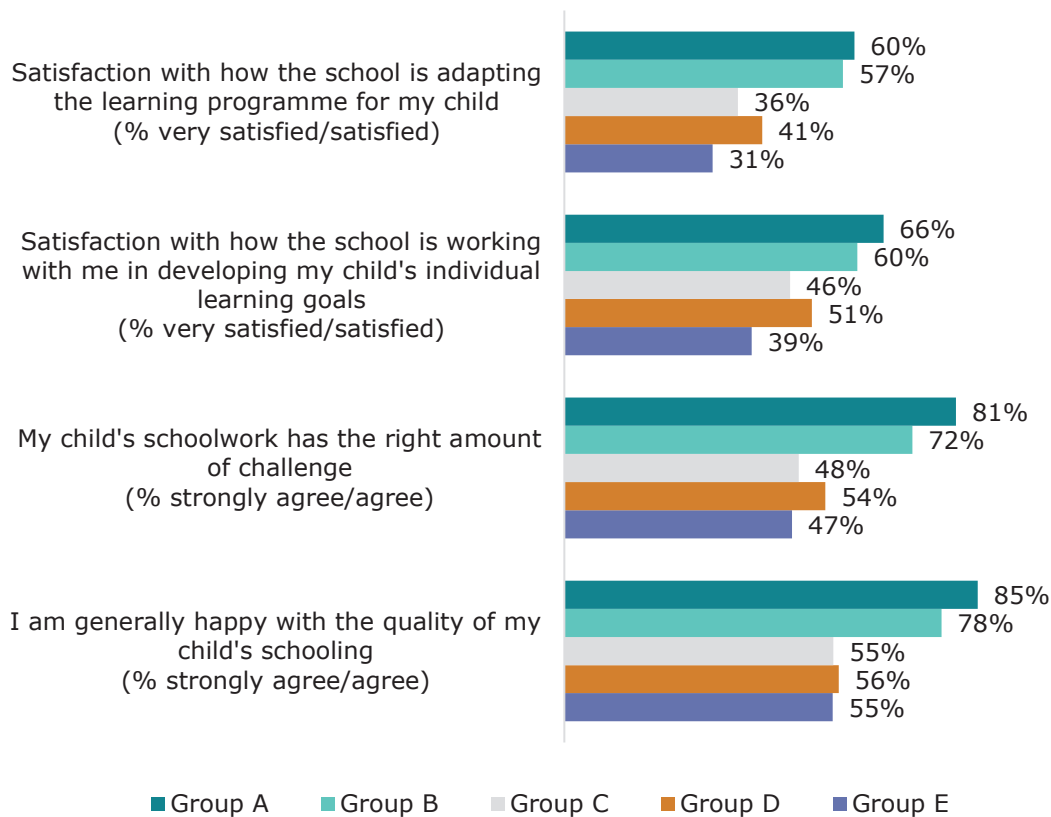
DISABLED LEARNER

Parents and whānau of disabled learners with more complex needs are also less likely to agree that their child is progressing well as a learner at school (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: *Parents’ views of child’s learning progress: Parent survey*



Only about one in three (31 percent and 36 percent) parents and whānau of learners with complex needs in Groups C and E were satisfied with how the school is adapting the learning programme for their child (compared to more than half of parents and whānau of learners in Groups A and B). These parents and whānau are also less satisfied with how the school is working with them in developing their child’s learning goals, are less likely to think their schoolwork has the right amount of challenge and are less happy overall with the quality of their child’s schooling (see Figure 21).

Figure 21: *How well are schools supporting learning: Parent responses*

In interviews, some whānau told us about the school not understanding the learning difficulties their child struggles with and, therefore, not tailoring the work and expectations.

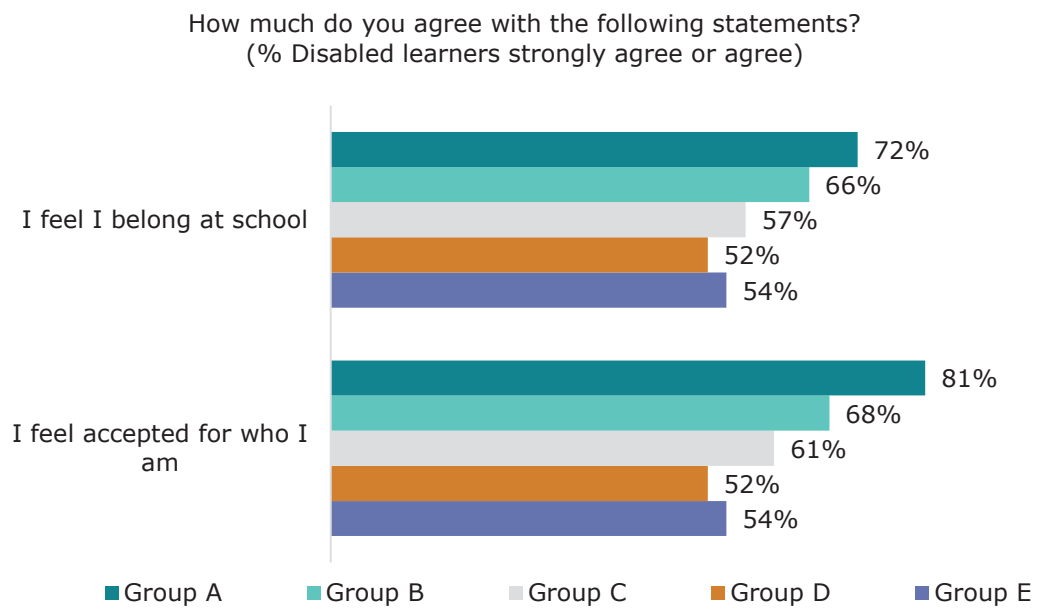
“[S]ometimes the expectations are too high and not well understood. People treat him more able than he is and don't realise he has developmental delay and other challenges.”

PARENT

c) Wellbeing and belonging

In terms of wellbeing and belonging at school, disabled learners with the most complex needs are (see Figure 22):

- less likely to feel they belong at school
- less likely to feel accepted for who they are.

Figure 22: *Wellbeing and belonging at school: Disabled learner survey*

Some neurodivergent learners told us about the struggles they have at school and how this is affecting their wellbeing.

“I need some peace – some quiet time – because some kids are shouting and screaming, and it is not helping me. I need quiet space.”

DISABLED LEARNER

“I find school scary and confusing. But I need to try and go because otherwise I will always be lonely and won’t be able to have a friend or fit into society. I am scared of not fitting into society. I can’t talk to people.”

DISABLED LEARNER

“It’s very hard to get used to, especially high school. Being disabled at high school can be taxing on your mental health, and it can be hard to get used to the culture and make friends. It can take years, I know, and it paid off. Just keep going for the learning, it’s not always about the people.”

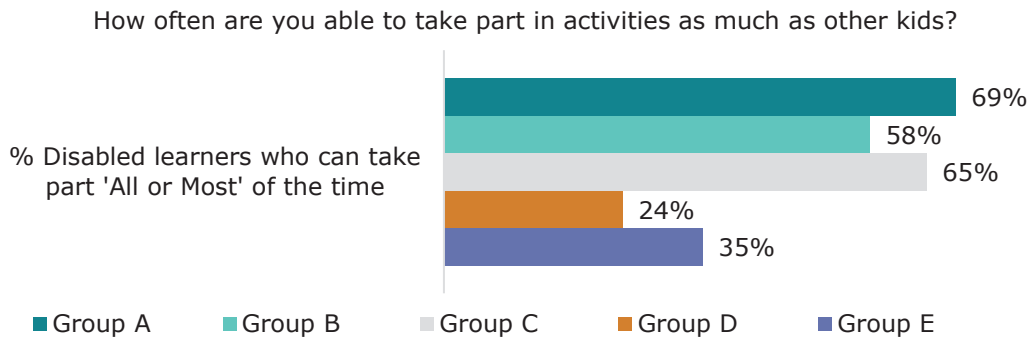
DISABLED LEARNER

Disabled learners with the most complex needs also reported that they are much less likely to participate in EOTC activities (see Figure 23).

“Didn’t go to the school ball even though I had bought a ticket. Some of the rules and the way we were told about them made me very anxious.”

DISABLED LEARNER

Figure 23: *Taking part in activities as much as other kids: Disabled learner survey*



Parents and whānau of learners with more complex needs are the least satisfied with how well the school is supporting their child’s wellbeing and inclusion, and how they help their child manage their stress or anxiety (see Figure 24).

Parents and whānau we heard from also talked about the need for teachers to better understand disabled learners with complex needs, particularly neurodivergent learners.

“There was little training done for the teachers around disabilities such as autism. Teacher aides were often left to plan instead of teachers. My child’s current school has far less issues than my child’s earlier schools.”

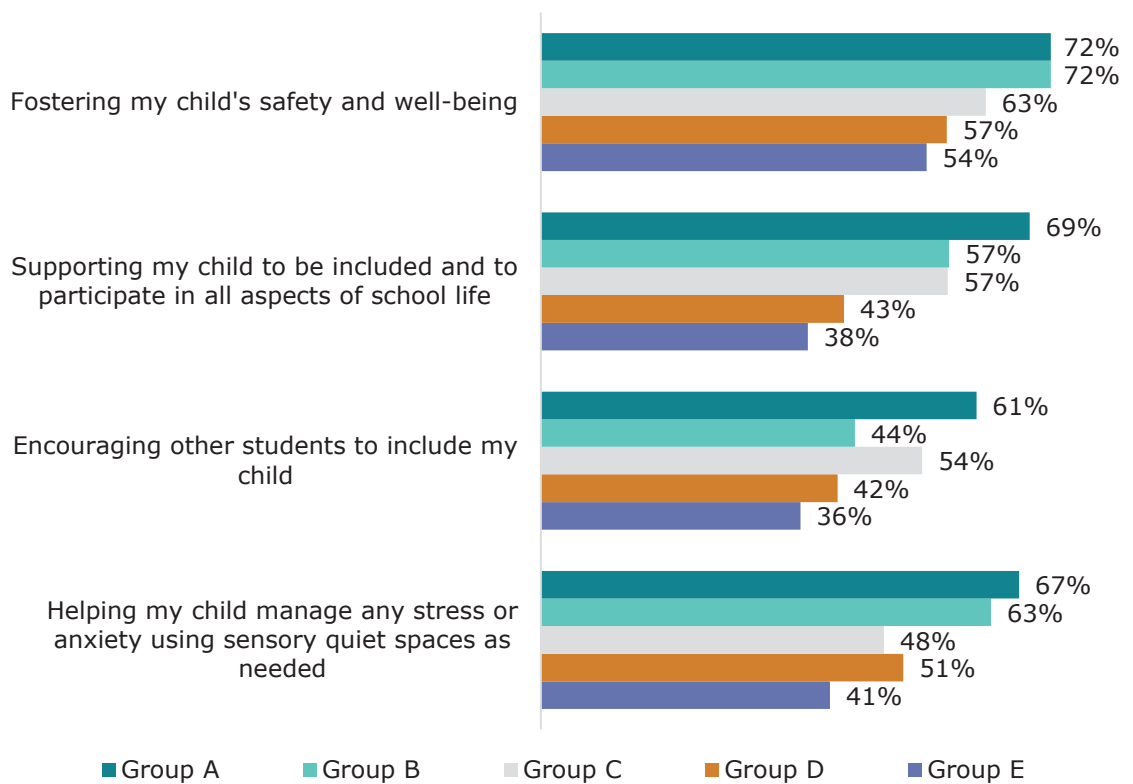
PARENT

“Better education to all staff in schools, particularly around autism so they can gain a better understanding to help children and provide education to all. We have had such an awful experience with this seemingly good decile 9 school. They have been detrimental to the health and wellbeing of my child and us as parents.”

PARENT

Figure 24: Satisfaction with school support for disabled learners’ wellbeing and inclusion: Parent survey

How satisfied are you with how the school is supporting your child in the following areas? (% Parents very satisfied or satisfied)



Story 4.1: Six-year-old disabled learner's story of struggling to be included at school

Despite a team of specialists and learning support staff supporting Eli's^j transition to primary school, the first year at school was very challenging.

Eli wasn't able to communicate with his teachers and peers, which was frustrating for him. He tried to get away from the situation by running away from school. Due to lack of teacher aide support, during breaks and play time, he was unable to self-regulate his behaviour with his peers, often resulting in conflict in the playground.

The school's response was to suggest he attend school for a shorter day, missing out on all the social time at school. This resulted in Eli not belonging to any social group or having any opportunities to build his skills for social learning. Eli's Mum gave up her job to help in the school and to support Eli in the playground.

Conclusion

Disabled learners with more complex needs are more likely to report poorer experiences and outcomes at school than other disabled learners. Those who are neurodivergent are more likely to report being discouraged from enrolment or being asked by the school to stay home. Those with cognitive impairments, requiring significant curriculum and teaching adaptations, are less likely to learn in a way that suits them, and their parents and whānau are less happy with their learning progress. Concerningly, learners with the most complex needs are less likely to feel they belong at school and are less able to participate in EOTC activities.

^j This is not his real name. Throughout the report we use aliases to ensure anonymity.



Part 5: How good is education provision for disabled learners?

The mixed picture of outcomes for disabled learners reflects the quality of education they receive. While some disabled learners are positive about their learning at school, not all are receiving a high-quality inclusive education. We looked at key components of education practice at schools. Across schools, there are examples of good practice, but there are also areas of concern, particularly around teachers' confidence in teaching disabled learners.

This section sets out areas of education provision for disabled learners that are stronger and areas of concern. We also share some examples of good practice.

How we gathered information

To understand how good education is for disabled learners, we gathered the views of disabled learners and their parents and whānau through interviews and surveys. We also conducted surveys and interviews with school principals, Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), teachers, and teacher aides. To get a closer understanding of school practice, we analysed school policies, strategic documents, learning support reports, and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) from 21 case study schools, and visited eight schools to observe teaching practice.

What we looked at

To understand how good the quality of education is for disabled learners, we looked at the following four components of inclusive education provision for disabled learners (see Appendix 4 for more details):

- 1) Leadership and expectations for inclusion
- 2) Quality teaching and supportive environments
- 3) Partnership with learners, parents and whānau
- 4) Accessibility of school buildings and facilities

What we found: an overview

Leadership in schools did not fully understand what is expected. We found most schools have a commitment to welcoming disabled learners and many are prioritising support for disabled learners. However, many principals are not effectively setting clear expectations for teachers. Too many school principals and Boards do not yet have a full understanding of legal obligations to disabled learners and policies that support disabled learners. Also, too many Boards are not well informed of outcomes for disabled learners in their schools.

Many teachers were not confident in teaching disabled learners. We found most disabled learners enjoy learning at their school and have teachers who help build their confidence. However, too many disabled learners do not feel supported to learn in a way that suits them. Many parents and whānau are not happy with the quality of their disabled learner's schooling. Most teachers lack confidence in teaching disabled learners, particularly those with complex needs who require significant adaptations. Confidence among secondary school teachers is particularly low.

Partnerships with learners, parents, and whānau were mixed. Most parents and whānau reported finding it easy to talk to teachers about their child's learning. However, there is insufficient involvement of disabled learners and their whānau in planning their learning. Few schools have good processes for gathering feedback from disabled learners and their whānau about how well the school is meeting their needs and how to improve.

School buildings and facilities were mostly accessible. We found that most schools are generally physically accessible. However, schools with older buildings still face challenges and the process for making alterations can be complex and slow. Some parents reported that modern learning environments with large open classrooms can create sensory overload for some disabled learners, and neurodivergent learners in particular.

Our findings for each area of education provision are set out in detail below. We include the different perspectives of disabled learners, parents and whānau, school principals, SENCOs, teachers, and teacher aides. Overall, learners, parents and whānau, and teachers are less positive, whilst principals and SENCOs are more positive.

1) Leadership and expectations

School leadership set the expectations and shape the school's overall culture. It includes how Boards, principals and their senior teams set schools' goals, priorities, plans and resourcing decisions.

This section looks at the following areas of leadership and expectations:

- a) culture of valuing disabled learners
- b) prioritising support for disabled learners
- c) understanding and putting into practice legal obligations
- d) setting clear expectations
- e) monitoring outcomes.

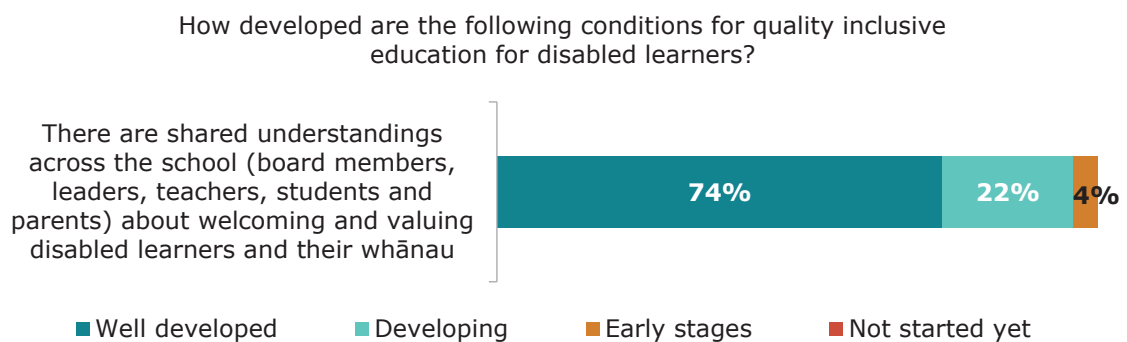
Aspects that are stronger

a) Culture of valuing disabled learners

Most schools reported a shared understanding about welcoming disabled learners

Encouragingly, three quarters (74 percent) of school principals reported there is a well-developed shared understanding across their school about welcoming and valuing disabled learners and their parents and whānau (see Figure 25).

Figure 25: *Shared understanding across the school about welcoming and valuing disabled learners and their whānau: School principal survey*



In our interviews, we heard that in schools where leaders understand and value the diverse nature of their school community, they become champions of inclusion for all learners – including disabled learners. In these schools, expectations about welcoming, including, and teaching disabled learners are explicit and well understood by students, parents and whānau, teachers, and Board members. These leaders made sure that the way the school is organised and run helped teachers work together, and with specialists and families, to plan and deliver quality education for disabled learners.

Parents and whānau spoke about how important the attitude of school leaders, including SENCOs, was when they enrolled and moved their child to the school.

“When we moved to this school the SENCO and enrolment was great. Very welcoming. It was comforting. Felt like I could trust them.”

PARENT



b) Prioritising support for disabled learners

Many schools are prioritising support for disabled learners

Many schools are prioritising support for disabled learners, including resourcing. Almost two thirds (64 percent) of the school principals reported that their school Board prioritises to a great extent additional funding (on top of ORS, In Class Support, and Special Education Grants) to provide learning support for disabled learners.

This was reinforced in our interviews where some school leaders and parents and whānau told us about the school's commitment to prioritise support for disabled learners.

“We do whatever we have to do to make it work.”

SCHOOL LEADER

“We ensure there is funding for enough adults to provide inclusive classrooms.”

SCHOOL LEADER

“Despite not having ORS funding, the school has been very supportive of us. Our child's place in the learning support unit has never been compromised.”

PARENT

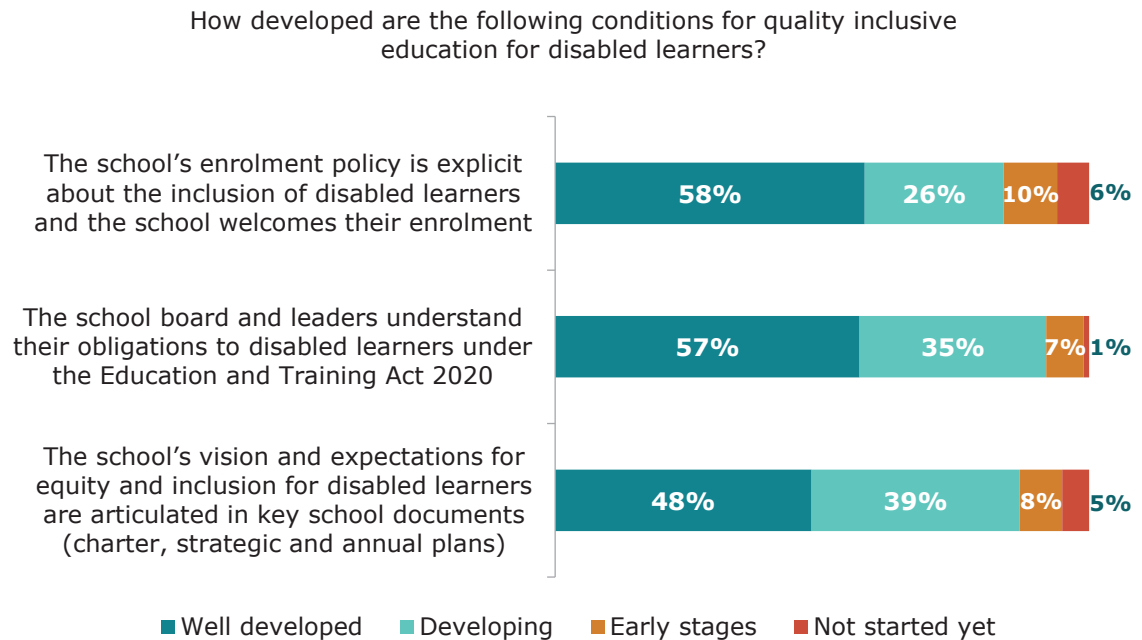
Areas of concern

c) Understanding and putting into practice legal obligations

Too many school principals and Boards do not yet have a full understanding of legal obligations to disabled learners and not all schools have policies that support disabled learners

Almost half (43 percent) of school principals in our survey indicated their school leadership does not yet have a well-developed understanding of their legislative obligations to disabled learners (see Figure 26).

Figure 26: *School leadership and expectations for inclusive education: School principals survey*



Among SENCOs, nearly a third (29 percent) indicated their school does not yet have policies fully in place to enact legal obligations to disabled learners. This was reflected in our interviews where we found that, even among the best-intentioned school leaders, there is a lack of understanding of legislative obligations and the reasonable accommodations they need to provide for disabled learners. In our visits with schools, we also found while most have policies that reflected legal obligations, these had often been developed using external templates and it was unclear what engagement principals and Board members have in understanding key legislation.

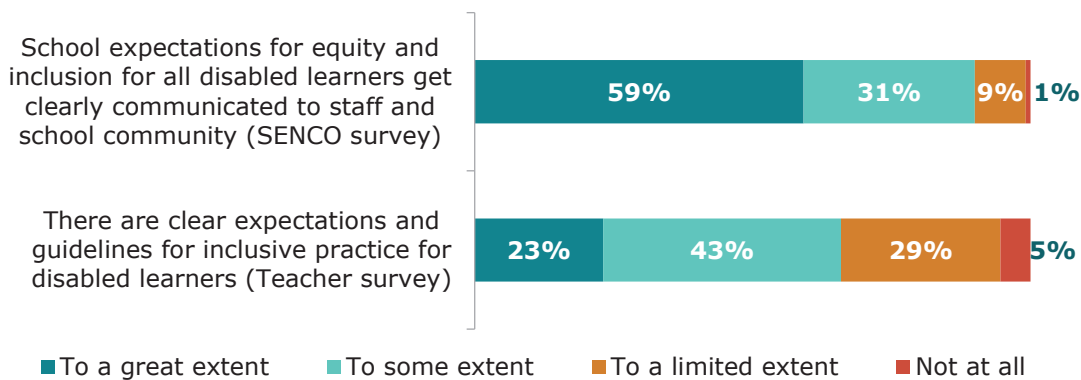
This lack of understanding of legislative obligations is then reflected in enrolment policies. Only half (58 percent) of school principals indicated that their enrolment policy is explicit about the inclusion of disabled learners. Twenty-six percent are still developing this, and 16 percent have not yet started or are in the early stages of development. This could be a key contributor to the concerning finding in Part 3 that one in five disabled learners' whānau reported they have been discouraged from enrolling at their local school.

d) Setting clear expectations

School leaders are not effectively promoting clear expectations for teachers

A third (34 percent) of teachers thought that expectations for inclusion of disabled learners are unclear and that there are no guidelines. SENCOs were a lot more positive (see Figure 27).

Figure 27: *Clarity of expectations for inclusion of disabled learners: SENCO and teacher survey*



The lack of clear expectations and guidelines could be a contributor to the variability we found across teachers in how well they are supporting the inclusion of disabled learners in their classroom.

“I think a lot of the opportunities for disabled learners come from the classroom teacher’s understanding and willingness to be inclusive of these students. I think this varies from teacher to teacher, even within a school.”

TEACHER

“There are still many teachers who are not interested in having students in their classes with additional needs. SENCOs need more time to work with teachers.”

SENCO

This was reflected in what we heard from parents and whānau about variability, even within schools.

“Because of medical issues, my son sometimes had to use a wheelchair, sometimes it was seen as him pretending. Years 5 and 6 of primary were extremely challenging because of the ‘old school’ class teacher who did not understand his disability. The SENCO was great and tried really hard to train the teacher. That year was detrimental for my son, he started feeling like he was the dumbest kid in the school.”

PARENT

e) Monitoring outcomes

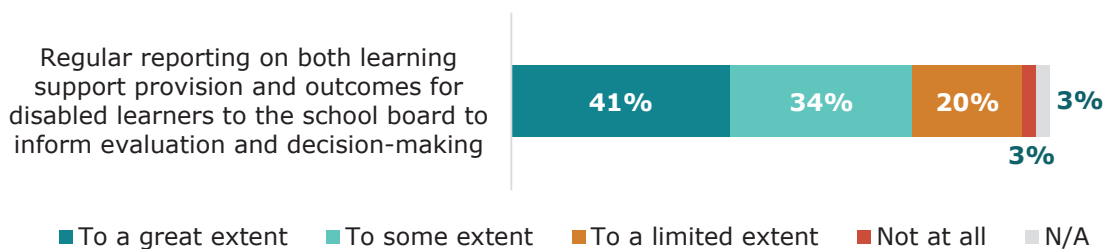
Too many Boards are not well informed of outcomes for disabled learners

School reporting to Boards is still most often focused on provision and resourcing for learning support – not on learning outcomes for disabled learners. This means that Boards are not well informed about how well their school is fostering positive outcomes for disabled learners.

ERO’s 2015 review highlighted the need for schools to improve their reporting to Boards on outcomes for disabled learners. However, from this evaluation there appears to be limited improvement in this area. Almost a quarter (24 percent) of SENCOs indicated that this process for regular reporting to the school Board on both learning support provision and outcomes for disabled learners was not at all effective or only effective to a limited extent (see Figure 28).

Figure 28: *Reporting to school Board on support and outcomes for disabled learners: SENCO survey*

How effective are the following systems and processes in your school?



Good practice example 5.1: Effective leadership and strong expectations for inclusion of disabled learners

A medium size primary school (5 percent of the student roll receive ORS).

This school's commitment to inclusive education for disabled learners is explicit in its charter, strategic and annual planning. This includes specific goals to:

- support all ORS-funded students to learn alongside their peers as much as possible
- support equitable access to specialist services
- build special education pedagogy and practice school wide.

The school systematically uses external and internal evaluation tools and processes to understand the quality and effectiveness of its provision for disabled learners. Recently this has led to improvements in the writing and review of individual education plans (including plans to develop goals aligned with Te Marautanga^k as appropriate) and the identification of, and response to, children's sensory needs.

The views of disabled learners and their parents and whānau are routinely collected and used to inform evaluation and decision-making. The Board includes representation of families with disabled children. Inclusion guides Board decision-making and resource allocation, including for ongoing adaptations of the school property (currently working on confirming funding for an adapted playground). School leaders and teachers regularly report to the Board about school-wide information about outcomes for disabled learners.

Qualified specialist teachers and other specialists review and design the school's curriculum to ensure it is inclusive and responsive to the needs of disabled learners. There is a school-wide focus on building inclusive classrooms with recent professional learning for teachers and teacher aides focused on use of core boards to support communication.

2) Quality teaching and supportive environments

Quality teaching and supportive classroom environments are key contributors to how inclusive and equitable learning at school is for disabled learners. We looked at the teaching strategies, curriculum and assessment adaptations, and accommodations made to include disabled learners in whole class learning with their peers. We also looked at how teachers are fostering a supportive classroom environment.

^k Te Marautanga o Aotearoa sets the direction for teaching and learning in Māori medium primary and secondary kura.

This section reports on the following:

- a) expectations and building student confidence
- b) adapting curriculum and teaching
- c) planning the learning programme
- d) assessment and reporting
- e) tailoring the physical environment and the use of technology
- f) fostering social and emotional inclusion and wellbeing
- g) culturally responsive teaching for Māori.

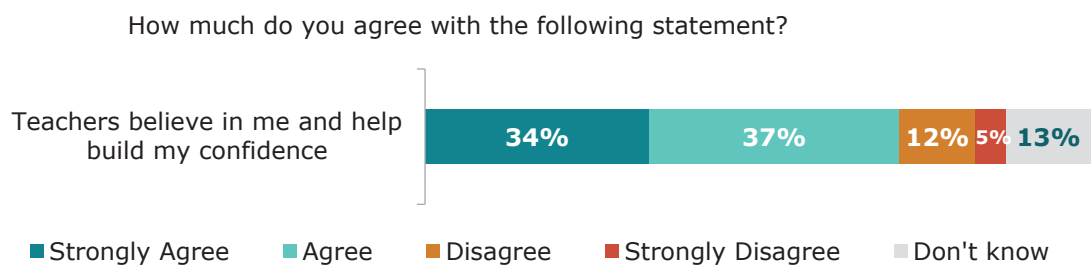
Areas that are stronger

a) Expectations and building student confidence

Many disabled learners have teachers who build their confidence

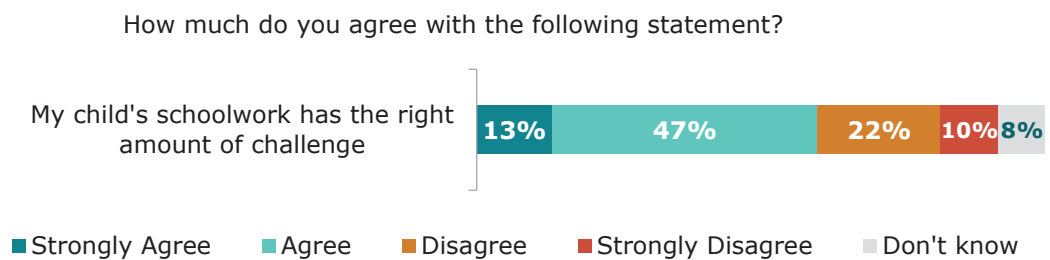
The majority (almost three quarters) of disabled learners agreed that their teachers believe in them and help them build their confidence (see Figure 29).

Figure 29: *Disabled learners' views of teacher expectations: Disabled learner survey*



Almost two in three parents and whānau (60 percent) agreed that their child's schoolwork has the right amount of challenge (see Figure 30).

Figure 30: *Parents' views of teacher expectations: Parent survey*



In interviews and survey comments, some parents and whānau talked about supportive teachers having high expectations of disabled learners, and encouraging their child to challenge themselves and try new experiences.

“[W]hen the goals weren’t high enough, the teachers would push him. At intermediate he learnt to set himself challenges and he still uses that method.”

PARENT

“The school has provided a lot of help and support to get my child to where he is now ... Learning has been a challenge, but the help from the school and the teacher aides have got him talking and understanding what he is talking about. I am very grateful for all the teacher aids and the school for getting my son to where he is now. I am confident with every task that I put in front of my child that he can do it successfully.”

PARENT

Areas of concern

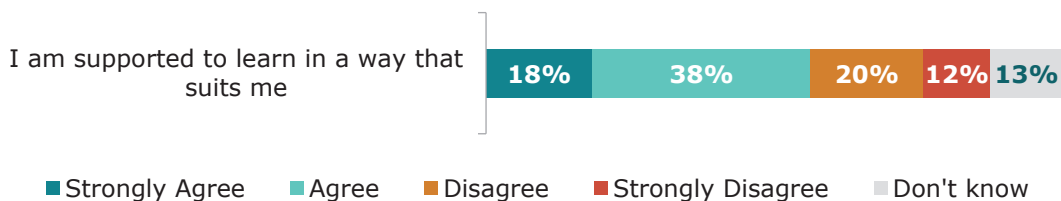
b) Adapting curriculum and teaching

Many disabled learners do not feel supported to learn in a way that suits them

Almost a third (32 percent) of disabled learners in our survey disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are supported to learn in a way that suits them (see Figure 31).

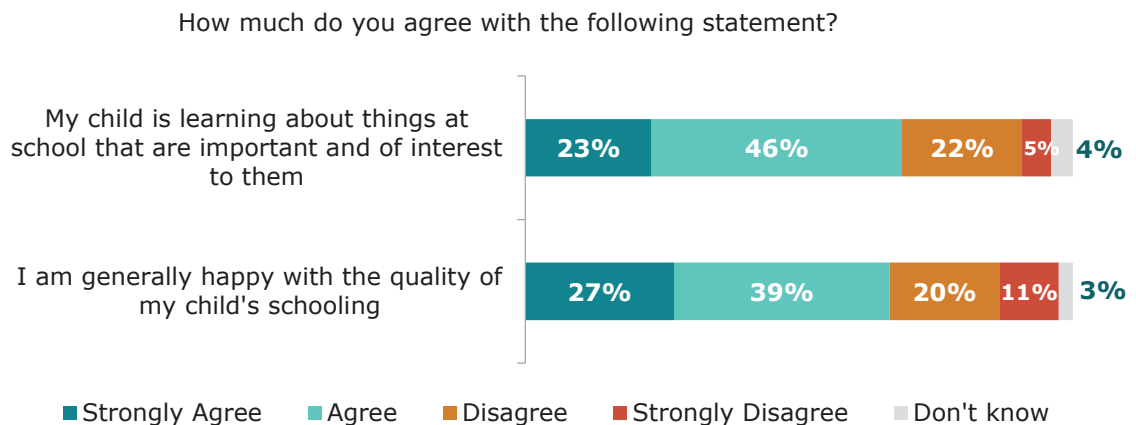
Figure 31: *Disabled learners’ views of quality of teaching: Disabled learner survey*

How much do you agree with the following statement?

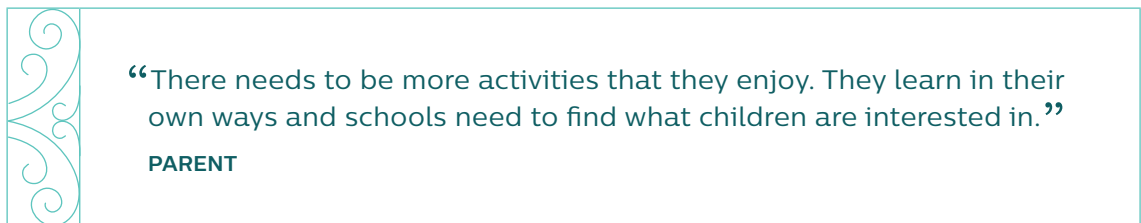


Among parents and whānau, almost a third (31 percent) were not happy with the quality of their child's schooling and over a quarter (27 percent) did not agree their child is learning about things that are of interest to them (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: *Parents' views of quality of teaching: Parent survey*



Some disabled learners and parents and whānau described their frustration with teaching not being sufficiently tailored to the learner's interests.



Most teachers are not confident in adapting curriculum and teaching for disabled learners, particularly those with complex needs who require significant adaptations

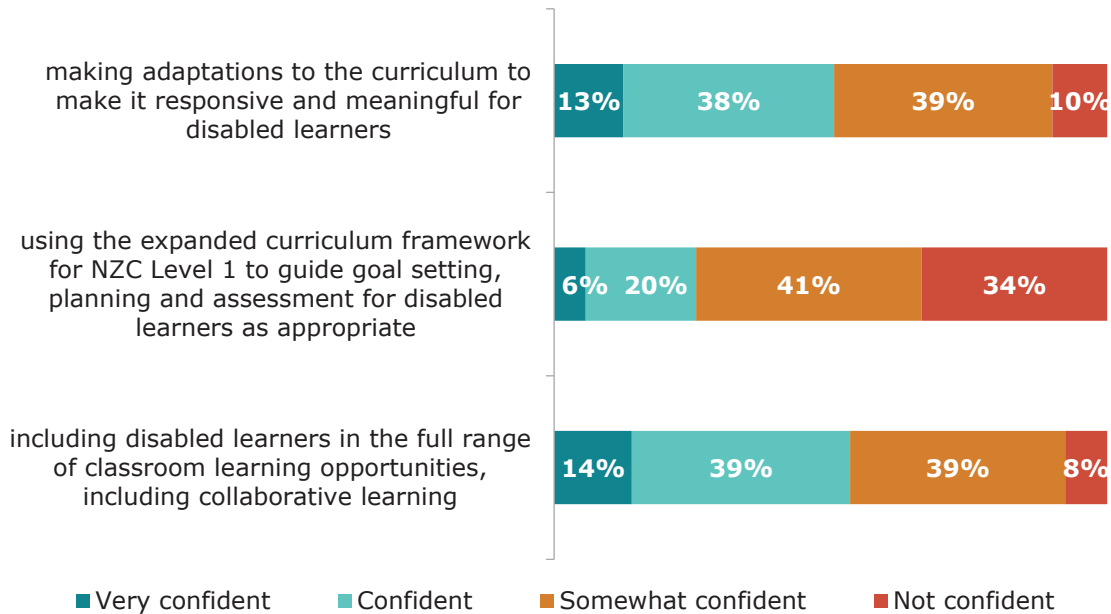
Almost half (49 percent) of teachers reported that they lack confidence in making adaptations to the curriculum to make it responsive and meaningful, and for including disabled learners in the full range of classroom opportunities (see Figure 33).

The area where teachers reported the lowest levels of confidence was in making adaptations for disabled learners with the most significant difficulties in learning, remembering, and concentrating. In our survey, three quarters (75 percent) of teachers reported that they lack confidence using the expanded curriculum framework for Level 1 of the NZ Curriculum¹. A lack of confidence in this area was also highlighted in ERO's 2015 review.

¹ The expanded curriculum framework refers to the framework developed for the Ministry of Education by the central region cluster of special schools in 2001 to expand and enhance Level One of the New Zealand Curriculum in literacy and numeracy. The expanded curriculum was designed as matrices of assessment tools and resources to document holistic learning progressions set on a continuum, and to help teachers, learning support teams, and parents identify the fine-grained progressions that some disabled learners make.

Figure 33: *Teacher confidence in adapting curriculum and teaching: Teacher survey*

How confident are you implementing the following teaching practices?



The schools we interviewed acknowledged variability in teacher experience and confidence in working with disabled learners. We heard examples of teachers expressing reluctance to include disabled learners in their classroom without having individual learning support or teacher aides present. We also heard examples of teacher variability from teacher aides we interviewed.

“Communication with teachers varies. [The] ones I work with are good [but] they are stressed. There are the behaviour issues ... we do what we need to do. You know which teachers you can approach and which you can't.”

TEACHER AIDE

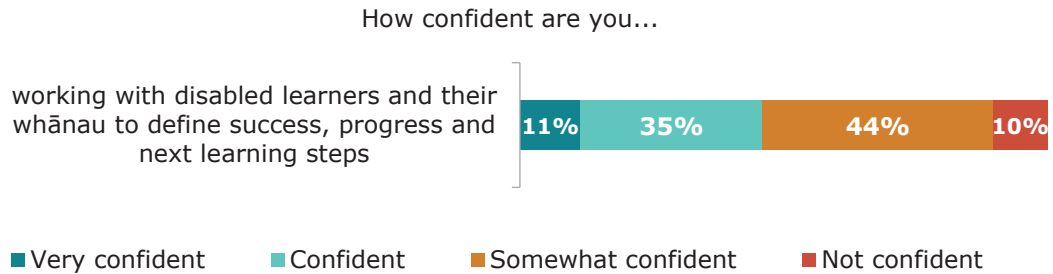
Teacher aides are more confident than teachers. The majority (71 percent) of teacher aides who responded to our survey felt confident in adapting programme planning and curriculum resources to the interests and abilities of disabled learners.

c) Planning the learning programme

Teachers lack confidence to plan for disabled learners

Over half of the teachers surveyed (54 percent) reported low confidence in working with disabled learners and their whānau to define success, progress, and next learning steps (see Figure 34). In contrast, only 22 percent of teacher aides reported low confidence in contributing to disabled learners IEP or individual learning goal meetings.

Figure 34: *Teacher confidence in planning with disabled learners and their whānau: Teacher survey*



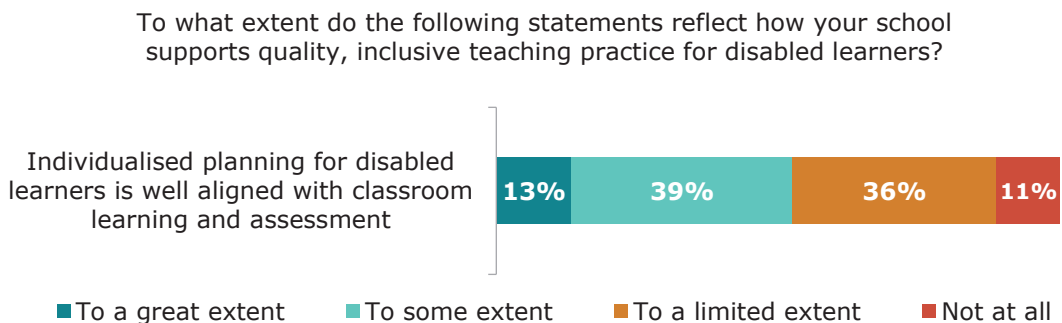
Planning for disabled learners is not well aligned with planning for the whole class

Disabled learners do better when what they are learning is linked to what the rest of the class is learning. However, almost half (47 percent) of teachers reported that individualised planning for disabled learners is not at all or to a limited extent well aligned with classroom learning and assessment (see Figure 35). We heard in our interviews that individualised plans for disabled learners are often developed by the SENCO or specialist learning support teacher.

“The SENCO is very capable but learning outcomes would be far better ... if the classroom teacher was far more involved in educating my son. I would like to see the classroom teacher more involved in determining what my child does during class, providing one on one support, and modifying work to provide genuine inclusion.”

PARENT

Figure 35: *Teacher views on individualised planning for disabled learners: Teacher survey*

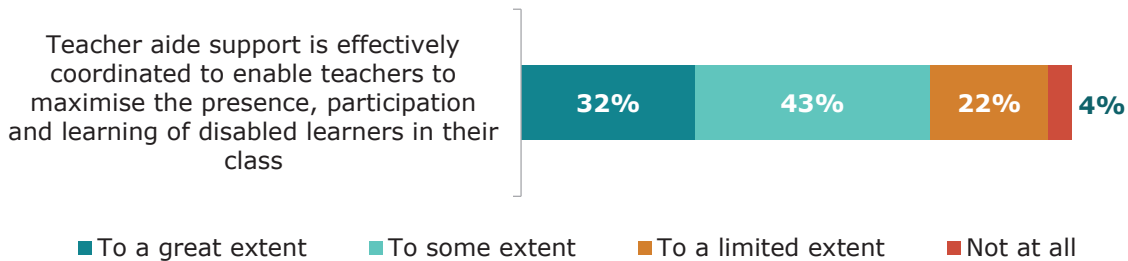


Teachers and teacher aides are too often not working as a team

Over a quarter (26 percent) of teachers reported that teacher aide support is not at all or to a limited extent effectively coordinated to enable teachers to maximise the presence, participation, and learning of disabled learners in their class (see Figure 36).

Figure 36: *Teacher views on coordination of teacher aide support: Teacher survey*

To what extent does the following statement reflect how your school supports quality, inclusive teaching practice for disabled learners?



Among the teacher aides who responded to our survey, almost half (43 percent) reported they do not regularly meet with the classroom teacher and 34 percent do not meet regularly with the SENCO to plan and review learning programmes for disabled learners.

In our interviews we heard examples of poor practice where teacher aides are leading the adaptation of the curriculum without sufficient oversight from teachers or specialists.

“It is very rare that adaptations are done by teachers for the students, leaving this aspect up to the teacher aide, or the student’s key teacher who is based in our specialist centre. Some wider school teachers make contact and are willing to make accommodations, some do not and will not.”

SENCO

“Teachers have their programme; our programme is from an outsider, from an RTLB. The teacher works around us. The teacher lets us do our thing with the child.”

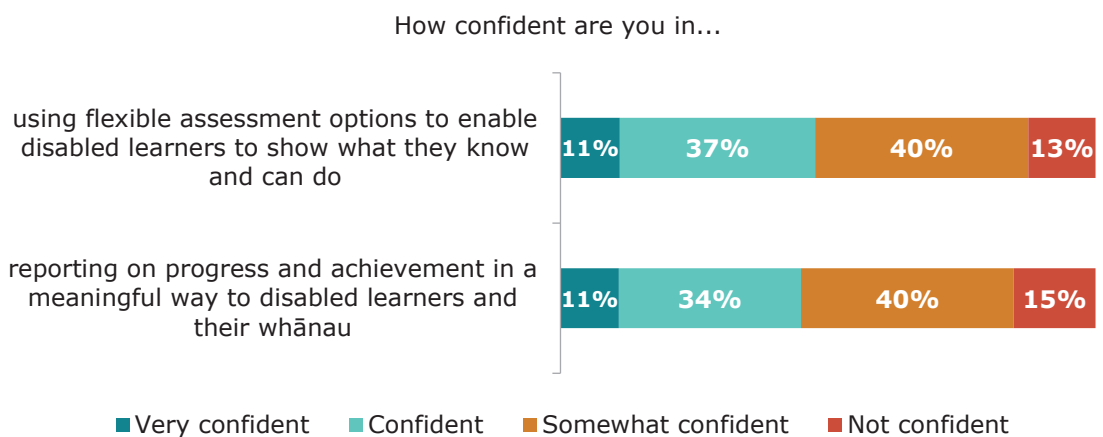
TEACHER AIDE

d) Assessment and reporting

More than half of teachers also reported they were not confident, or only somewhat confident, in reporting on disabled learners' progress and achievement and in using flexible assessments (see Figure 37). Almost a third (31 percent) of teacher aides indicated they have low confidence in documenting the learning progress and achievement of disabled learners.

The teachers we interviewed were often using their usual practices to work with disabled learners and their whānau, but often with the addition of strategies such as daily notebooks. A few teachers were using digital platforms (for example, Educa, Class Dojo, Seesaw) to enhance the sharing of learning with families and learners.

Figure 37: *Teacher confidence in assessment and reporting: Teacher survey*



Teachers' lack of confidence in reporting on disabled learners' progress was reflected in what we heard from whānau and disabled learners. Only 51 percent of parents and whānau who responded to our survey were happy with how their disabled child's learning is being assessed and reported, with many feeling they were not receiving enough information on their child's progress (see Figure 38).



“I would like more information about his learning and progress, narrative assessment isn't used at this school. There is no direct communication with other [subject] teachers.”

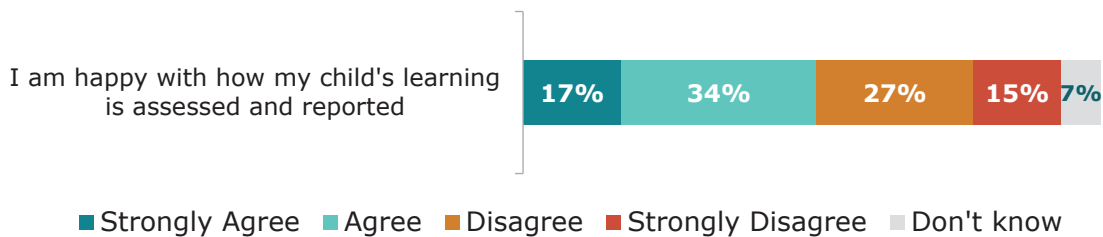
PARENT

“I feel like I’m not kept in the loop. I feel like it’s wrong that my child doesn’t get a report at the end of the term. I feel like I don’t hear about the good things that happen in the classroom – class dojo is great for the teacher to post things on, and I know he’s not the only student in the class, but maybe once a week/fortnight something written down or shown to me to show his progress on something. Maybe more schoolwork comes home or even an email from a SENCO or someone who works with him to show his strengths and weaknesses.”

PARENT

Figure 38: *Parents’ views on assessment of their child’s learning: Parent survey*

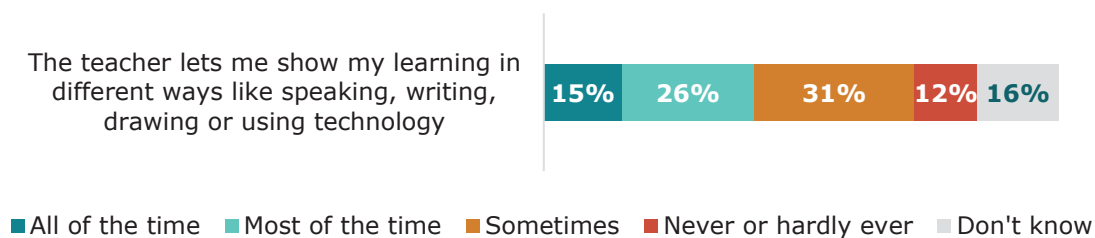
How much do you agree with the following statement?



Less than half of disabled learners (41 percent) reported that their teacher lets them show their learning in different ways, like speaking, writing, drawing, or using technology ‘all’ or ‘most of the time’ (see Figure 39).

Figure 39: *Disabled learner views of assessment: Disabled learner survey*

When you are at school, how often does this happen?

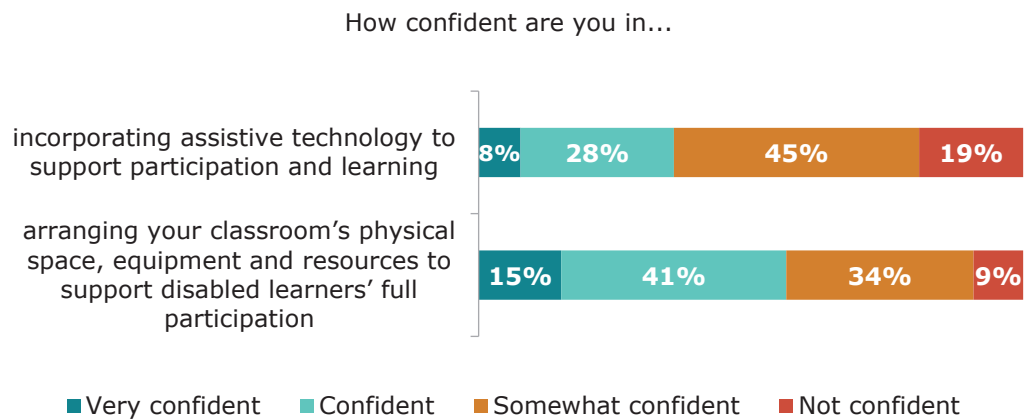


e) Tailoring the physical environment and the use of technology

Teachers are not confident in arranging their classroom or incorporating assistive technology to support disabled learners

Almost two thirds (64 percent) of teachers reported low confidence in incorporating assistive technology to support disabled learners to participate and learn in class. Just under half also reported low confidence in arranging their classroom’s physical environment to support disabled learners to participate (see Figure 40).

Figure 40: *Teacher confidence in tailoring physical environment and use of technology*



Teacher aides who responded to our survey were more positive. The majority (82 percent) reported that the disabled learners they work with always or often have access to the equipment and resources they need to participate fully in learning and school life.

f) Fostering social and emotional inclusion and wellbeing

Teachers lack confidence in supporting disabled learners in self-regulation, social inclusion, and EOTC

Two thirds (65 percent) of teachers reported low confidence in supporting disabled learners to self-regulate (for example, managing emotions and behaviour) (see Figure 41). Our interviews and survey comments from parents and whānau also reflect teachers’ lack of confidence in supporting disabled learners to self-regulate. Many whānau expressed concerns that teachers lack understanding of what triggers their child’s stress and anxiety.

“Some teachers are good other not so much ... [My son] feels that the other teachers in the mainstream classes don’t understand his ASD and anxiety.”

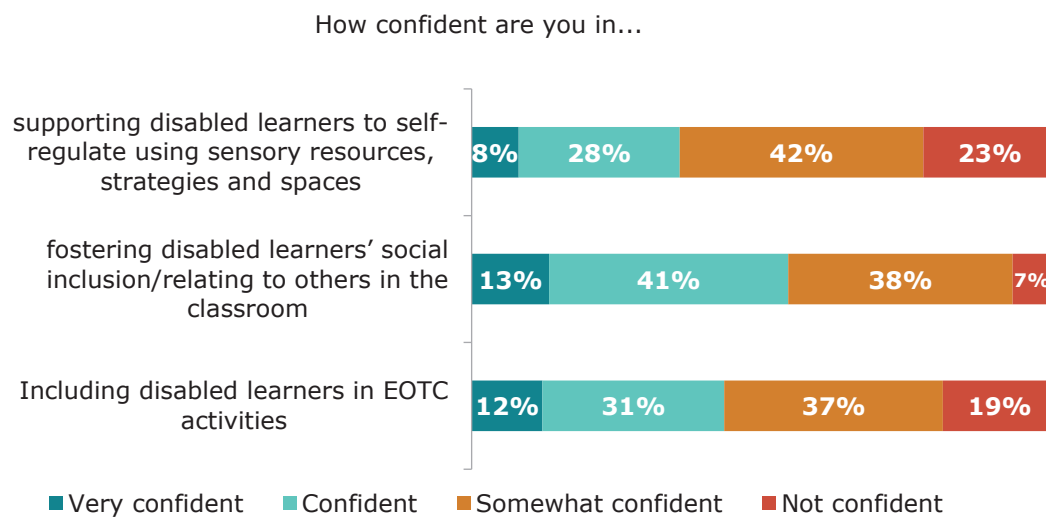
PARENT

“[My son’s] triggers weren’t identified and resulted in emotion and behaviour which the teachers couldn’t manage, and the right kinds of support wasn’t offered.”

PARENT

In contrast, among teacher aides, the majority (74 percent) who responded to our survey indicated they feel confident in supporting disabled learners to self-regulate. Two-thirds of teachers also reported lower levels of confidence at including disabled learners in EOTC activities.

Figure 41: *Teacher confidence in fostering inclusive social and emotional environment: Teacher survey*

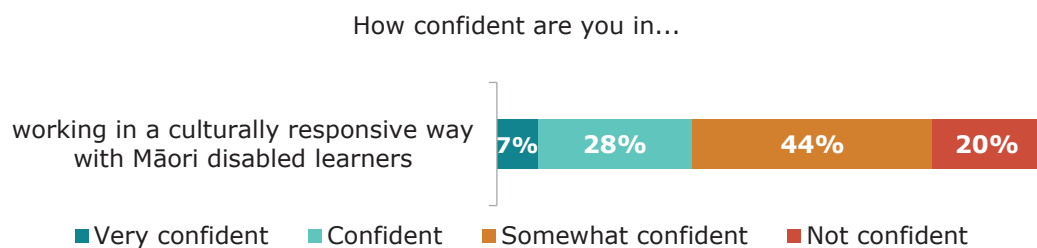


g) Culturally responsive teaching for Māori

Teachers are not confident working in culturally responsive ways with Māori disabled learners

Ka Hikitia Ka Hāpaitia (the cross-agency Māori Education Strategy, 2021) guides education agencies and schools to support the identity, language, and culture of Māori learners and their whānau to strengthen belonging, engagement, and achievement as Māori. This includes Māori disabled learners and their whānau. In our teacher survey, it is concerning that almost two thirds of teachers reported low confidence in working in a culturally responsive way with Māori disabled learners (see Figure 42).

Figure 42: *Teacher confidence in culturally responsive teaching for Māori disabled learners: Teacher survey*



The majority (79 percent) of Māori whānau indicated that their child's cultural identity is recognised and respected at school. Many (40 percent) of these respondents have children attending schools with high Māori rolls.

Good practice example 5.2: Quality teaching

A large, urban secondary school (3 percent of the student roll has ORS)

This school develops detailed profiles of each disabled learner which are shared with staff to support responsive curriculum planning and quality teaching. These profiles focus on the learner's strengths, interests and needs, and effective teaching strategies. Learning Support staff observe learners in class and support the teachers to adapt the curriculum.

Disabled learners learn in a range of settings across this school, including in mainstream classes, specialist classrooms, supported learning spaces, and in combinations of these.

“We share the IEP with teachers [in mainstream], we look at the entire programme and think, well, ok this is where it's going to be accessible, and this may be where we might need to do a little bit of an adaptation.”

SENCO

Learning Support staff support teachers to adapt assessments for disabled learners. The school is also making increasing use of technology. Teachers across the school routinely incorporate talk to text technology, use subtitles, and enlarged print to support learning.

Based on parent feedback, the school has increased its focus on improving learners' communication skills in IEPs, and on professional development for teachers and teacher aides (making use of core boards^m consistent).

The school has also simplified the way it presents IEP goals to make the focus on literacy, numeracy, and key competencies clearer for families, and has introduced a new communication assessment tool to better support goal setting and tracking of progress.

3) Partnerships with learners and whānau

To support disabled learners to succeed in their education, schools need to work in close partnership with disabled learners and their parents and whānau. This helps teachers to understand the learner's strengths, interests and needs, and to tailor their support and learning programme accordingly.

This section looks at:

- a) engaging parents and whānau in their children's learning
- b) involving learners and whānau in planning
- c) gathering feedback from learners and whānau.

^m There are a few different core boards in use across New Zealand. Essentially a core board is a colourful board with symbols that are fixed in place. This is known as the "core vocabulary".

Areas that are stronger

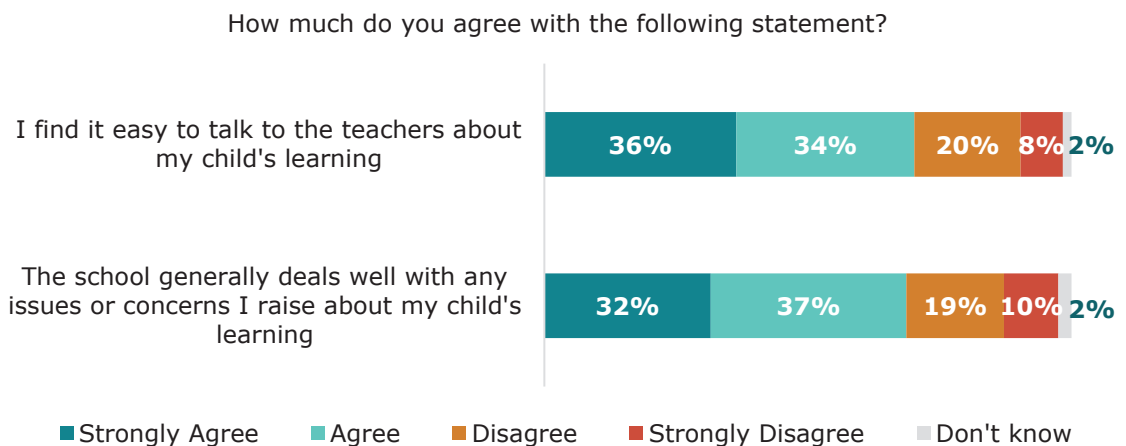
a) Engaging parents and whānau in their children’s learning

Most parents find it easy to talk to teachers about their child’s learning

Over 80 percent of SENCOs said their school works effectively to get to know the strengths, abilities, preferences, and needs of disabled learners. Just over half (56 percent) of teacher aides feel confident in communicating with parents and whānau.

Most (70 percent) parents and whānau indicated they find it easy to talk to teachers about their disabled child’s learning. Two thirds (69 percent) also feel the school generally deals well with any issues or concerns they raise about their child’s learning (see Figure 43).

Figure 43: *Parents’ views of engagement with their child’s school*



Areas of concern

b) Involving learners and whānau in planning

There is insufficient involvement of disabled learners and their parents and whānau in planning their learning

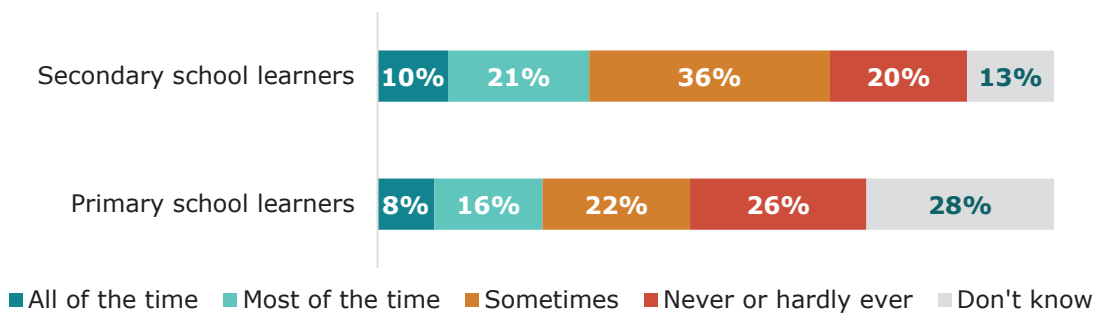
Fewer than a third (31 percent) of disabled learners at secondary school said their teachers talk with them about goals for their learning all or most of the time (see Figure 44).

“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

Figure 44: *How often the teacher and learner talk about learning goals: Disabled learner survey*

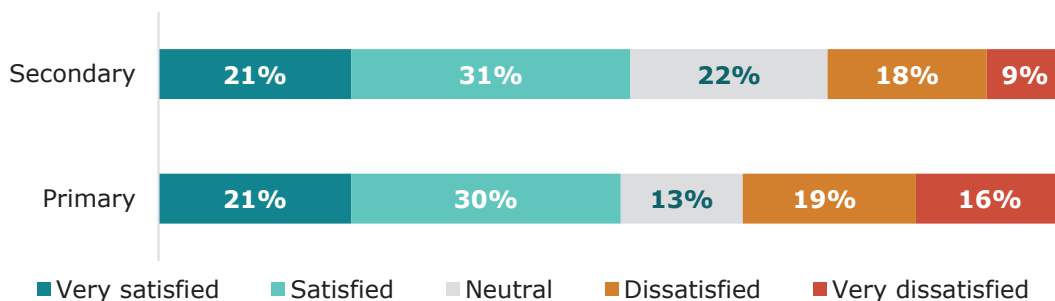
When you are at school, how often does the teacher and you talk about goals for your learning?



Only half of parents and whānau are happy with how the school is working with them in planning their child’s individual learning goals in their IEPs (see Figure 45).

Figure 45: *Parent satisfaction with how school is working in developing their child’s learning goals: Parent survey*

How satisfied are you with how well the school is working with you in developing your child’s individual learning goals?



In school interviews, visits, and analysis of a sample of IEPs, we saw only a few examples of schools consistently seeking disabled learner and parent and whānau voice. In some IEPs, input was sought only to provide feedback on a plan already developed by the school. There was limited evidence of disabled learners and whānau being involved in goal setting and pathway planning.

Schools also told us that IEP meetings are often led and facilitated by specialists in the school, while teachers may or may not have an active role.

c) Gathering feedback from learners and whānau

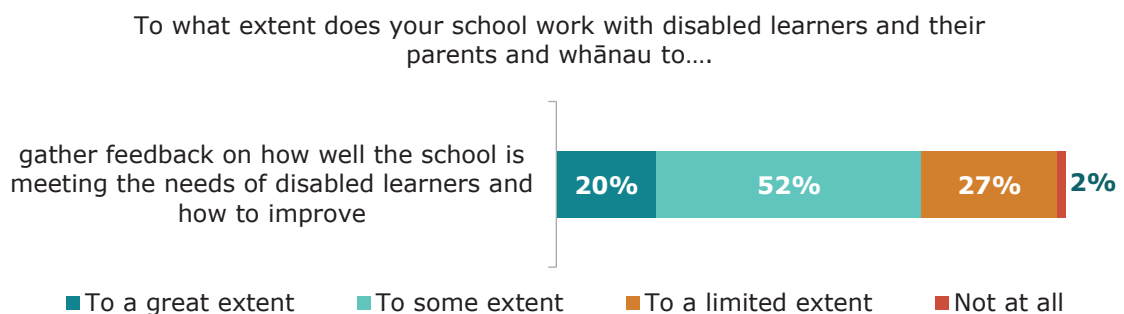
Few schools have good processes for gathering disabled learner and whānau feedback about how well the school is meeting their needs and how to improve

Among the schools we interviewed, we found few seek feedback from disabled learners and their parents and whānau to inform school self-review and decision-making.

In our surveys, just over half (53 percent) of school principals, but only one in five (20 percent) of SENCOs, indicated that their school has effective processes for gathering feedback from disabled learners and their whānau on how well the school is meeting their needs, and what can be improved (see Figure 46).

The exception to this is fund holder schools, which have regular external special standards reviews that include a focus on learner and parent feedback. Some schools (particularly fund holder schools and schools with specialist units/classes) actively seek representation of parents and whānau of disabled learners on the school Board.

Figure 46: *Extent to which school gathers feedback on how well they are meeting the needs disabled learners and how to improve: SENCO survey*



Good practice example 5.3: Learner and whānau engagement

Large urban secondary school (3 percent of the student roll has ORS)

This school ensures parents and whānau have many points of contact for input into their child's learning. Specialist staff and teaching assistants are resourced for non-contact time at the start of the school year to get to know disabled learners and their families.

The school has three IEP meetings a year to provide regular opportunities to discuss, review, and adapt planning for disabled learners. The school has recently strengthened the way it involves the parents and whānau of disabled learners in assessing the progress of learners against their IEP goals.

Parent voice and feedback is included in learning support reporting to the school Board to help them know about the effectiveness of provision and parent perspectives on changes and goals.

4) Accessibility of school buildings and facilities

The physical environment of the school is critical for enabling disabled learners to access all areas and facilities and to support learning and social inclusion at school.

This section looks at:

- a) physical accessibility: school buildings
- b) physical accessibility: updating buildings
- c) classroom environments.

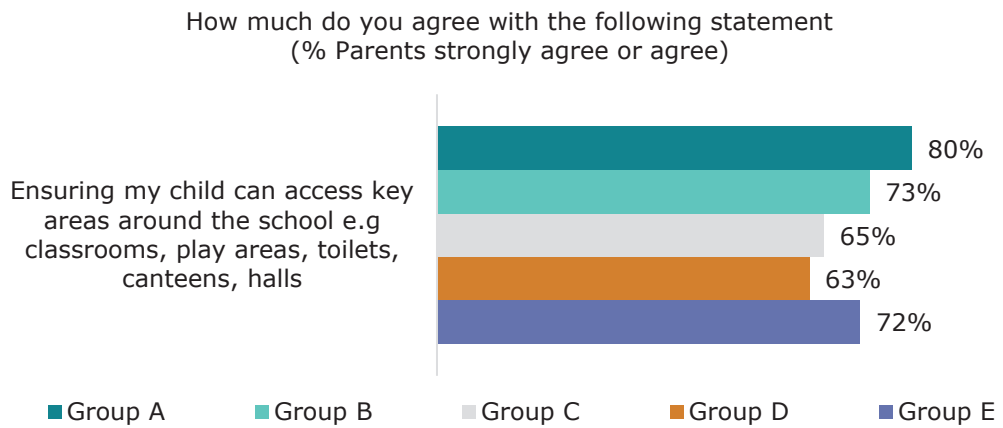
Areas that are stronger

a) Physical accessibility: school buildings

Most schools are generally physically accessible

Encouragingly, the majority of schools and parents and whānau reported that school buildings are generally physically accessible. Across all groups of disabled learners, the majority of whānau were satisfied with the way schools ensured their child could access key areas around the school (including classrooms, play areas, toilets, canteens, and halls) (see Figure 47).

Figure 47: *How well are schools supporting physical accessibility: Parent survey*



Some parents and whānau we interviewed were particularly pleased with the school's support for physical accessibility and safety. For some, it was a major consideration in choosing a school for their child.

“The school was very supportive and provided a standing desk and other equipment to help my son.”

PARENT

“The principal was amazing. The school got new toilets and fences because our child is a runner.”

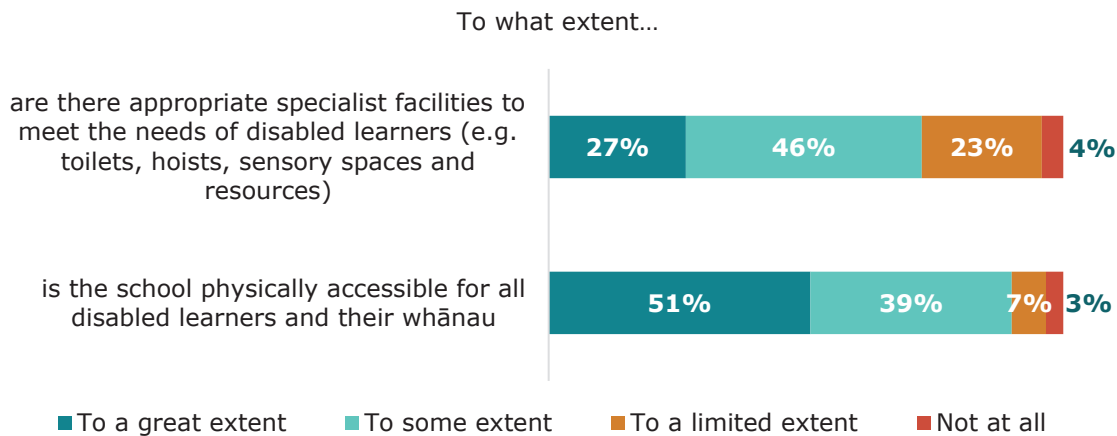
PARENT

“We had the option of two local schools. We chose this school because it was the one with fences and gates.”

PARENT

Just over half of school leaders we heard from (57 percent of principals, 51 percent of SENCOs) thought their school is physically accessible to a great extent (see Figure 48).

Figure 48: *Accessibility of school physical environment and facilities: SENCO survey*



The majority (89 percent) of teacher aides reported that the disabled learners they work with ‘always’ or ‘often’ can safely access all areas of the school.

In our interviews, some school principals articulated a strong commitment to ensuring physical access for disabled learners.

“We make sure access is considered for everyone – not just to one room – they can go to all rooms. They need to be able to go the same way as their friends – not have to go in around the back.”

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

“When we put the special needs toilet in our bathroom, our property people were keen to put it in our dental clinic. I refused, because it was at the end of the building. Children would have to travel right across the school to get to it – lots of barriers. In the end, they agreed with me that middle of the school was best place for it.”

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Areas of concern

a) Physical accessibility: updating buildings

Schools with older buildings still face challenges, and the process for making alterations can be complex and slow

We heard from schools and whānau that schools with older buildings still face challenges, and the process for getting alterations done to make their facilities more accessible can be complex and slow. In some instances, older buildings could not be modified and complete rebuilds were required to make their facilities accessible.

In our interviews with school leaders, we heard of ongoing frustrations with reactive approaches to property development and delays in completion.

“Property development is our Achilles heel. My highest level of frustration. I have spent my whole time here battling for our learning support facility. It is in desperate need – needs bowling and starting again.”

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

“When you are working with an infrastructure that is 70 years old, the considerations and solutions for students with access issues are significant and require quite an investment with the Ministry. We have good support to raise these with the Ministry, but it is a slow process. Some students will not be able to benefit from those developments because of the slow process.”

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

c) Classroom environments

Modern learning environments with large open classrooms can create sensory overload for some disabled learners

Modern learning environments, or Innovative Learning Environments (ILEs) as they are referred to by the Ministry of Education, are part of the new building upgrade in primary schools and are designed to offer team teaching to combined class groups. In primary schools offering such environments, multiple teachers work with mixed class groups in large modern or open learning environments with some/limited space for quiet small group or one-on-one work.

Whilst this evaluation did not look at how well these environments work for disabled learners, we did hear from some disabled learners and whānau who voiced concern that these modern learning environments with large open classrooms can create sensory overload for them.

“There are too many students, and it is too noisy a lot of the time.”

DISABLED LEARNER

“He was being baby-sat by the iPad in a large open learning environment. Teachers should know about neurodiverse learners. People have stereotypes of disabilities. He does not have the typical ASD pattern. 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

Good practice example 5.4: Physical accessibility and classroom environments

A large urban primary school (2 percent of student roll has ORS)

At this school the leadership advocates strongly for equity of physical access for disabled learners.

“We made sure that there is ramp access to all blocks and that consideration is given so that disabled students can access classes and spaces via the same route as their friends rather than having to go around the back.”

SCHOOL LEADER

School leaders demonstrated their valuing of, and commitment to, disabled learners and their families by planning proactively to have a high dependency toilet unit with hoist and shower built into the senior block in readiness for their transition through the school.

The school caters for the sensory needs of neurodivergent learners through provision of a low-sensory room and sensory resources in classrooms. School leaders and teachers also develop and support individual sensory plans for students. For example, one learner is supported to leave the class every hour to do a circuit of the bike track to support his self-regulation.

Conclusion

Across the key components of quality, inclusive education there are some areas that are relatively strong, such as the physical accessibility of most schools, but also areas that are concerning. These areas include: low teacher confidence in many aspects of teaching disabled learners; aspects of leadership and expectations for inclusion of disabled learners; and whānau and learner voice in goal setting and planning of pathways.



Part 6: How does the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled learners vary between schools?

Not all schools are welcoming of disabled learners, resulting in inequities for disabled learners. This section looks at how the quality and inclusiveness of education varies between schools. We found differences across schools on three aspects: decile, school level, and cultural diversity.

What we found: An overview

We found three key differences across schools:

- 1) disabled learners in low decile schools report better outcomes
- 2) teacher confidence in working with disabled learners is lower in secondary schools
- 3) schools with high numbers of Māori students have stronger inclusion of disabled learners and their whānau.

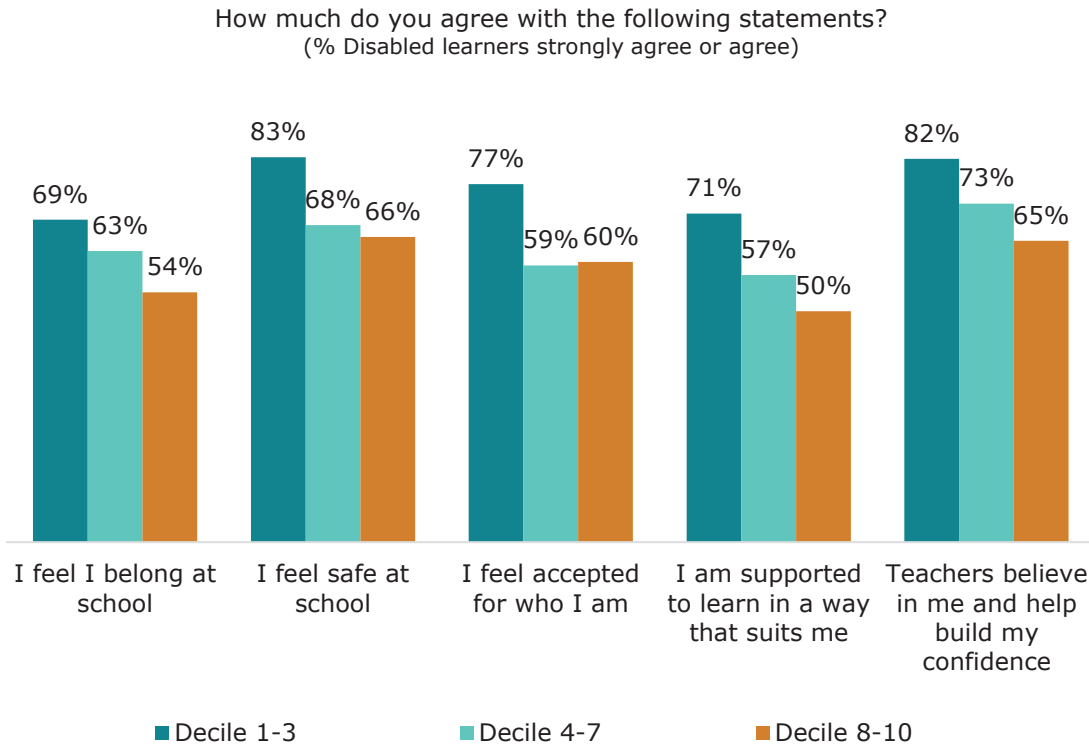
1) Disabled learners at low decile schools report better outcomes

Not all schools are welcoming of disabled learners. As a result, there is an uneven distribution of disabled learners across schools.

Among survey respondents, disabled learners at low decile schools reported more positive experiences and outcomes than those at high decile schools. For example (see Figure 49):

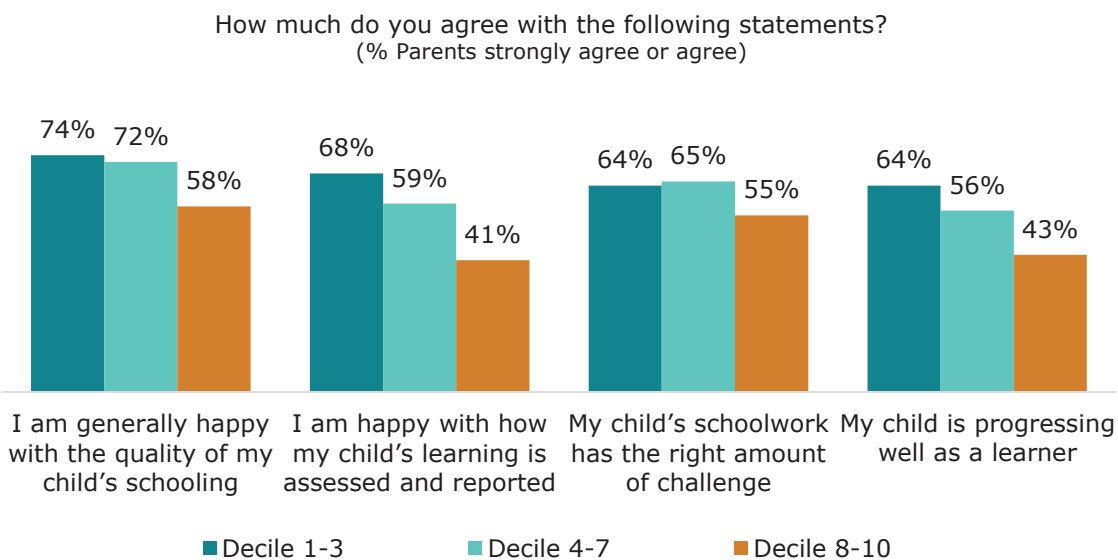
- 77 percent of disabled learners from low decile schools indicated they feel accepted for who they are compared to 60 percent of learners from high decile schools
- 83 percent of disabled learners from low decile schools indicated they feel safe at school compared to 66 percent of those from high decile schools
- 71 percent of disabled learners from low decile schools feel supported to learn in a way that suits them compared to 50 percent of those from high decile schools.

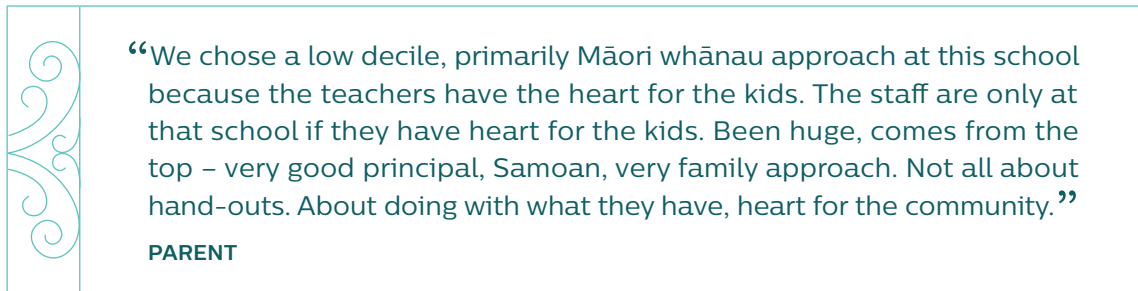
Figure 49: *How disabled learners feel about school, learning and wellbeing by school decile: Disabled learner survey*



Parents and whānau of disabled learners at low decile schools are also more positive about the quality of their child’s schooling and their child’s progress (see Figure 50). In our interviews, we heard from some parents and whānau that they specifically chose a low decile school for their disabled child as the school was known for their more inclusive culture.

Figure 50: *How Parents feel about their child’s schooling by school decile: Parent survey*





Good practice example 6.1: Building an inclusive culture at a low decile school

Small urban primary school (4 percent of student roll has ORS)

The school leader in this low decile primary school worked proactively on developing a school culture that was welcoming for everyone.

“When I came here, I noticed that whānau and some staff would talk about learners who found it difficult to self-regulate. They would talk like they don’t really belong here and comment that they should go into that satellite class. I found that interesting. They saw it as too hard. I set about re-centring that thinking, positioning that the school is a place for everyone.”

SCHOOL LEADER

The school Board has embraced its school’s inclusive culture and uses inclusion as a key criterion for decision-making.

“We emphasise you cannot exclude anyone when it comes down to resources. If everyone can’t do it, we won’t do it. Our school camp is focused on everyone being able to take part. We have it in a place that is accessible. For our learning conferences it is important and vital that whānau can participate. It is a key part of students’ learning that all whānau can walk in and be welcomed. It can take a while to implement that culture. It is an ongoing process.”

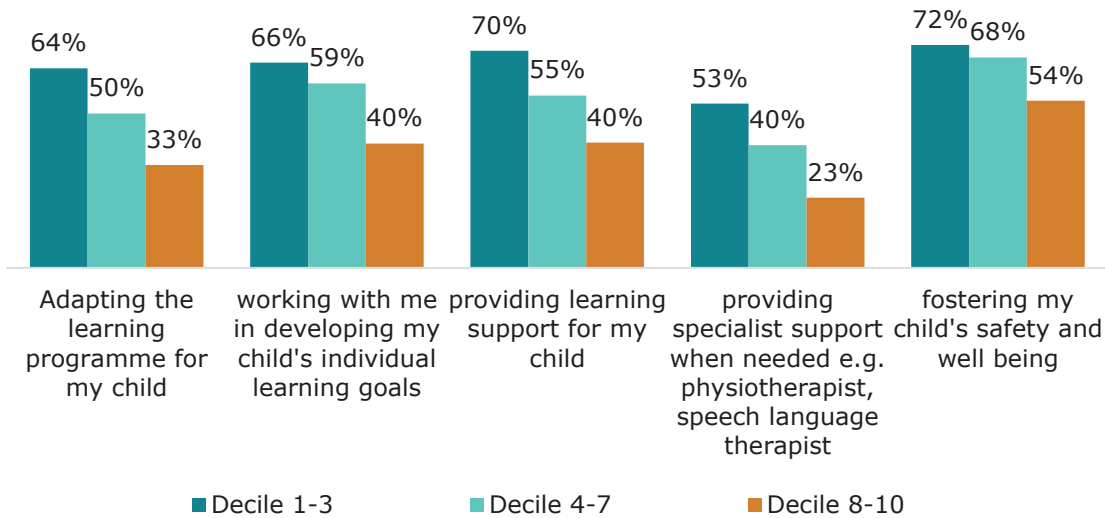
BOARD MEMBER

Parents and whānau of disabled learners at low decile schools also report greater satisfaction with how well the school is supporting their child. For example (see Figure 51):

- 64 percent of parents and whānau with children in low decile schools were satisfied with how the school is adapting the learning programme for their child, compared to 33 percent of parents and whānau with children in high decile schools
- 66 percent of parents and whānau with children in low decile schools were satisfied with how the school is working with them in developing their child’s individual learning goals, compared to 40 percent of parents and whānau with children in high decile schools.

Figure 51: *Parent satisfaction with how well the school is supporting their child by school decile: Parent survey*

How satisfied are you with how well the school is...
(% Parents very satisfied or satisfied)



Some parents and whānau of disabled learners commented on their poor experiences at high decile schools, particularly in terms of the school's attitude towards inclusion of disabled learners, and how these experiences had a detrimental affect both on them and their child.

“Higher decile schools seem to have much worse attitudes to disabled learners, and there are very few levers for parents and whānau to address this. There needs to be more and clearer mechanisms for addressing ableism in schools, including from other parents and from school Boards.”

PARENT

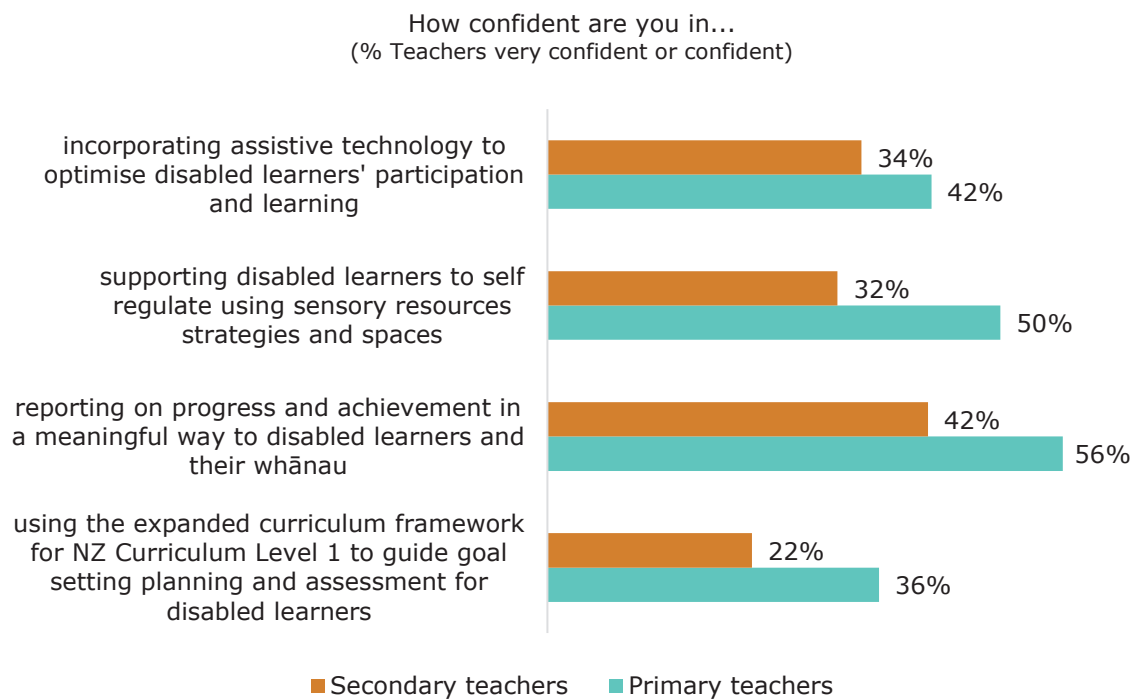
“We have had such an awful experience with this seemingly “good” decile 9 school, they have been detrimental to the health and wellbeing of my child and us as parents.”

PARENT

2) Teacher confidence in working with disabled learners is lower at secondary schools

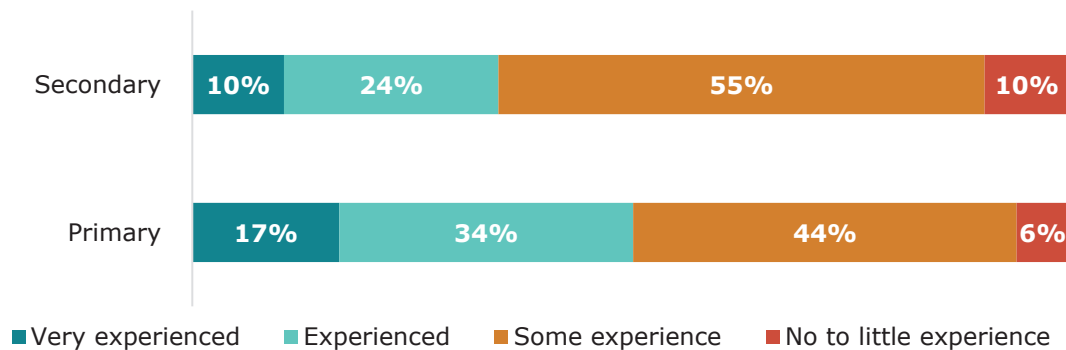
Teachers at secondary schools reported lower overall levels of confidence in teaching disabled learners than those at primary school, but particularly in adapting curriculum for disabled learners at Level 1 of the curriculum, supporting self-regulation, and in the use of assistive technology (see Figure 52).

Figure 52: Comparison of primary and secondary teachers' confidence: Teacher survey



The different levels of confidence are consistent with our finding that primary school teachers tend to have more experience in teaching disabled learners. Among the teachers who responded to our survey, secondary teachers have much less experience teaching disabled learners: only a third of secondary teachers reported being very experienced or experienced with disabled learners compared to half of primary school teachers (see Figure 53).

Figure 53: Comparison of primary and secondary teachers' experience with disabled learners: Teacher survey



Lower confidence in secondary school teachers may reflect their training, which does not focus as much on teaching level 1 to 3 of the curriculum and on using a range of assessment tools to support this. Our interviews with SENCOs and teachers confirmed concerns about secondary school teachers' confidence in working with disabled learners.

“In a secondary school, it is much harder to support disabled learners in mainstream classes. This is because the student is often working at Curriculum Level 1. Secondary teachers are trained to teach from the end of Curriculum Level 3 through to Curriculum Level 8. An English teacher becomes a teacher because they love literature, not because they know how to teach a child to read – that is a completely different skill set. As a result, disabled learners often end up solely working with a teacher aide, with little or no input from the teacher.”

SENCO/TEACHER

3) Schools with a high Māori student roll are more inclusive of disabled learners

Schools with high Māori rolls have a stronger culture of inclusion of disabled learners. They are also more likely to have better engagement with whānau of disabled learners. This is reported on in more detail in the following chapter of this report.

Conclusion

There is significant variability in the quality and inclusiveness of education provision for disabled learners between schools. Lower decile schools and schools with a high Māori student roll tend to be doing better at providing an inclusive, quality education for disabled learners and their whānau.



Part 7: How well are Māori disabled learners and their whānau doing?

Schools with a high Māori student roll have a stronger culture of inclusion of disabled learners and their whānau. They are also more likely to have better engagement with whānau of disabled learners.

Across all schools, many Māori disabled learners are enjoying school and learning. However, a significant number are still experiencing exclusion and inequity of outcomes. In this section, we look at how well Māori disabled learners are doing and key differences in schools with a high Māori roll.

How we gathered information

We first looked at Māori education research to identify what high quality education looks like for Māori disabled learners and their whānau. We then worked closely with Māori education experts in reaching out to and hearing from Māori disabled learners, their whānau, and from schools with a high Māori student roll (which we define as schools where at least 26 percent of the students are Māori).

We engaged with whānau and schools as follows:

→ online surveys:

- responses from 78 Māori disabled learners and 85 whānau (17 percent of total respondents)
- we also compared the survey responses from 286 parents and whānau of disabled learners attending schools with a low Māori student roll with the survey responses from 76 parents and whānau of disabled learners attending schools with high Māori rolls
- principals, SENCOs, teachers, and teacher aides from 106 schools across the country (among this, 35 percent of the schools have at least 26 percent Māori in their student roll).

→ interviews:

- seven Māori disabled learners and their whānau (led by ERO's Māori evaluation partners)
- thirteen schools with high Māori rolls
- two Māori education academics, and a Māori disability academic.

We then reviewed the survey and interview findings with Māori education experts to help us understand and contextualise what we heard.

What we found: An overview

- 1) Schools with a high Māori student roll have a stronger culture of inclusion of disabled learners and their whānau.
- 2) Schools with a high Māori student roll have better engagement with whānau.
- 3) Many Māori disabled learners are enjoying school and learning.
- 4) A significant number of Māori disabled learners are still experiencing exclusion and poor outcomes.
- 5) Whānau of Māori disabled learners are concerned about key aspects of education provision.
- 6) Māori whānau are dissatisfied with how complaints are resolved.

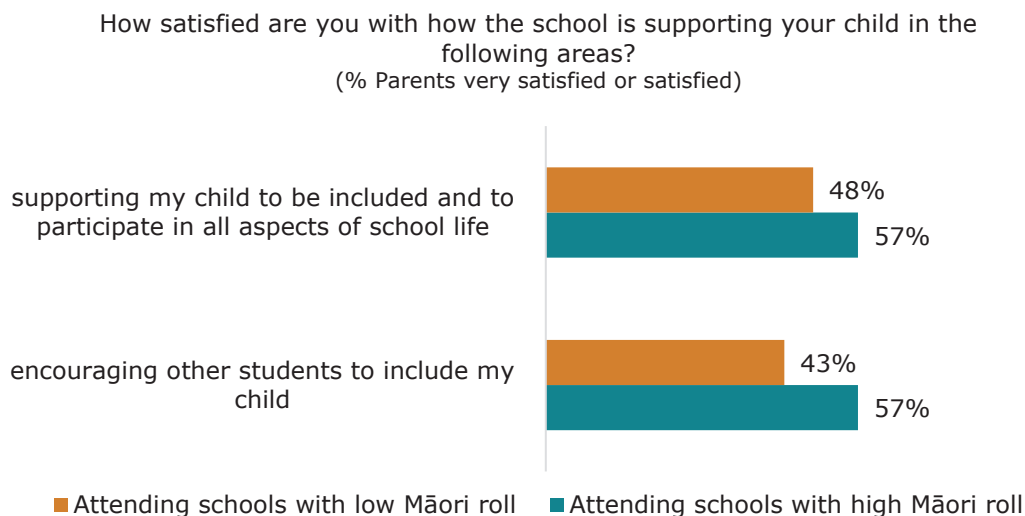
The small survey sample size of Māori (85 disabled learners and whānau) means comparisons with non-Māori disabled learners need to be treated as indicative only.

1) Schools with a high Māori student roll have a stronger culture of inclusion for disabled learners and their whānau


Among Māori disabled learners who responded to our surveys, 40 percent were attending schools with a high Māori roll.

We found that these schools tend to have a stronger culture of inclusion for disabled learners compared to schools with a low Māori roll. In our survey, whānau of disabled learners at schools with a high Māori roll are more likely to be satisfied or very satisfied with how the school is supporting the inclusion and participation of their child (see Figure 54).

Figure 54: *Parents' views of school culture and inclusion in schools with high and low Māori roll: Whānau survey*




In interviews and survey comments, Māori whānau talked about their child being genuinely cared for and valued by their schools:



“[My child’s] school should be a model for other schools ... The thing about them is their staff genuinely care and try whether they have the resources, time, space or not.”

MĀORI WHĀNAU



“[My child’s] progressions and goals are celebrated by the whole school. Everyone gets to see what he is capable of.”

MĀORI WHĀNAU



Story 7.1: A Year 12 Māori disabled learner supported to achieve his NCEA goals

The secondary school found a way to support the interest Hemi (not his real name) has in digital art and design and offered a tailored pathway to achieve his NCEA goals. The school has facilitated his dual enrolment and gradual transition to Te Kura to finish his qualification at his own pace.

“This school has provided support that is respectful and proactive.”

PARENT

Hemi has received support from the school leaders and teachers to increase his engagement and participation in activities in the school.

“He has access to his own toilet with a key to use while in his power chair, the school has also organised the free taxi van service to take him to school every day. When he started using the chair the SENCO and Principal made it easy ... help was always available.”

PARENT

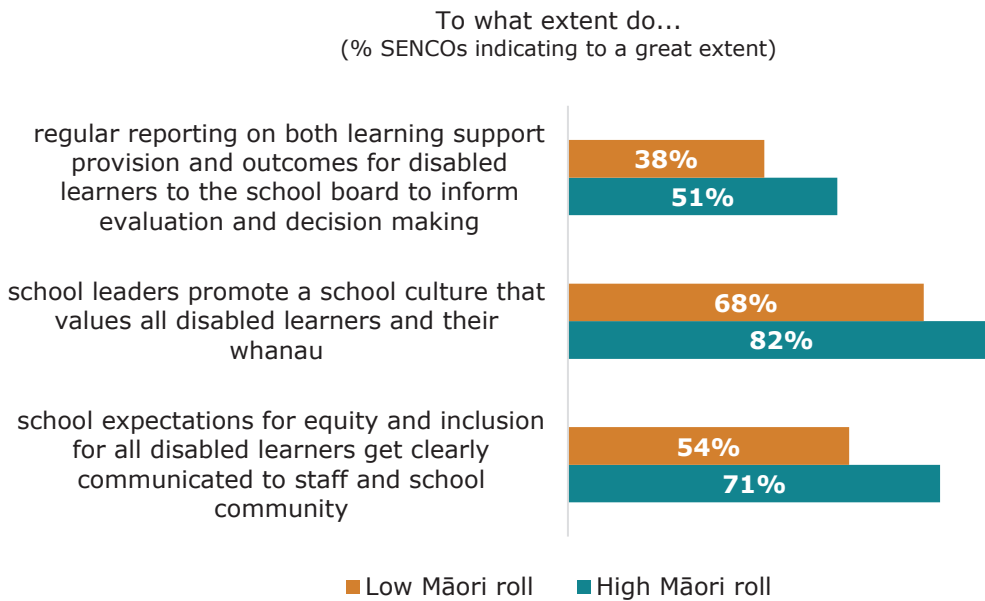
Teachers have had high expectations and supported Hemi to try new things.

“PE teacher encouraged him to take part in special basketball and he enjoyed it.”

PARENT

Among SENCOs who responded to our survey, those from schools with a high Māori student roll were more likely to report there is a strong inclusive school culture, and expectations for equity and inclusion are clearly communicated (see Figure 55).

Figure 55: *Leadership expectations and culture in high Māori vs low Māori roll schools: SENCO survey*



Good practice example 7.1: School promotes wellbeing and belonging through valuing language, culture, and identity

Medium sized primary school (with over 80 percent Māori students and 3 percent of student roll has ORS)

At this school, its curriculum and whole way of working are centred on fostering learners' emotional safety, wellbeing, and sense of belonging. Its values education programme helps learners manage their emotions and supports their wellbeing.

“Once a child is in red (melt down space) they have a responsibility to work their way back to Tangaroa – the calming waters. We teach our kids what to do – mindfulness, breathing, relaxation. We have done a lot of work with outside experts on trauma informed practice and brain development.”

PRINCIPAL

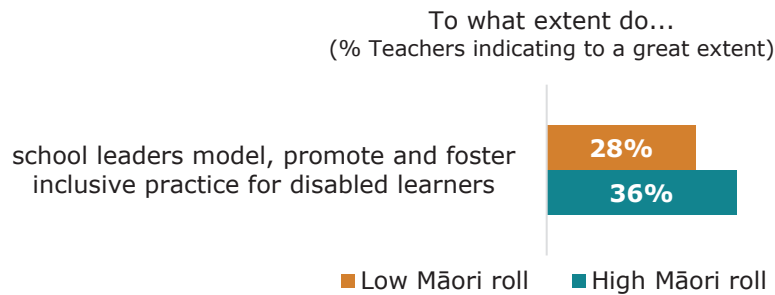
The Board provides additional funding to keep class sizes small and learning environments calm. The school splits break times to ensure smaller groups in the playground and calmer play times. In addition, every child who needs it has a space or a person they can go to support their self-regulation.

“Gone are the days when a child's meltdown sets off three others and causes the learning programme to go out the window. We have the resource and the people to help them process that moment.”

PRINCIPAL

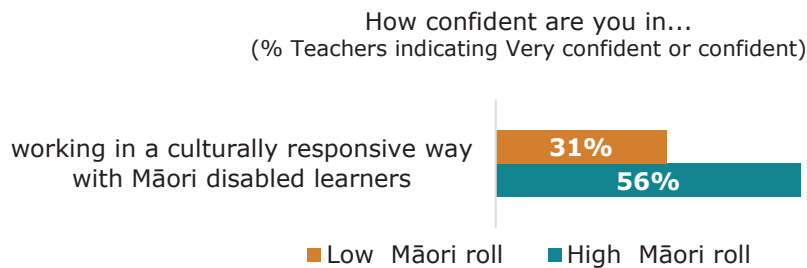
Teachers from schools with a high Māori student roll were also more likely to report that school leaders promote inclusive practice (see Figure 56).

Figure 56: *Extent to which school leaders promote inclusive practice: Teacher survey*



Teachers from these schools also reported higher confidence in working in a culturally responsive way with Māori disabled learners and their whānau (see Figure 57).

Figure 57: *Teacher confidence in working in a culturally responsive way: Teacher survey*



In interviews with schools with a high Māori student roll, we heard that many have the “heart” for inclusion. We heard good practice examples of supporting wellbeing and belonging and promoting inclusion in classroom and social activities.

Good practice example 7.2: Promoting inclusion in class activities and social interaction.

Medium sized rural primary school (with over 50 percent Māori students and 4 percent of student roll has ORS)

At this school, teachers use a range of strategies to fully include disabled learners in classroom learning and to promote social interaction with non-disabled peers. Teachers model inclusive behaviour for all children. They ensure they are included in small group work, are called on to contribute to class discussions and have their turn at performing class leadership roles alongside their peers. Teachers buddy disabled learners with their non-disabled peers to support their participation in both classroom and individualised programmes.

“We maintain expectations for students to be self-managing. We won’t do what a student can do for themselves. We are mindful of not using teacher assistants in a way that gets in the way of independence and collaboration in the class or the playground.”

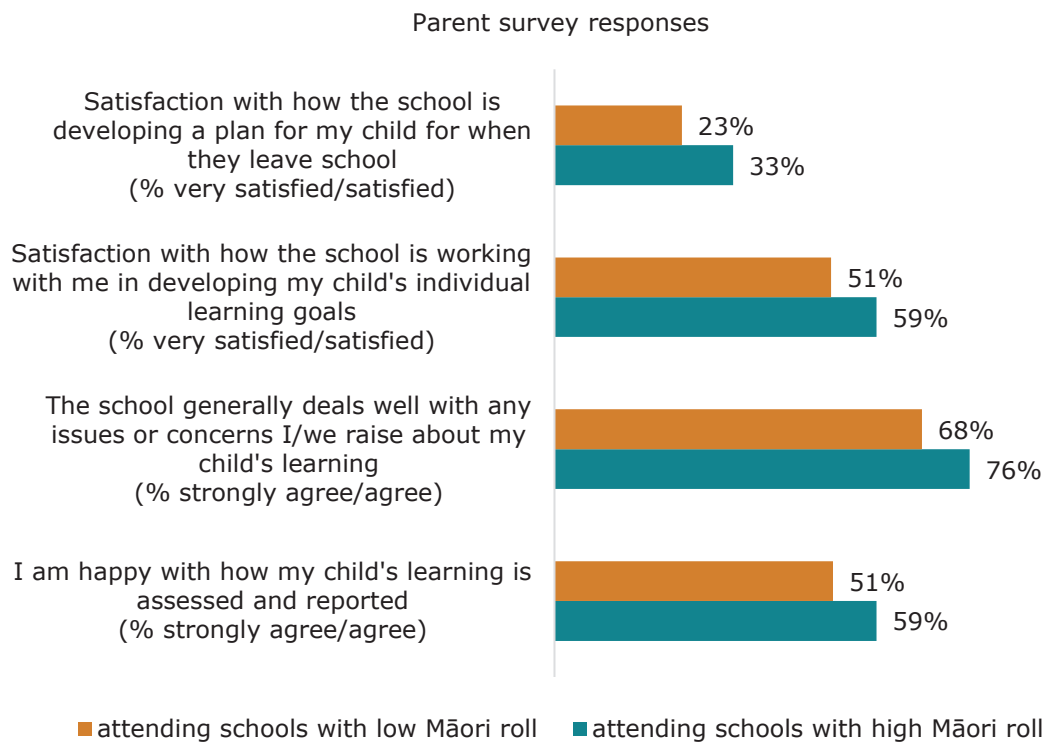
TEACHER

Teachers write “social stories” together with disabled learners and their peers and use them to promote social skills. Teachers use assistive technology, including communication technology, skilfully to enhance disabled learner participation and social interaction.

2) Schools with a high Māori student roll have better engagement with whānau

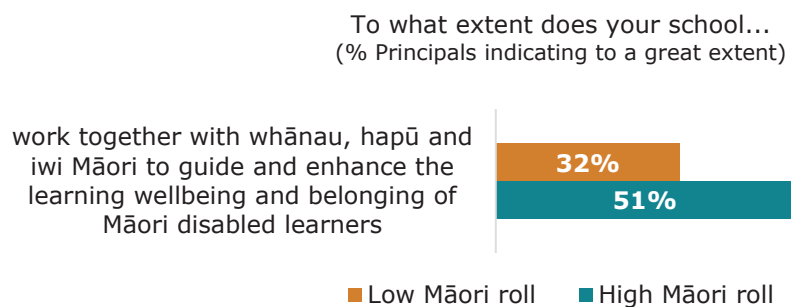
Whānau of disabled learners attending schools with a high Māori roll are also more likely to be satisfied with how the school is working with them in developing their child’s learning goals and responding to issues or concerns they raise (see Figure 58). In interviews we heard examples of schools tailoring their support to these learners and working closely with whānau.

Figure 58: *Parents' views of school engagement with parents and whānau*



Schools with a high Māori student roll also report better engagement with whānau and working with whānau, hapū, and iwi Māori to guide and enhance learning, wellbeing, and belonging of Māori disabled learners (see Figure 59).

Figure 59: *Working with whānau, hapū, and iwi Māori: Principal survey*



Good practice example 7.3: Effective partnerships with whānau of disabled learners

A large urban primary school (with over 40 percent Māori students and 2 percent of student roll has ORS)

This school places a high priority on developing effective partnerships with parents and whānau of disabled learners. The school Board and leadership team value and encourage regular feedback from its school community.

School leaders and class teachers make time to meet with families and respond to any concerns or feedback.

“Families are comfortable speaking with us. [We have] built such a relationship, that it happens. Parents have our cellphone numbers, and they can text us readily. We do hear if there are differences between home culture and school.”

SENCO

“In our IEP there is a big section for whānau input. They are a key part of it ... They are a part of development and reviews.”

SENCO

The school Board is representative of the diverse school community, including families with disabled learners. The school has developed effective processes for involving families and whānau in decision-making.

“We draw on our parents. We have whānau hui for each of our learning teams.”

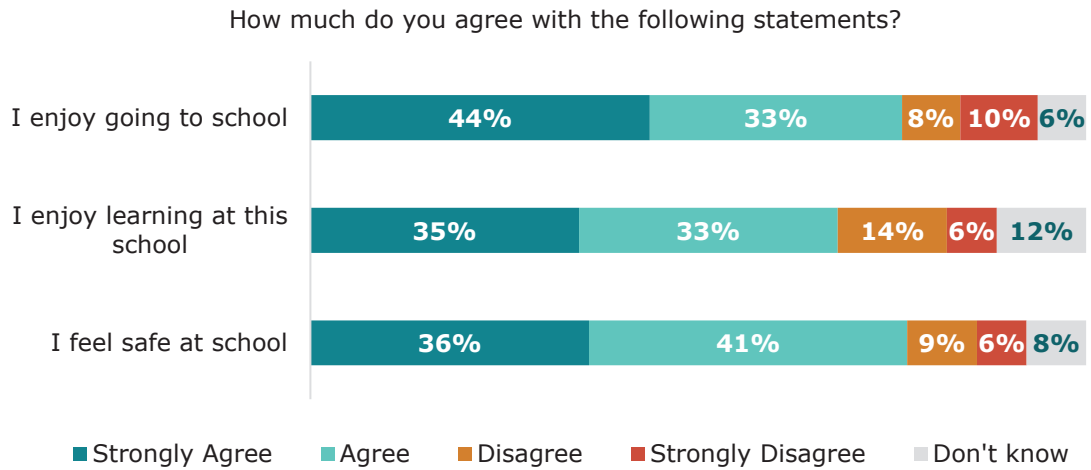
PRINCIPAL

3) Many Māori disabled learners are enjoying school and learning

Most of the Māori disabled learners in our survey feel positive about going to school and learning at school. Most also reported they feel safe at school (See Figure 60):

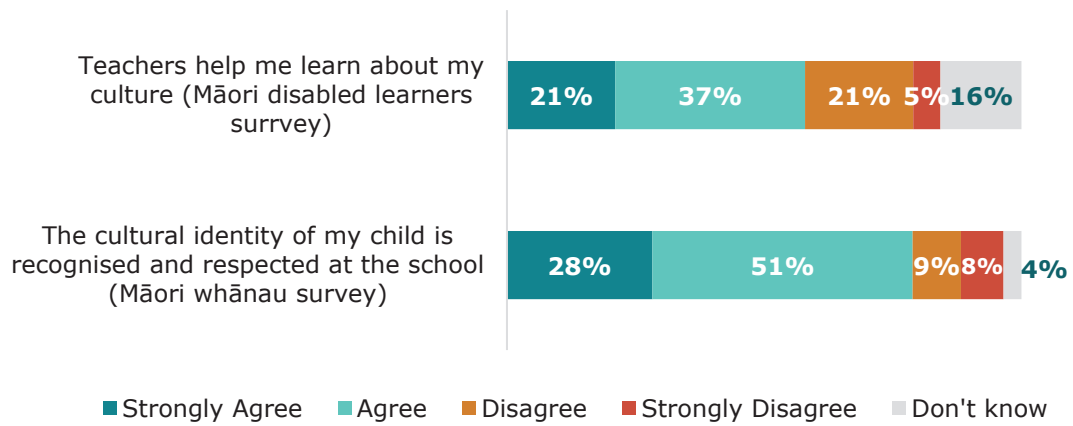
- 77 percent reported they enjoy going to school (higher than non-Māori disabled learners at 66 percent)
- 68 percent reported they enjoy learning at school (similar to non-Māori disabled learners)
- 77 percent reported feeling safe at school (higher than non-Māori disabled learners at 68 percent).

Figure 60: *How Māori disabled learners feel about school: Disabled learner survey*



Most Māori whānau (79 percent) feel their child’s cultural identity is recognised and respected at school. More than half (58 percent) of Māori learners agreed or strongly agreed that teachers help them learn about their culture (higher compared to 37 percent of non-Māori learners) (see Figure 61).

Figure 61: *How well schools support the cultural identity of Māori disabled learners: Disabled learners and whānau survey*

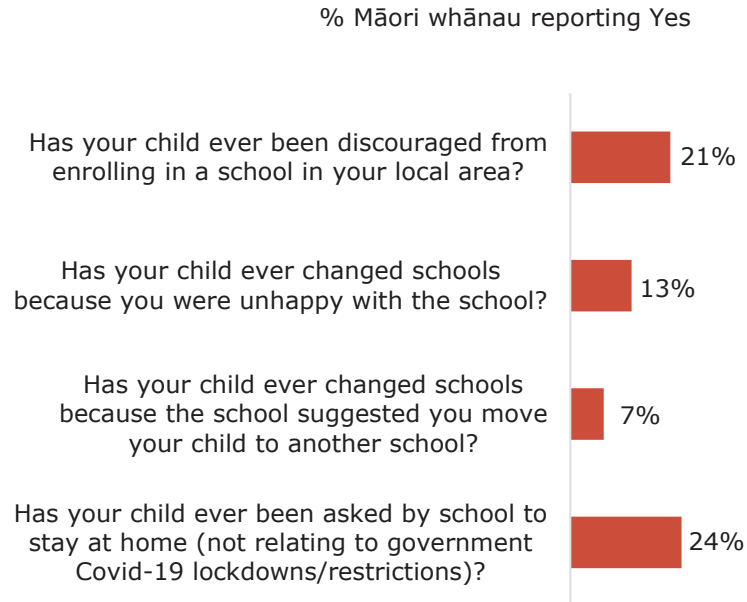


4) Some Māori disabled learners are still experiencing exclusion and poor outcomes at school

There are, however, still a significant number of Māori disabled learners who told us they are experiencing exclusion and poor outcomes at school. Among Māori whānau who responded to our survey (see Figure 62):

- 21 percent reported their child has been discouraged from enrolling in a school in their local area (similar to non-Māori parents and whānau)
- 13 percent have moved their child to a different school because they were unhappy with the school their child was at (lower than non-Māori parent respondents at 18 percent)
- 7 percent of parents have moved their child to a different school because their current school suggested it (higher than non-Māori parents and whānau at 3 percent)
- 24 percent indicated their child has been asked by school to stay at home (similar to non-Māori disabled learners).

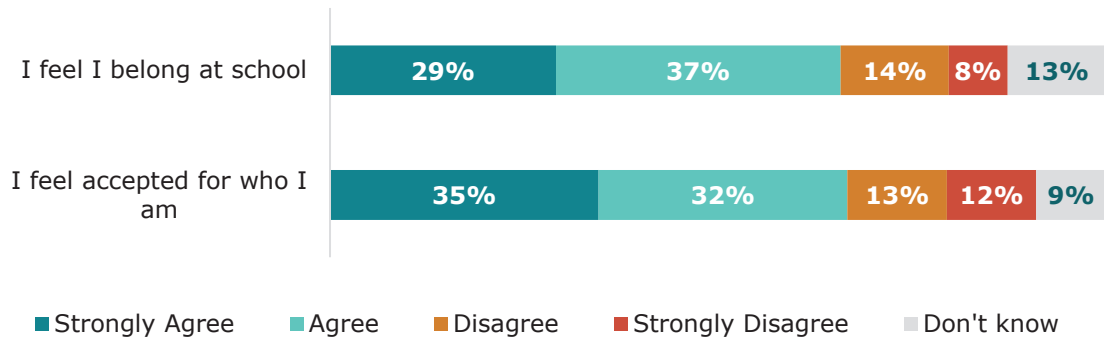
Figure 62: *Māori disabled learners' experiences of exclusion: Whānau survey*



Among Māori disabled learners who responded to the survey (see Figure 63):

- 22 percent indicated that they do not feel they belong at their school (lower than non-Māori disabled learners at 33 percent)
- 24 percent do not feel accepted for who they are (similar to non-Māori disabled learners).

Figure 63: *Māori disabled learners' sense of wellbeing and belonging at school: Disabled learner survey*



In terms of Māori disabled learners' participation in school activities:

- 34 percent hardly ever take part in school camps (higher than non-Māori respondents at 27 percent)
- when asked how often they are able to take part in school activities as much as other children, 16 percent said hardly ever (similar to non-Māori disabled learners).

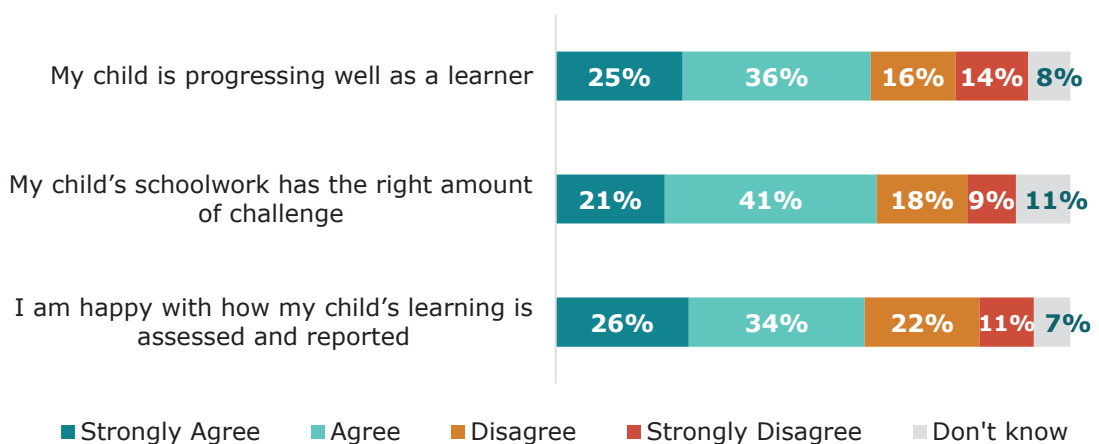
5) Whānau of Māori disabled learners are concerned about key aspects of education provision

When we asked Māori whānau how they feel about their tamariki's learning at school, almost one in three (31 percent) Māori whānau did not feel their child is progressing well as a learner (lower than non-Māori whānau at 44 percent).

Māori whānau were also concerned about other key aspects of their learning (see Figure 64).

Figure 64: *Whānau Māori views on child's learning: Whānau survey*

How much do you agree with the following statements?



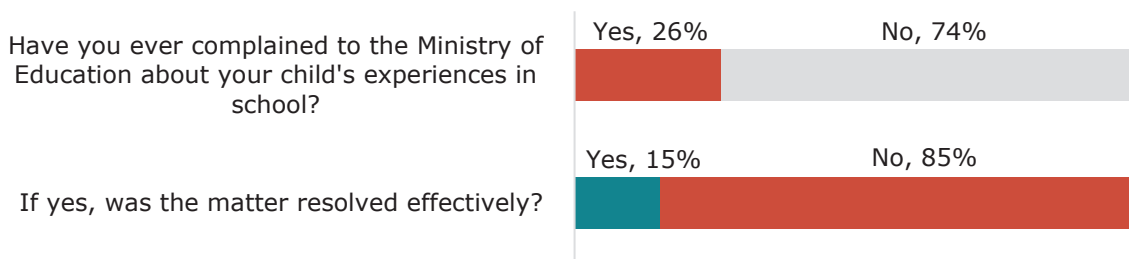
6) Whānau of Māori disabled learners are dissatisfied with how complaints are resolved

Just over a quarter (26 percent) of Māori whānau who responded to our survey reported they have complained to the Ministry of Education about their child's experiences in school (see Figure 65). However, the vast majority (85 percent) said the matter was not resolved effectively (higher than non-Māori parents and whānau at 70 percent).

“I am concerned [for] parents of disabled learners who aren't equipped to stand up for their child because of their lack of education and their background. I could see that it would be very intimidating, especially for Māori families who find it hard to speak up ... I thought to myself, thank goodness it wasn't the old me supporting my son. The old me would have accepted less and let them get away with it, resulting in my son having an awful time at school.”

MĀORI WHĀNAU

Figure 65: *Complaints to the Ministry of Education by Māori whānau: Whānau survey*



Conclusion

Schools with a high Māori student roll are more inclusive of disabled learners and their whānau. They also have better engagement with whānau. Many Māori disabled learners are enjoying school – more so than non-Māori disabled learners. However, there is still a significant number who are experiencing exclusion and poor outcomes. Some Māori whānau are also concerned with key aspects of their child's education, although less so than non-Māori parents and whānau. Māori whānau are significantly more dissatisfied with how complaints are responded to and resolved.



Part 8: How well are Pacific disabled learners doing?

Many of the Pacific disabled learners we heard from reported that they enjoy school and learning. However, a significant number are still experiencing exclusion and poor outcomes at school. This section presents what we heard.

How we gathered information

To find out how well Pacific disabled learners are doing, we worked closely with Pacific education experts in reaching out and hearing from Pacific disabled learners and their families, and from schools with a high Pacific student roll.

We engaged with disabled learners, their families and schools as follows:

→ online surveys:

- responses from 29 Pacific disabled learners and 32 Pacific parents (6 percent of total respondents) – consisting of 56 percent Samoan, 38 percent Cook Island Māori, 13 percent Tongan, 6 percent Niuean, 3 percent Fijian, and 6 percent Tokelauan.

→ interviews:

- five Pacific parents who represent seven disabled learners, led by experienced Pacific evaluators
- three Pacific disabled youth who participated in a focus group
- interviews with five schools with a high Pacific student roll (two with over 60 percent Pacific students on their roll, three with over 20 percent).

We then reviewed the findings with Pacific education experts to help us understand and contextualise what we heard.

This section reports what we heard about how well Pacific disabled learners are doing. However, given the small number of Pacific participants, we cannot make a comparison between Pacific and non-Pacific responses, or draw firm conclusions on how well Pacific disabled learners are doing.

What we found: An overview

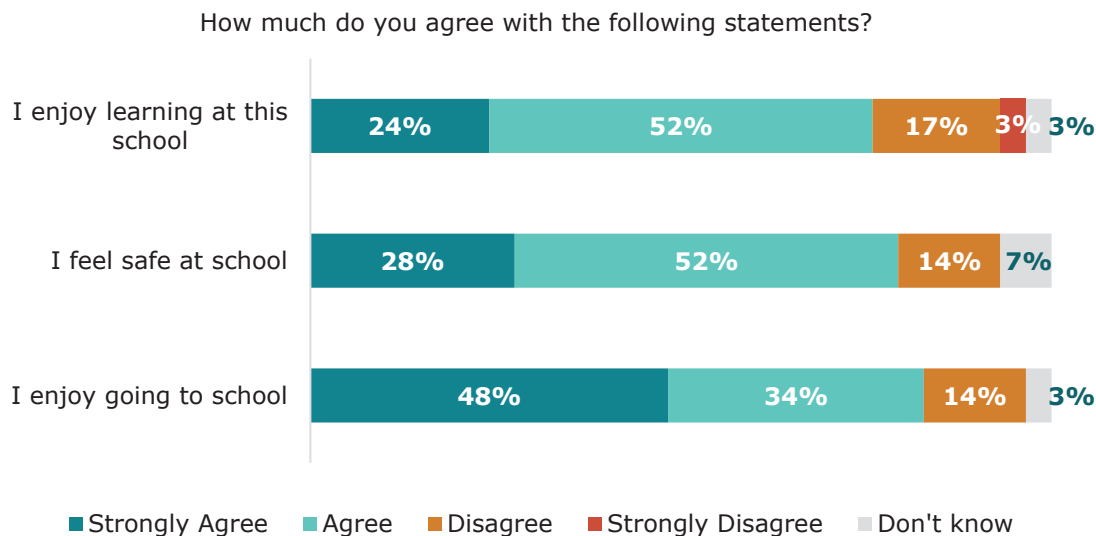
- 1) Many Pacific disabled learners enjoy school and learning.
- 2) Some Pacific disabled learners are still experiencing exclusion and poor outcomes at school.

1) Many Pacific disabled learners enjoy school and learning

Among the Pacific disabled learners who responded to our survey, many were positive about school and learning (see Figure 66):

- 83 percent reported they enjoy going to school
- 76 percent reported they enjoy learning at school
- 79 percent reported they feel safe at school.

Figure 66: *How Pacific disabled learners feel about school and learning: Disabled learners survey*



In our interviews, we heard examples from Pacific parents of how strong leadership and an inclusive culture at the school provides a nurturing environment for their disabled children. We also heard of schools responding to their child's wellbeing needs, and how they are creating plans in partnership with parents to support their transition, participation, and engagement at school.

“School has been a huge help. They developed the safety plan with input from me. I get regular updates from school. They changed the gates and locks because he used to be a runner.”

PACIFIC PARENT

“If there is a problem the SENCO contacts me, we get a phone call or a text message ... we have a good relationship with the teachers and the teacher aide.”

PACIFIC PARENT

Story 8.1: Eight-year-old Pacific disabled learner who had a well-supported transition from early learning to primary school

Michael was diagnosed with global developmental delay when he was two. The speech language therapist and Child Development Unit set up the funding and support for Michael's parents and facilitated his transition to kindergarten, along with an Early Intervention Education Support Worker.

Michael's transition to school was well supported by the Early Intervention team. There was a meet and greet with the teachers and teacher aides months before he started school. The Early Intervention team continued follow up visits at school every month for a few terms.

Michael's ASD behaviour patterns started emerging after he turned five. The school developed a safety plan, with input from Michael's mum, and gave her regular updates over the phone or by text. Michael's mum has input into his IEP and links it with things at home.

The school has established a system of using the teacher aide to influence peers to support his engagement in the class and playground. He has a friend to help him put on his shoes, one who gets him back to class if he runs away, and one to help at lunch time. The teacher aide also helps him identify his triggers and self-regulate using his sensory basket in the class.

“School had been challenging for him, he used to be a runner, they have had a few scares ... but the school has been a huge help.”

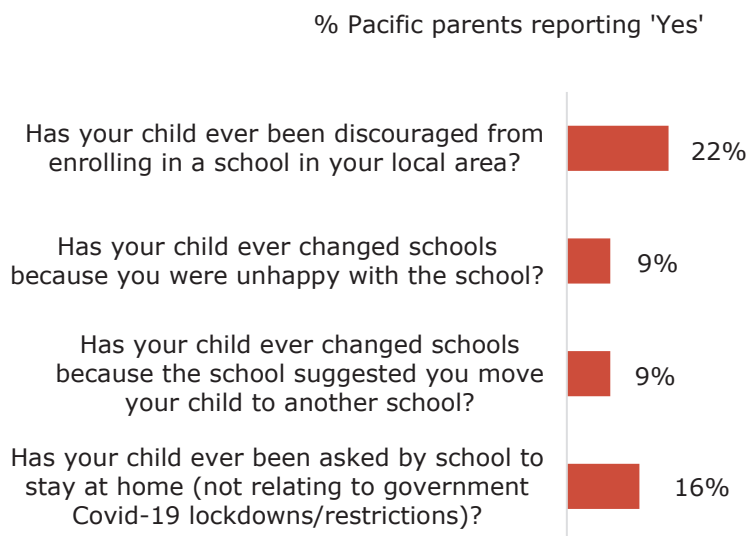
PACIFIC PARENT

2) Some Pacific disabled learners are still experiencing exclusion and poor outcomes at school

We also heard that some Pacific disabled learners are still experiencing exclusion and poor outcomes at school (see Figure 67). Among the Pacific parents who responded to our survey:

- 22 percent reported their child has been discouraged from enrolling in a school in their local area
- 9 percent moved their child to a different school because they were unhappy with the school their child was at, and another 9 percent of parents have moved their child to a different school because their current school suggested it
- 16 percent have been asked by the school to stay home (not relating to government Covid-19 lockdowns/restrictions).

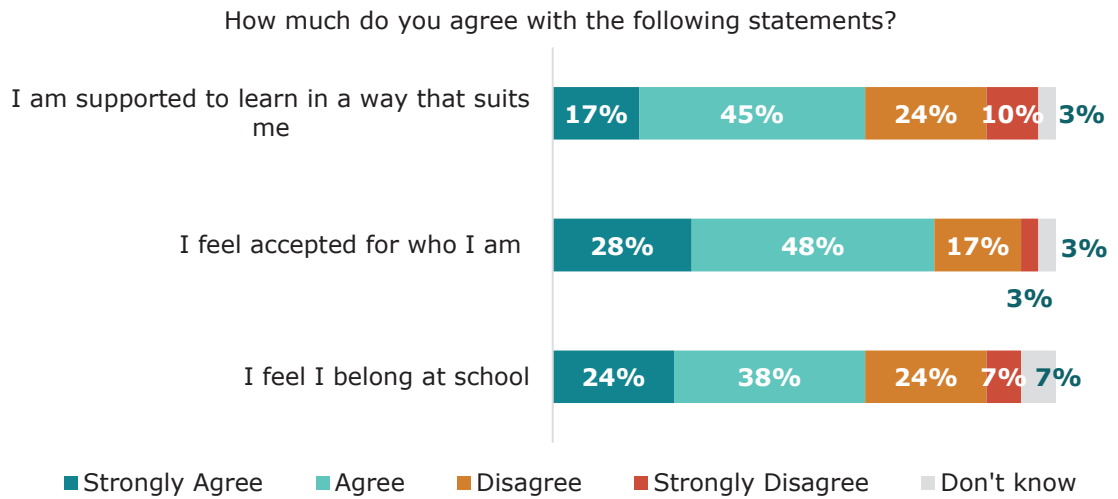
Figure 67: *Pacific disabled learners experiences of exclusion: Pacific parent survey*



Among the Pacific disabled learners who responded to our survey (see Figure 68):

- 31 percent indicated they do not feel they belong at school
- 21 percent indicated they do not feel accepted for who they are
- 34 percent did not feel supported to learn in a way that suits them
- 22 percent said they never or are hardly ever able to take part in activities as much as other kids.

Figure 68: *How Pacific disabled learners feel about school: Pacific Disabled Learners survey*



In interviews, some Pacific parents shared about their child’s experiences of being bullied, and the lack of school support for EOTC participation.

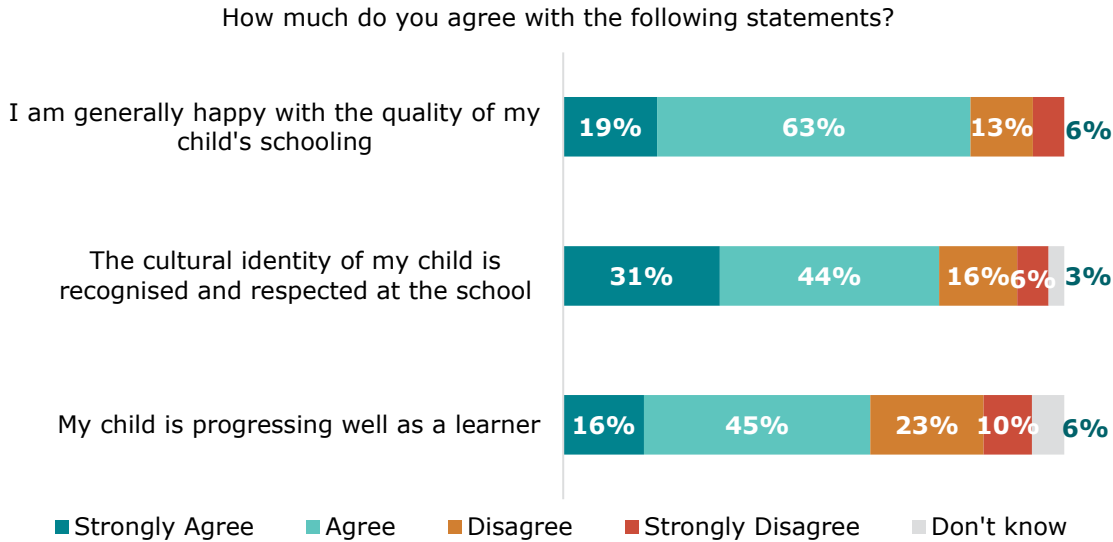
“He got teased a lot and was sad. The kids called him names ... It happened a lot.”
PACIFIC PARENT

“There was an incident with swimming. They go to local pools. He is still in pull-ups, and I was concerned that if they go into [the same] changing rooms, other children would see, that he was in pull ups ... The school did not have a teacher aide for swimming so one of us [parents] has to help.”
PACIFIC PARENT

Among Pacific parents of disabled learners who responded to the survey (see Figure 69):

- 32 percent did not think their child is progressing well as a learner
- 19 percent were not happy with the quality of their child’s schooling
- 22 percent did not think the cultural identity of their child is recognised and respected as a learner.

Figure 69: Pacific parents' views of their child's learning at school: Parent survey



Pacific parents told us about their disabled child not being taught in a way that supports them to demonstrate progress and achievement, and that learning goals and expectations were not always pitched at the right level. These factors often resulted in disengagement from learning.

“There needs to be more activities that they enjoy. They learn in their own ways and schools need to find what children are interested in.”
PACIFIC PARENT

“People treat him more able than he is and don't realise he has developmental delay or other challenges.”
PACIFIC PARENT

Parents also talked about the lack of understanding of the needs of neurodiverse learners.

“The new class teacher doesn't seem to fully understand his condition and considers him to be lazy at times.”
PACIFIC PARENT

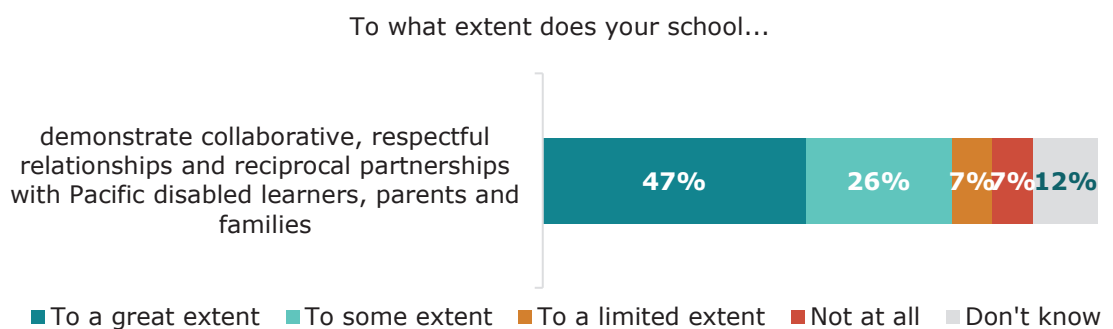
“His primary school was struggling with his behaviour and did not organise RTLB support till I complained to MoE and asked for it.”
PACIFIC PARENT

Story 8.2: 14-year-old Pacific disabled learner who fell through the cracks of a poor transition and is currently excluded from school

Joe was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and global developmental delay in kindergarten and had support put in place for his transition to primary school. He felt included and loved at primary school. However, intermediate school was not a good experience for Joe. He felt excluded in the special unit he was placed in, and experienced bullying. The intermediate school did not support his transition to secondary school. Joe’s parents were left struggling to navigate the funding system because the secondary school had asked for ORS funding as a condition for his enrolment. Unfamiliar with the funding application process and how to proceed, his parents are currently keeping Joe home.

In our survey of school leaders, less than half (47 percent) indicated their school is demonstrating collaborative, respectful relationships and reciprocal partnerships with Pacific disabled learners and parents and families to a great extent (see Figure 70).

Figure 70: *How well are schools working with Pacific disabled learners and their families: School principal survey*



In our interviews with five schools with high Pacific student rolls, we heard that some were struggling to provide quality, inclusive education due to the following challenges:

- ineffective use of learning support roles to enhance leadership capability and capacity
- variable teacher confidence and capability for implementing inclusive teaching practice and curriculum and assessment adaptations

- lower confidence in using assistive technology to support greater inclusion in classrooms
- lack of effective systems for gathering and using progress and achievement data for disabled learners.

We also found examples of good practice (see below).

Good practice example 8.1: Strong leadership setting inclusive culture and expectations

Large urban primary school (with 61 percent Pacific students, 22 percent Māori students, and 6 percent of students roll has ORS)

At this school, serving a large Pacific community, the leaders articulate a strong rights-based commitment to inclusion of disabled learners. Leadership of learning support across specialist settings and mainstream classes is joined up, coordinated and collaborative.

“You cannot separate children with needs from others. We want our tamariki to come to school with their cousins and siblings ... If you are in our area, you are our kid.”

PRINCIPAL

The school has used the new Learning Support Coordinator role effectively to augment its capacity to coordinate and deliver learning support and connect with families. Leaders model and promote a strengths-based, respectful approach to disabled learners and their families. They have a deep understanding of how culture and language matter and foster different ways of engaging with families.

During the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the school offered a series of workshops for parents on wellbeing, based on different cultural models and concepts. The school routinely draws on the perspectives and feedback of families of disabled learners to support evaluation and decision-making and advocates for families to have a voice in national consultations.

Conclusion

The number of Pacific participants in this study is too small to enable any firm comparisons or conclusions to be made on how well Pacific disabled learners are doing. Among those we heard from, many reported they enjoy school and learning. However, there is still a significant number who are experiencing exclusion and poor outcomes at school.



Part 9: How strong are the supports for good education provision?

Good education provision for disabled learners requires support. This includes clear expectations, curriculum and assessment tools that work for disabled learners, a capable workforce, coordination of support services, and clear pathways for learners. We looked at how well these key enablers are supporting quality education and found that there are areas that could work better to support disabled learners' education.

In this section, we report our findings on what is supporting schools to provide quality, inclusive education for disabled learners and what needs strengthening.

Enablers that support good education provision

To understand how strong the enablers are that support schools to provide quality, inclusive education for disabled learners, we looked at the following four components in the education system:

- 1) system expectations and accountability
- 2) national curriculum and assessment
- 3) workforce capability
- 4) coordination and collaboration for transition, pathways, and services.

How we gathered information

We gathered information through multiple sources to make judgements about how well the system enablers are working. The evidence for the findings came from surveys and interviews with disabled learners, their parents and whānau, school principals, SENCOs, teachers, and teacher aides. We also interviewed key informants in the education system.

What we found: An overview

System expectations are robust, but there is no systematic tracking of how well they are being met and there is weak accountability. We found that some parents and whānau are not aware of their children's education rights or how to raise concerns, which impacts on their ability to advocate for their child. Complaints about poor experiences at school are not being effectively resolved.

National curriculum and assessment guidelines and tools are not being used by the majority of teachers. At a high level, the national curriculum and assessment is designed to be flexible and support quality, inclusive education for disabled learners. However, most of the guidelines and tools are not well-aligned or easy to access and are hardly ever used by teachers.

Workforce capacity is a significant concern. We found that the majority of teachers report low levels of confidence in teaching disabled learners. Only a small proportion of teachers and SENCOs have specialist training in teaching disabled learners, and many teachers do not have sufficient opportunities to improve their skills in this area. Some schools are not satisfied with how specialists and agencies are supporting their teaching staff to plan and deliver education for disabled learners.

Coordination and collaboration for transitions, pathways, and services is mixed. While the majority of parents and whānau are satisfied with how the school helped their child start school, many are not satisfied with how the school is supporting their child to leave school and access pathways beyond school. Support for disabled learners is not always well coordinated across schools and lack of information sharing impacts on transitions and pathways for learners.

1) System expectations and accountability

This section looks at the following:

- a) legal expectations
- b) parent and whānau awareness of legal expectations
- c) complaints
- d) parent and whānau input into design of education policies for disabled learners
- e) system responsiveness to Māori disabled learners and their whānau
- f) monitoring performance.

Areas enabling quality provision

a) Legal expectations

Expectations for quality, inclusive education are set in legislation and are robust

Schools are required to be inclusive of disabled learners under the Education and Training Act 2020. The Act requires schools to be inclusive of, and cater for, students with differing needs. The requirement for schools to be inclusive is reinforced by the New Zealand Disability Strategy, particularly Outcome 1 on Education: “We get an excellent education and achieve our potential throughout our lives”.

The right to inclusive education is in line with international obligations which Aotearoa New Zealand has signed up to. In particular:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which Aotearoa New Zealand ratified in 2008. Signatories to the convention are to ensure equal access for disabled people to: primary and secondary education, vocational training, adult education, and lifelong learning.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), which Aotearoa New Zealand ratified in 1993. UNCROC is a comprehensive human rights treaty that enshrines specific children’s rights in international law.

Areas that need strengthening

b) Parent and whānau awareness of legal expectations

Some parents and whānau are not aware of their children’s education rights or how to raise concerns, which impacts on their ability to advocate for their child

Through our interviews and survey comments, we consistently heard that some parents and whānau are not even aware of their child’s education rights or how to raise concerns or make complaints. This lack of knowledge means parents and whānau often do not feel equipped or confident enough to stand up to schools when they refuse to enrol their disabled child, or when their child is not being well or fairly supported.



“I haven’t complained because I don’t know how to do this. How do we as parents raise our concerns to MOE?”

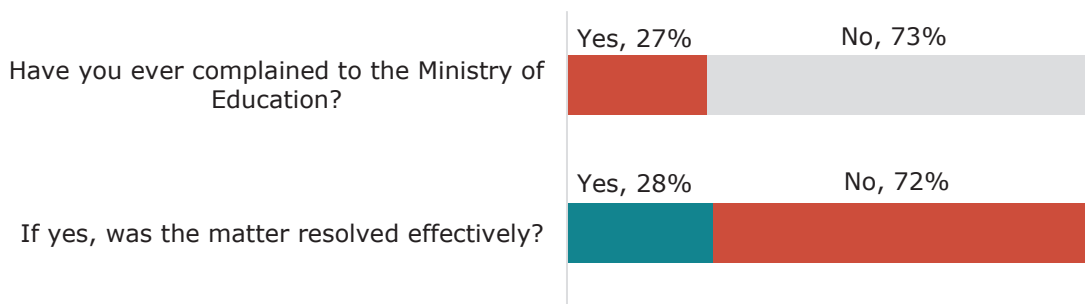
PARENT

c) Complaints

Complaints about poor experiences at school are not being effectively resolved

More than a quarter (27 percent) of parents and whānau have made complaints about their child's experiences at school to the Ministry of Education (see Figure 71). Of these, most (72 percent) reported that the matter was not resolved effectively.

Figure 71: *Complaints and how effectively they are resolved: Parent survey*



Through interviews and survey comments, parents spoke of their experiences of putting in a complaint to the Ministry of Education and the importance of 'social capital' and personal contacts in advocating effectively for their disabled children.

“I had a complaint with communication from the Ministry speech language therapist. It was referred to her manager and after a 90 minute phone call, was seemingly resolved. But I didn't feel heard or respected. It makes me feel wary, disappointed, and not valued in my daughter's education journey. I am reluctant to talk or ask questions as the whole experience was crappy. [They should] listen to parents without spouting facts from research. Don't threaten to cut funding unless they toe the line. It is a poor reflection on the supposed equal partnership between us.”

PARENT

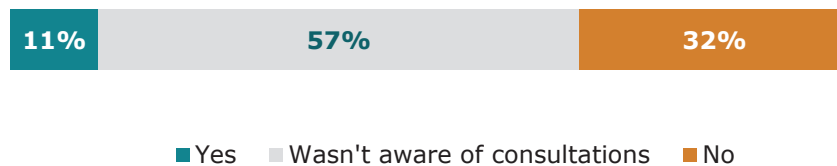
d) Parent and whānau input into design of education policies for disabled learners

Most whānau of disabled learners do not provide input into the design of education policies and programmes that affect them.

Only 11 percent of parents and whānau indicated they have provided input or feedback to the Ministry of Education's consultations about education for disabled learners (e.g., Kōrero Mātauranga and the draft Learning Support Action Plan in 2018). More than half of parents and whānau were not even aware of the consultations (see Figure 72). Māori whānau were even less likely to have provided input into consultations (with only 7 percent indicating they have provided input, but 62 percent indicating they were not aware of the consultations).

Figure 72: *Provided feedback on Ministry of Education's consultations: Parent survey*

Have you provided any input or feedback to the Ministry of Education's consultations about education for disabled learners?

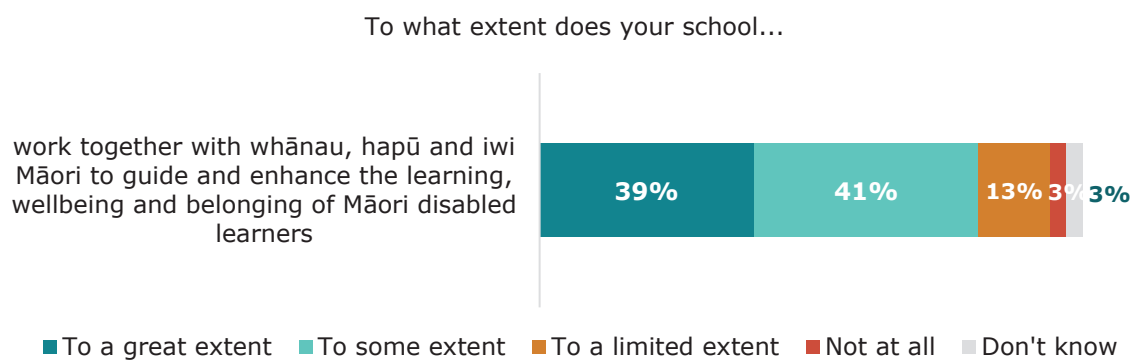


e) System responsiveness to Māori disabled learners and whānau

Limited system responsiveness to Māori disabled learners and whānau

In our survey of school principals, only 39 percent reported their school is working together with whānau, hapū, and iwi Māori to guide and enhance the learning, wellbeing and belonging of Māori disabled learners to a great extent (see Figure 73).

Figure 73: *How well are schools working with Māori in supporting Māori disabled learners: School principal survey*



As noted earlier in the report, Māori whānau are, concerningly, less satisfied with how complaints are resolved than non-Māori whānau.

The limited responsiveness of the system to Māori disabled learners and whānau is concerning. Many of the education agencies, experts, and practitioners we interviewed recognised that the current system needs to work better for Māori.

f) Monitoring performance

There is no systematic tracking of how well expectations are being met for disabled learners

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 and progress achievement. As a result, there is no systematic monitoring of this priority group of learners to understand how well expectations for inclusive, quality education are being met.

The absence of systematic monitoring is acknowledged by the Ministry of Education in their own analysis:

“While the Ministry of Education collects national data on learners who receive additional support in early childhood education and schooling, data identifying which learners are disabled are not currently collected in a consistent way across the education system.”

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2020, HE WHAAKARO, THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF DISABLED LEARNERS

Consistent identification and monitoring are essential for understanding how well disabled learners are doing in terms of learning and progress achievement, what is working well and for whom, what is not working well and for whom, and what needs to be improved.

Our interviews with key informants from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), Ministry of Education, and academics, all noted that the lack of consistent system-level identification and tracking of disabled learners results in the absence of a national-level picture of how disabled learners are doing.

The following good practice example illustrates how another country has prioritised and improved reporting and monitoring of outcomes for disabled learners in their jurisdiction.

Good practice example 9.1 from another jurisdiction: System expectation and accountability

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) on School Students with Disability is an annual collection of data provided by all Australian schools, reporting on students with disabilities who are receiving ‘adjustments’ in the form of assistive technology, modifications, support, physical access, and differentiated learning. The Australian Education Act 2013 established the groundwork for NCCD and gave schools the authority to share disabled student information. NCCD went live in 2015 and, from 2018, has been used to inform funding decisions. The NCCD is underpinned by Australia’s Disability Discrimination Act 1992.²³

The NCCD also encourages schools to review their learning support systems and processes:

“[t]his helps schools to continually improve education outcomes for all students.”²⁴

2) National curriculum and assessment

This section looks at:

- a) curriculum design
- b) guidelines and tools.

Areas enabling quality provision

a) Curriculum design

The NZ Curriculum is designed to be flexible and support inclusion

The New Zealand Curriculum is designed to support quality, inclusive education for disabled learners. The Ministry of Education provides a wide range of online guides for school leaders and teachers on effective, inclusive practice through its online portal Te Kete Ipurangi inclusive.tki.org.nz. The Ministry’s online guides also promote the use of the Universal Design for Learning framework to help teachers meet the diverse needs of learners in their classrooms.²⁵

This portal also provides schools with literacy and numeracy frameworks to expand and enhance teaching and learning at NZ Curriculum Level 1 (developed in 2001), and links to associated assessment tools to provide measurement of progressions for learners working within Level 1 of the curriculum.

NZQA administers two national qualifications specifically designed for disabled learners with intellectual impairments (New Zealand Certificate in Skills for Living for Supported Learners Level 1; and New Zealand Certificate in Skills for Learning and Working Level 1). In addition, schools can apply to NZQA for Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) to provide support for disabled learners being

assessed for National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 1, 2, and 3 qualifications. Examples of SACs include reader or writer assistance, enlarged papers, rest breaks, and separate rooms.

Areas that need strengthening

b) Guidelines and tools

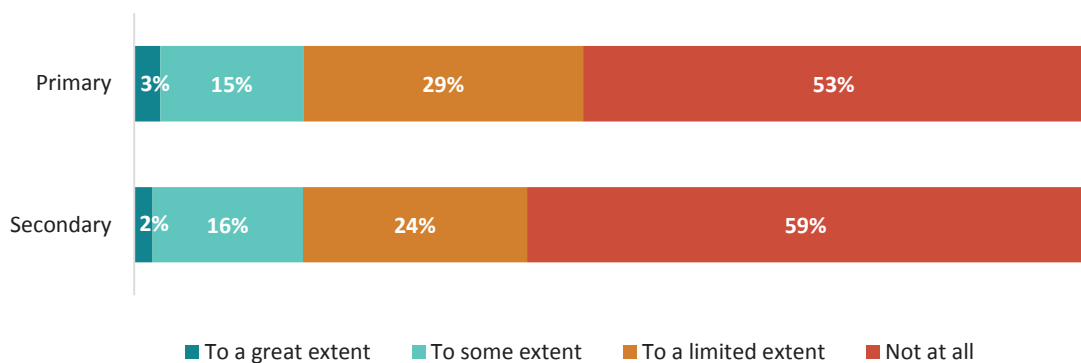
Current curriculum and assessment guidelines and tools are not well aligned, and the majority of teachers are not using them

While the Ministry of Education have developed inclusive education resources for disabled learners, most teachers we heard from are not accessing and using them. Among the teachers who responded to our survey (see Figure 74):

- 53 percent of primary teachers and 59 percent of secondary teachers have not used the Ministry of Education’s online inclusive education guidance at all
- 29 percent of primary teachers and 24 percent of secondary teachers have only used the resources to a limited extent.

Figure 74: *Extent teachers have made use of Inclusive Education Guides: Teacher survey*

To what extent have you made use of the MoE’s online Inclusive Education Guides to support your inclusive teaching practice with disabled learners?



Our interviews with key informants and teachers further highlighted that:

- Ministry of Education guidelines and resources are not consolidated in one place, meaning teachers have to search across multiple sources to find them
- there is a lack of consistency across guidelines and resources
- links between curriculum areas and assessment guidance is unclear, particularly for disabled learners requiring significant learning and assessment adaptations.

Teachers also recounted difficulties in accessing age-appropriate curriculum and assessment resources for secondary-aged learners working within NZC Levels 1 and 2, making it hard to align disabled learners' work with the rest of the class.

In our interviews with SENCOs, we heard examples of teaching staff struggling to adapt the NZC to Level 1 and 2 due to a lack of knowledge and skills.

“Our general teaching staff lack the skills and ability to adapt the NZC to work within Level 1 and 2. We see too many newly trained teachers arriving without any skills to work with difference. This role is draining, I am the only trained learning and behaviour specialist. We need more people like me teaching in schools, not just dropping in and out as a resource.”

SENCO

There was acknowledgement from Ministry of Education informants that some schools have had to go offshore or self-develop the curriculum and assessment tools to support curriculum adaptations for disabled learners. The curriculum refresh is looking at a review of the levels-based framing of the National Curriculum.

3) Workforce capability and confidence

This section looks at:

- a) specialist training
- b) workforce capability
- c) teacher development opportunities.

Areas enabling quality provision

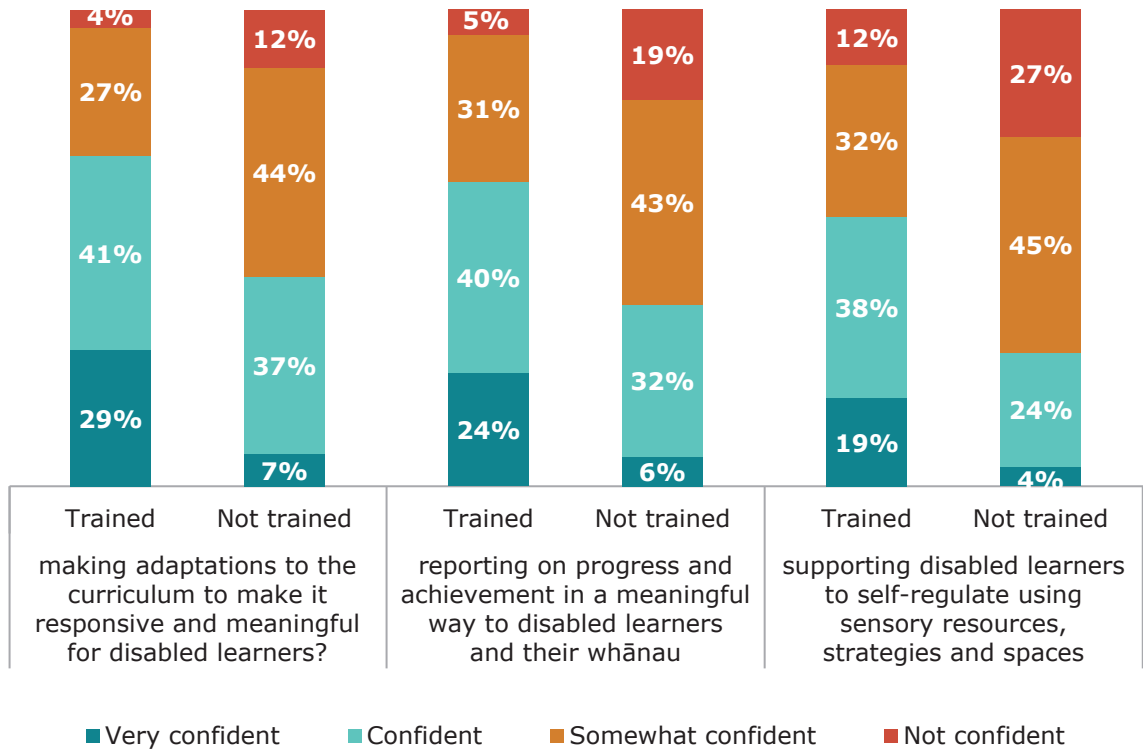
a) Specialist training

Teachers with specialised training in teaching disabled learners are more confident

Among the teachers who responded to our survey, those who have undertaken specialised study in teaching disabled learners reported higher confidence in teaching disabled learners across a range of aspects (see Figure 75).

Figure 75: Confidence in teaching disabled learners comparison: Teacher survey

How confident are you implementing the following teaching practices with disabled learners and their whānau?
 Comparison of teachers with specialised study on teaching disabled learners (Trained) with those without (Not trained)



The difference that specialised study makes to teacher and SENCO confidence was reinforced in our interviews with schools, parents, and whānau.

“I came from an RTLB background and training. I believe that every SENCO should come from an RTLB model [based on the same level of specialist training in behaviour and learning support] you are fundamentally working from an ecological model [as a SENCO] ... changing the ecology of classroom.”

SENCO

“Having the maths teacher as a SENCO doesn't help, you need someone who has a special education background to be a SENCO otherwise they see the child as the problem.”

PARENT

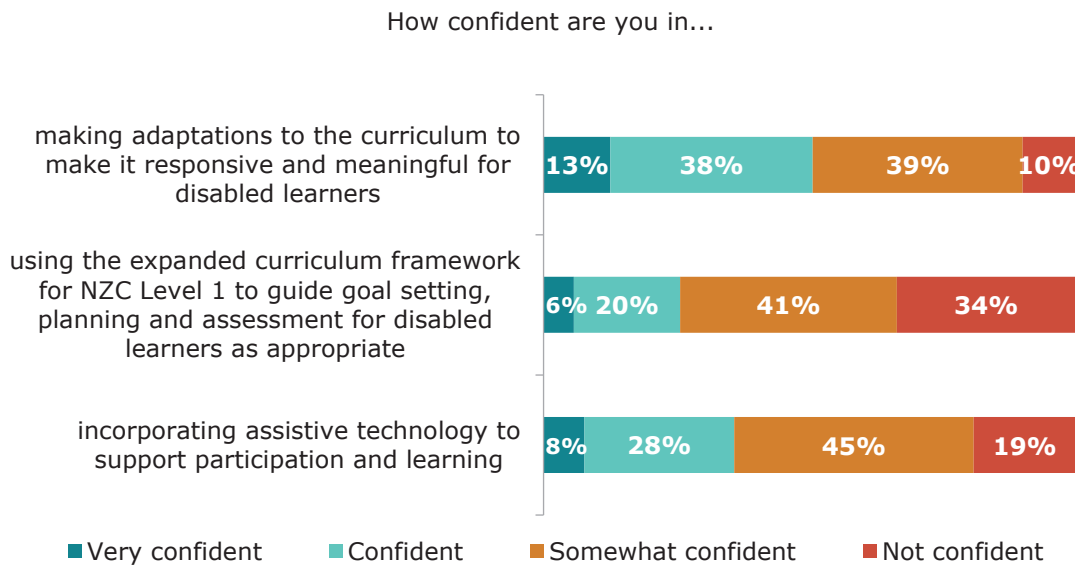
Areas that need strengthening

b) Workforce capability

Most teachers are not confident in teaching disabled learners, particularly those with complex needs who require significant adaptations

A significant concern is that more than half of teachers reported low levels of confidence across many areas of teaching disabled learners (see Figure 76 for examples). (For a more detailed analysis see Part 5 of this report.)

Figure 76: *Teacher confidence in adapting curriculum and teaching for disabled learners*



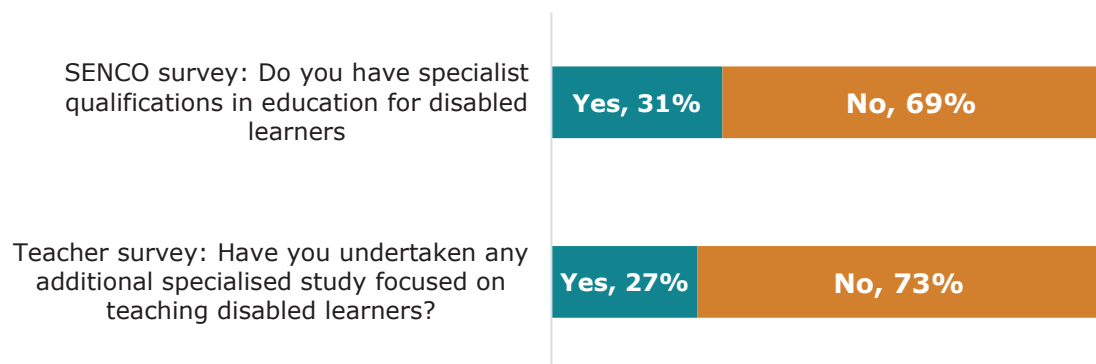
In contrast, 80 percent of teacher aides who responded to our survey indicated they feel confident in working with a wide range of disabled learners.

There is a low proportion of teachers and SENCOs who have specialist training

Although we found that specialised qualifications make a difference to teacher confidence, there is, unfortunately, a low proportion who have undertaken this training (see Figure 77).

- Just over a quarter (27 percent) of teachers who responded to our survey reported they have undertaken additional specialised study focused on teaching disabled learners.
- Almost half (49 percent) of teachers said they have not heard about Universal Design for Learning, which is a key concept for teaching disabled learners.
- Among SENCOs, less than a third (31 percent) who responded to our survey reported they have specialist qualifications in education for disabled learners, reflecting the lack of training requirements for this role.²⁶

Figure 77: *SENCOs and Teachers with specialist training*



In our interviews with parents and whānau, many acknowledged that teachers and SENCOs often had the “heart” and put in the hard work, but also raised concerns about teachers’ and SENCOs’ lack of knowledge and training in working with disabled learners, particularly those who are neurodiverse.

“They have such lack of knowledge and training.”
PARENT

“The teachers had no understanding that the behaviour was a response to stress.”
PARENT

Among teacher aides who responded to our survey, many (64 percent) have more than four years of experience working as a teacher aide. Only one in three (31 percent) indicated that previous work experience and/or qualifications in the education sector have prepared them well to work as teacher aides.

c) Teacher development

Teachers lack opportunities to improve their skills

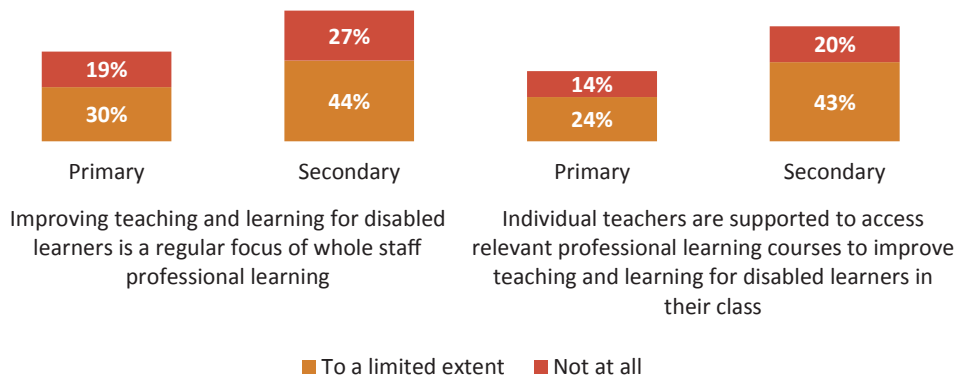
We asked teachers to what extent they are supported with professional learning to improve their skills in teaching disabled learners. Of those teachers who responded to our survey:

- almost two in three (64 percent) reported that whole of staff professional learning on teaching disabled learners at their school was not at all a focus, or only a limited focus
- over half (55 percent) reported that individual teachers are supported not at all or only to a limited extent to access relevant professional learning courses.

Secondary teachers reported fewer opportunities to improve their skills in teaching disabled learners than primary teachers (see Figure 78).

Figure 78: *How well schools support quality, inclusive teaching practice for disabled learners: Teacher survey*

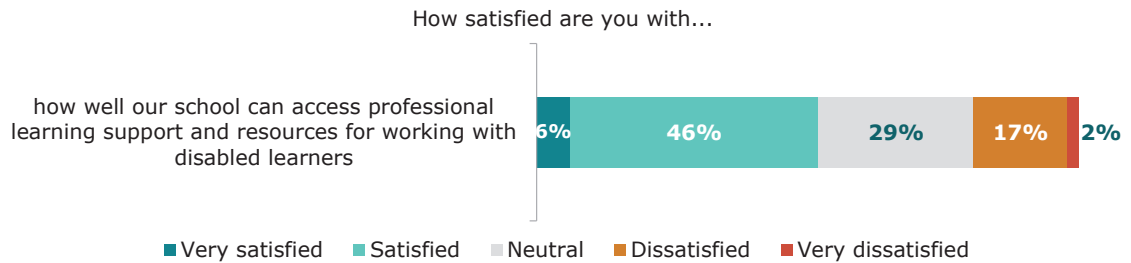
To what extent do the following statements reflect how your school supports quality, inclusive teaching practice for disabled learners?



Among teacher aides, 26 percent indicated they are not offered training and learning opportunities relevant to their work with disabled learners.

In our survey of principals, only half (52 percent) reported that they were satisfied with how well the school can access professional learning support and resources for working with disabled learners (see Figure 79).

Figure 79: *Satisfaction with access to professional learning: Principals survey*



Our interviews with schools revealed variable approaches and experiences in accessing professional learning development (PLD) to improve working with disabled learners. Some schools reported that they explicitly ensure their annual professional learning plan includes training for all teachers on how to meet the needs of disabled learners. In other schools, teachers reported very limited professional learning opportunities and being left to source guidance and learning themselves.

In interviews with key experts, several pointed out the need for better training as part of initial teacher education, but also in refreshing and retraining our older workforce, many of whom trained at a time when expectations for inclusive teaching practice were significantly different from today.

“Specialist teacher training should be part of ITE. Inclusion needs to be a huge part of teacher education ... Given the age of our workforce, like in Australia, our teachers need to have a year off to refresh and retrain ... We have an older workforce who have to unlearn, they have to become learners again.”

KEY INFORMANT

The need for initial and ongoing teacher training was reinforced in survey comments from schools.

“We need more exposure to supporting and teaching disabled learners, starting from ITE, and into our teaching career as small manageable bite sized chunks. One or two things we can take on board to try out or work into our classroom routines/programme – via email, social media and on a wide range of disabilities.”

TEACHER

Some experts also commented that PLD courses are not enough to achieve attitudinal change, and that ongoing support and coaching is also important.

“PLD only does so much to achieve attitudinal change. What they need are successes. We need to come in with our plan and support and coach and actually have success with the child.”

LEARNING SUPPORT MANAGER

“There is a gap between PLD content and what trickles down to the workforce. We need a head, hand, and heart approach. Knowledge and tools, approaches and strategies can cause a shift in the heart.”

KEY INFORMANT

“We need a combination of online and face to face. These are complex skills that can't be done with tick box PLD.”

KEY INFORMANT

4) Coordination and collaboration for transitions, pathways, and services

This section looks at the following:

- a) starting school
- b) leaving school
- c) information sharing
- d) links to specialist support
- e) schools collaborating.

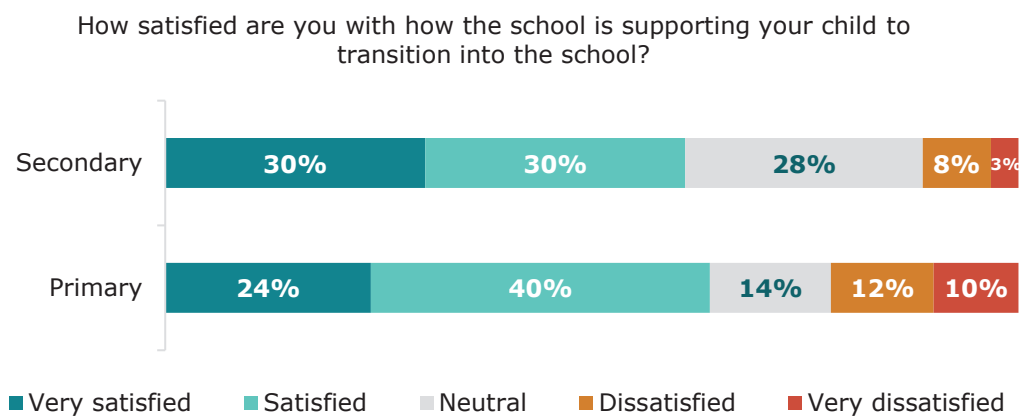
Areas enabling quality provision

a) Starting school

The majority of parents are satisfied with how the school helped their child transition into the school

Almost two thirds of parents and whānau who responded to our survey, were satisfied with how the school supported their child to transition into primary and secondary school (see Figure 80).

Figure 80: Satisfaction with how school supports transition into school: Parent survey



Through our interviews with schools, we heard examples of effective practices for planned and supported transitions into school, including:

- visits in early learning settings and the school
- sharing of information between the old school or early learning service and the new school
- planning with parents and whānau
- use of social stories and orientation programmes
- use of flexible settings and provision of learning support.

In our interviews with parents and whānau, we heard multiple examples where transitions from primary or intermediate into secondary school went smoothly. The success of these transitions was largely attributed to proactive support from the primary, intermediate, or secondary school SENCO/teacher who reached out and worked closely with the early learning service or school, and the whānau, to plan a transition tailored to the child's needs.

In interviews with key informants, we heard examples of the importance of successful transitions and how they can set up disabled learners for positive experiences at school.

“Early intervention people do a very robust transition plan and are very involved in the transition space. [They often] will do some PLD in the early learning space or the school setting. If the school has not had experience with ASD, they will set up workshops and tie those workshops to the children’s needs.”

LEARNING SUPPORT MANAGER

In the case of ORS funded students, once the learner is enrolled at a school the transition support is taken over by the school SENCO, specialist teacher, and classroom teacher, with specialists and teacher aides providing support as needed.

The process can become more complex if the disabled learner does not have ORS funding. Based on the needs of the learner, an early intervention team can support transitions over a six-week period followed by a hand over to the RTLB team who can extend transition support as needed. Some learners may be referred directly to communication or behaviour specialists, while other learners with learning or behaviour support needs might generate a “request for support” to the RTLB service.

Good practice example 9.2: Supporting transitions into and out of primary school

A large urban primary school (2 percent of student roll has ORS)

This school has developed effective practices to support disabled learners’ transitions into the school and out into secondary school. School leaders and teachers are all involved in planning for transitions together with specialists, and parents and whānau. When transitions are planned, new entrant teachers and the SENCO visit the disabled learner in their early childhood setting and meet with early childhood teachers and specialists to discuss needs and aspirations. Teachers are given release time to meet with the disabled learners and their parents and whānau to get to know them and begin building trusting relationships.

The school has a constructive partnership with its local secondary school and has agreed protocols for supporting the transition of disabled learners. These involve ongoing communication with disabled learners and their parents and whānau, supported visits to the secondary school, and meetings between teachers and learning support staff to share information on strengths, needs, and effective strategies.

Areas that need strengthening

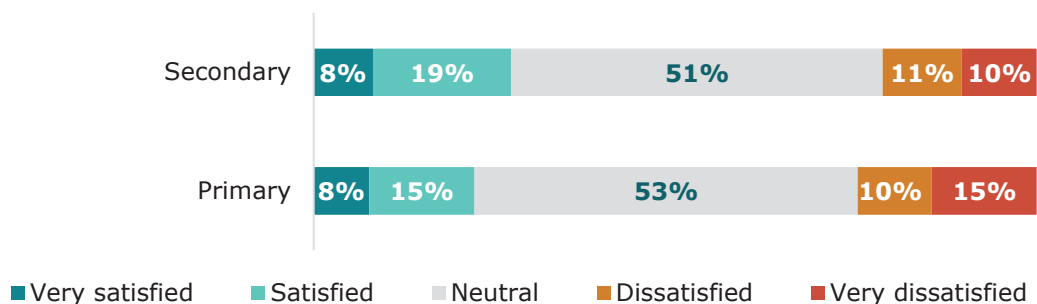
b) Leaving school

Many parents are not satisfied with how the school is supporting transitions to leave school and pathways beyond school

One in four parents and whānau of primary age children and one in five parents and whānau of secondary age children are unhappy with how the school is working with them to develop a leaving-school plan for their child (see Figure 81). In our interviews, parents and whānau often attributed poor transitions to a lack of support from the school their child was leaving.

Figure 81: *Satisfaction with how the school is supporting child when leaving: Parent survey*

How satisfied are you with how well the school is supporting your child in developing a plan for when your child leaves school?

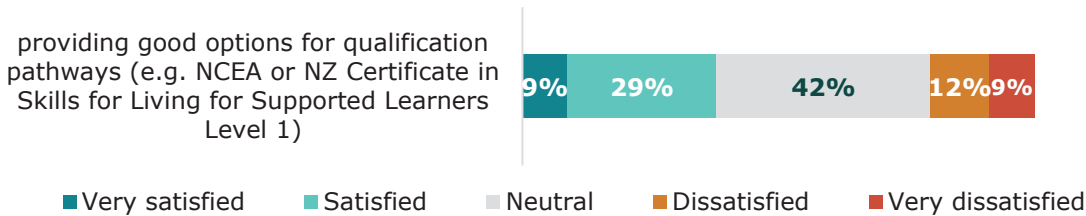


We also looked at how well secondary schools are supporting disabled learners with pathways and options for when they leave school. Sadly, a quarter of disabled learners indicated they could not take the courses that interested them (see Figure 82). Only a third (38 percent) of parents and whānau were satisfied that the secondary school is providing their disabled child with good options for qualification pathways such as NCEA or New Zealand Certificate in Skills for Living for Supported Learners Level 1.

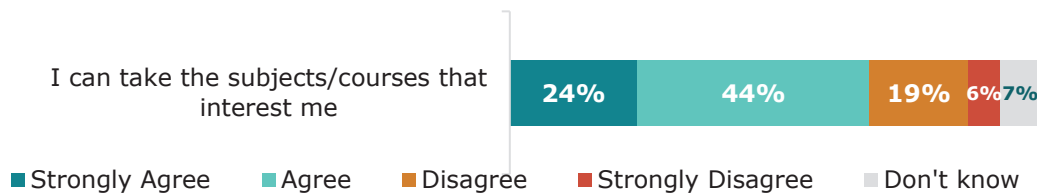
Figure 82: Satisfaction with options and pathways provided by secondary school: Parents and disabled learner surveys

Parent Survey responses:

How satisfied are you with how the secondary school is supporting your child in...



Secondary school disabled learner survey responses



We also heard in our focus group with recent school leavers the need for better career advice and information on pathways beyond secondary school that supports the aspirations of the learner.

“People in the [Learning Support] Units are not getting the same career advice as other kids. For example, [a friend] was pushed into tourism when she wanted to be a vet. For work experience, I wasn’t allowed to choose youth work, they put me in the library. Schools need to be more open-minded. Many examples of those in Units, the teachers are putting us into courses they think are good for us. We don’t know what is out there, as people are sugar coating for us in schools.”

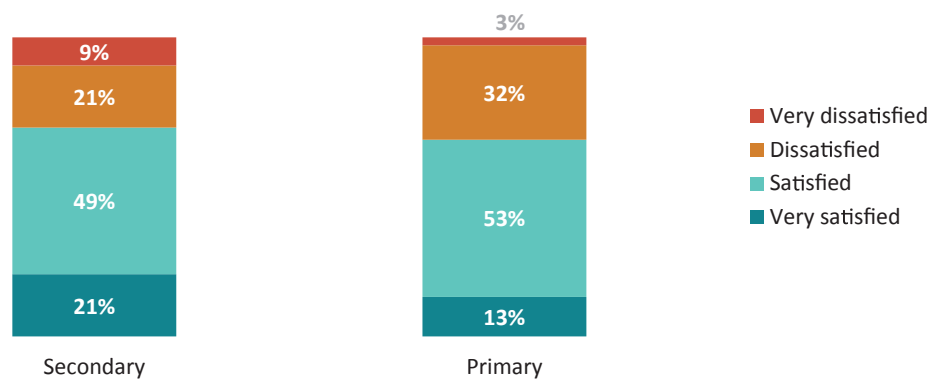
DISABLED YOUTH

“Looking back, I wish my teachers had just let me do what I wanted to try, without making me feel like they had doubts I would be capable of it just because of my disability. Better services need to support the needs of disabled transitioning out of high school. Main issues I think we have in terms of a good transition is the lack of accommodations from services. Such as education on disability, not knowing how to go about a situation. Not enough information is definitely a barrier.”

DISABLED YOUTH

The low parent satisfaction with support from schools is consistent with our survey of SENCOs, where only 40 percent of SENCOs reported that their school works well in ensuring disabled learners, their parents, and whānau are informed about the full range of pathways and options available to them as they plan to leave school. About a third of SENCOs reported they were not satisfied with how specialists, other agencies, and educational institutions work with them to develop educational pathways based on aspirations of disabled learners and their whānau (see Figure 83).

Figure 83: *Education pathways support from specialist and other agencies: SENCO survey*



How satisfied are you with how specialists, other agencies and educational institutions work with you to develop educational pathways based on aspirations of disabled learners and their whānau?

Interviews with school staff also highlighted the lack of work experience options for disabled learners leaving school.

“We have good transition providers for ORS students in the last year at school. This has been supplemented for those without ORS funding and we are finding this very helpful so far. However, there is a big lack of work experience places for our students, who could do some work. Many of the typical shops like the Warehouse, Bunnings etc don't take our students now unless they sign up with a tertiary provider, but the unit standards etc are so hard! So, all these transitions are not easy!”

SENCO



Good practice example 9.3: Supporting pathways and transition out of secondary school

A large urban secondary school (3 percent of student roll has ORS)

A key focus of the curriculum at this school is preparing disabled learners with the skills for work and independent living.

Specialist teachers work together with disabled learners and their whānau to develop and continually review a pathway plan from the time they start school. Learners and families are asked what a good life looks like to them. The planning maps who and which agencies they currently have connections with identifies any blocks to their path, and strategies and support that they may need to achieve their pathway goals.

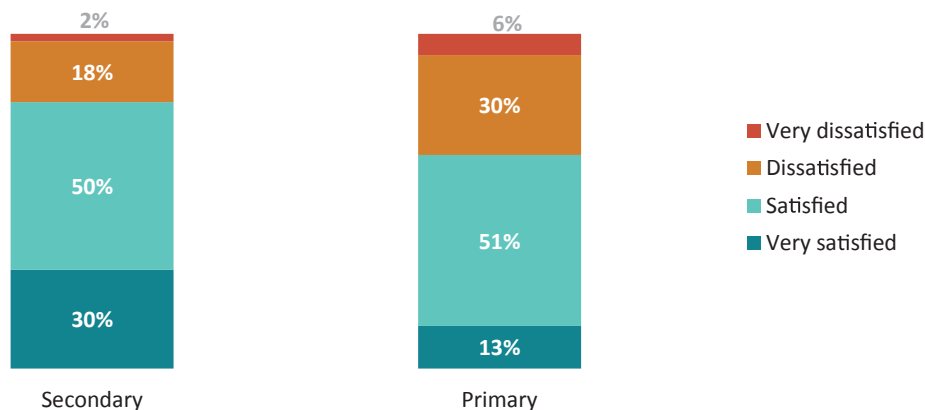
In their senior years, learners are increasingly supported to participate in work experience, access key facilities and services and participate in a range of recreational activities in their local community. Teachers focus on employment skills, life skills and functional literacy and numeracy to support independence. The school is a partner in an innovative initiative with the local District Health Board that offers one-year internships for disabled learners aged 18 to 21 years transitioning to work.

c) Information sharing between agencies and schools

Lack of information sharing impacts on transitions and pathways for learners

Over one in three primary school SENCOs, and one in five secondary school SENCOs, were not satisfied with how ECE and other schools to support transitions into and out of their school (see Figure 84).

Figure 84: *School satisfaction how ECE and other schools work with them in transitions: SENCO survey*



How satisfied are you with how ECE settings and other schools work with you to support disabled learners' transitions into and out of your school?

In our interviews, we heard that the sharing of information between agencies and schools to support transitions of disabled learners into and out of school was a source of frustration.

“Any transition is difficult. Some schools are much more helpful with sharing information. For example, one school last year arranged a very useful zoom with their specialists and teachers so we could learn a lot about our new Year 9 student. Another school had a great RTLB who was available for lots of consultations about her students. From some other schools, we had hardly any information on ORS students! We had to ring up and keep requesting.”

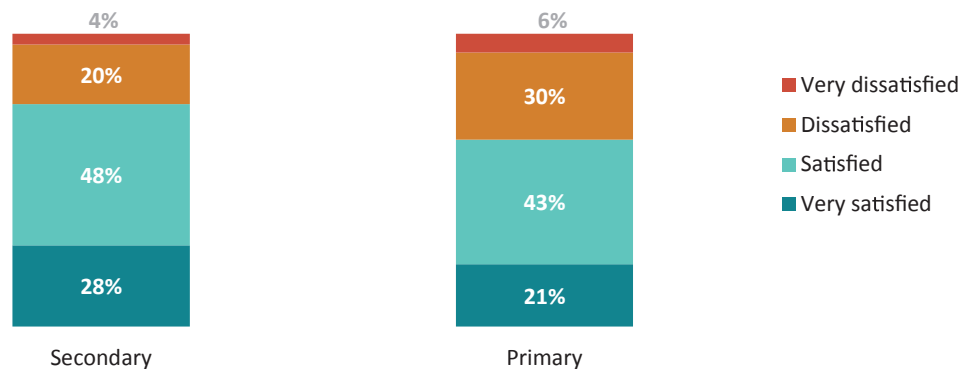
SENCO

“We recently had six five-year-olds start with early intervention closed before they came to school. Involved a lot of jumping through hoops to get funding and support and information to find out why they are running out the gates. When early intervention has been closed and there is no information or ORS application, it takes six months to work out do we just have a child struggling to settle into school or [is it] something else, by the time you refer to GP and refer back to MoE or RTLB.”

SENCO

A similar proportion were also not satisfied with information sharing from specialists and agencies to support transitions (see Figure 85).

Figure 85: SENCO satisfaction with information sharing from specialists and agencies: SENCO survey



How satisfied are you with the way specialists and agencies share information with you to support the transition of disabled learners into your school?



To improve information sharing, the Ministry of Education is developing a Standardised Learning Support Register (sLSR). The register is being developed on Te Rito and aims to improve how the learning support needs of disabled learners are recorded and shared across the system. It is expected to improve transitions of disabled learners between education settings. However, this project is currently on hold.

d) Links to specialist support

Some parents are struggling to access specialist support for their child

In our survey, a third (36 percent) of parents and whānau were not satisfied with how the school is supporting their disabled child's access to specialist support.

In our interviews, we heard:

- examples of parents and whānau choosing schools based on their access to specialists
- that some parents and whānau struggle to know how to access specialists and services
- that families who connect with child development and/or early intervention services often have better experiences accessing specialists and services
- about the struggles some face in navigating the system to access learning support for their child. Some parents and whānau feel the medical support system is easier to navigate than the learning support system. Some talked about lack of interagency coordination even when the Ministry of Education offices are involved.



“We moved school zone to get access to physical therapist.”

PARENT



“We are frustrated that the health, medical and education supports are not lined up.”

PARENT



“Learning support isn't joined up, services aren't connected. We have to continually reapply.”

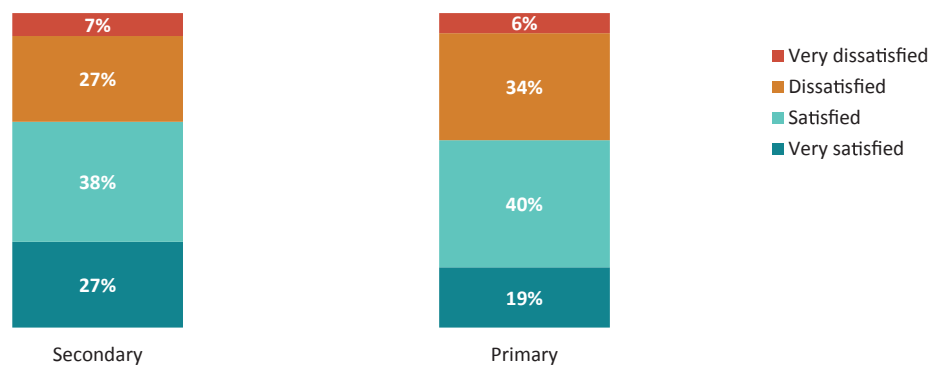
PARENT

“Transition to school was set up by MoE with multiple agencies involved but fell through in implementation ... At start of schooling, it was a shambles.”
PARENT

Some schools are not satisfied with support from specialists

As well as information sharing, more than a third of schools (34 percent of secondary and 40 percent of primary) were unhappy with the way specialists and agencies are supporting their teaching staff (see Figure 86).

Figure 86: *Satisfaction with how specialist and agencies are supporting teaching staff: SENCO survey*



How satisfied are you with how well specialists and agencies support you, teachers and teacher aides to plan and deliver education for disabled learners?

In our interviews with schools, we heard frustration with changes of staffing, staffing shortages, long wait times for service, lack of transparent information sharing, curtailed services, and frustration and confusion with processes and responsiveness.

Good practice example 9.4: Good interagency coordination and collaboration

A large urban primary school (5 percent of student roll has ORS)

Regular liaison meetings and effective collaboration across agencies supports coordinated learning services at this large urban primary school.

The school hosts interagency liaison meetings three times a term. These typically include the school employed specialists (occupational therapist, speech language therapist, and physical therapist), social worker, public health nurse, RTLit, RTLB, Ministry of Education learning support liaison, and school learning support leadership. Together this group reviews and plans provision for all students needing additional learning or wellbeing support. Teachers can book time to meet with the group to seek advice or to present the case of a student they believe would benefit from additional specialist support.

The school makes good use of specialists and specialist teachers as a resource to support and advise teachers and teacher aides on how best to meet the needs of disabled learners. Teachers and teacher aides are released to meet together and with specialists to plan for disabled learners. The result is that provision of learning support is flexible and responsive, and wider teaching staff are well supported to build their capability.

Access to specialist support is an issue in rural areas

Due to low responses from SENCOs, parents, and whānau in rural areas, we could not analyse rural versus urban differences in survey responses.

However, from interviews with parents and whānau and schools, we heard about rural communities facing more difficulties in accessing specialists.

“[My daughter] has not had much speech therapy ... She hasn't had frequent support from the Ministry SLT in the region who is stretched thin and can only meet [her] once a month.”

PARENT OF A DISABLED LEARNER AT A RURAL AREA SCHOOL

In our school interviews, the SENCO of a rural school shared her challenges in coordinating specialist support due to inconsistent access to specialists in her region who are often stretched too thin covering a large geographical area.

“There are so many vacancies in our rural region (and the regional offices we come under) that our children don’t have access at this time to a MoE physio or [occupational therapist]. There is not enough resourcing of Speech Language Therapists ... Art Therapy was a service available here for only two of the past ten years I have been a SENCO. Music therapy service is patchy at best ... We are always initiating the contact, the transitions, and the removal of barriers. 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. I have received some support, but it is not consistent enough and the vacancies limit everything.”

SENCO

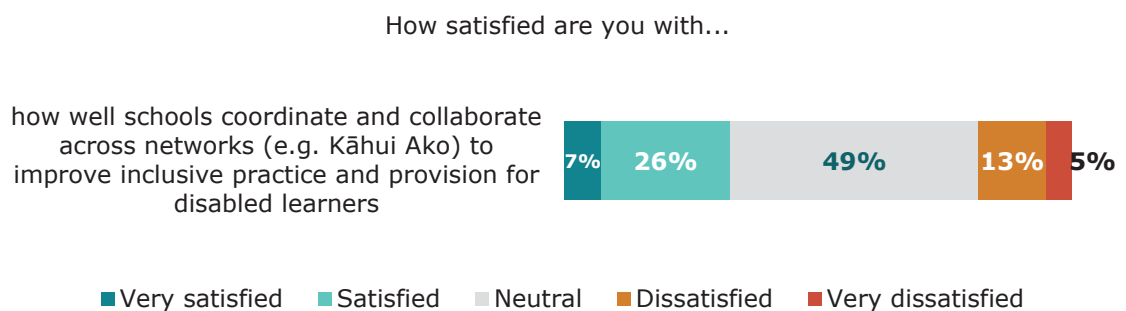
Through our key informant interviews, we heard that support is distributed based on population, which at time creates regional variability, especially in isolated areas. Learning support managers and Resource Teacher cluster leads reported similar variations in provision across regions, but also highlighted the challenges of recruiting and retaining specialist staff in some regions.

e) Schools collaborating

Not many schools are collaborating effectively with each other

We asked principals about how well schools are coordinating and collaborating across networks (such as Kāhui Ako) to improve support for disabled learners. Only one in three (33 percent) who responded to the survey reported they were satisfied (see Figure 87).

Figure 87: *Satisfaction with how schools coordinate and collaborate across networks: Principal survey*



In interviews with schools, we heard some examples of effective collaboration between schools. For example, one school’s Kāhui Ako has a forum for school SENCOs. This enabled sharing of effective practice and collaboration on common needs and solutions, such as professional development for teachers, and workshops to support parents and whānau.

Other observations

Whilst outside the scope of this evaluation, we also heard in our interviews and surveys with schools and parents and whānau their views about Learning Support funding criteria and application processes. We heard frustrations and concerns about funding processes being complicated, time-consuming, and resources being inadequate to meet the level of need.

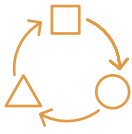
Conclusion

While system expectations for quality, inclusive education are set in legislation and are robust at a high level, there are weaknesses in other areas of the system needed to support quality, inclusive education in schools. There is no systematic tracking of how well legislative expectations are being met for disabled learners. Some parents and whānau are not aware of their children's education rights or how to raise concerns, which impacts on their ability to advocate for their child.

We are also concerned that:

- national curriculum and assessment guidelines and tools are not well aligned, and the majority of teachers are not using them
- there is low workforce capability and many teachers do not have sufficient opportunities to improve their skills
- effectiveness of coordination between schools, and information sharing between agencies, is variable. As a result, some learners struggle with poor transitions between schools and lack of pathways and options when they leave secondary school.

The next chapter sets out a summary of our findings and recommendations to address areas that need improvement.



Part 10: Findings and areas for action: How can we improve education outcomes for disabled learners?

The three questions we asked for this evaluation have led to 11 key findings that sit across this work. Based on these findings, we have identified four areas for action, which together have the potential to strengthen education for these priority learners. This section sets out the findings, areas of action, and our recommendations for improvement.

In this evaluation of the quality and inclusiveness of education provision for disabled learners in mainstream English medium schools we answered three key questions.

- 1) How well are disabled learners doing?
- 2) What is the quality and inclusiveness of education provision (including teaching and learning practice)?
- 3) How strong are the system enablers that support more inclusive and higher quality education?

Our evaluation found 11 key findings.

- 1) Expectations set in legislation are robust, but there is no systematic tracking of how well these expectations are being met.
- 2) Many disabled learners are still experiencing exclusion, including being discouraged from enrolling at their local school, being asked to stay at home due to resourcing issues, being stood down, and having to move schools.
- 3) Many disabled learners are positive about going to school and have teachers who are kind, helpful, and care about them, but a significant proportion do not feel accepted and are not supported to engage in learning or to participate in wider school activities.
- 4) Schools with high numbers of Māori students tend to report more inclusive leadership and culture, and better engagement with whānau of disabled learners.
- 5) Many teachers are not confident in teaching disabled learners, particularly those learners with more complex needs. Learners with more complex needs report poorer outcomes and experiences at school.

- 6) The curriculum is designed to be flexible and inclusive, but curriculum guidelines and tools are not well aligned, and the majority of teachers are not using them.
- 7) The quality and inclusiveness of education varies significantly between schools, resulting in inequity in outcomes for disabled learners. There are, however, pockets of good practice, particularly in schools in lower socio-economic and more diverse communities.
- 8) Most schools are physically accessible, but schools with older buildings face challenges and the process for making alterations can be complex and slow.
- 9) There is insufficient involvement of learners and whānau in planning for their learning and pathways.
- 10) Some whānau are not aware of their child's education rights or how to raise concerns. When complaints about experiences at school are made, they are not resolved effectively.
- 11) Support for disabled learners is not always well coordinated and lack of information sharing impacts on pathways for learners.

In this section we summarise our evidence across the report that supports the findings and identify areas for action to address them.

Eleven key findings

Finding 1: Expectations set in legislation are robust, but there is no systematic tracking of how well these expectations are being met.

While robust expectations for disabled learners are set out in legislative and policy frameworks, nearly half of school leaders we heard from are still developing an understanding of their legal obligations, and almost a third do not have policies that support disabled learners.

Disabled learners are not specifically or consistently identified in education data on learning and progress achievement. As a result, there is no systematic monitoring for this priority group to understand how well expectations for inclusive, quality education are being met.

Finding 2: Many disabled learners are still experiencing exclusion, including being discouraged from enrolling at their local school, being asked to stay at home due to resourcing issues, being stood down, and having to move schools.

Despite legal obligations for inclusive education, a significant proportion of disabled learners we heard from reported that not all schools are welcoming and that they have been discouraged from enrolling in their local school, or the school placed conditions on their enrolment.

We found that disabled learners are sometimes sent home or asked by the school to stay home due to resourcing issues, typically when their teacher aide is not there.

Disabled learners are more likely to be stood down or suspended compared to non-disabled peers and are also more likely to change schools, mostly because they are unhappy with how they are treated by the school, but sometimes at the request of the school.

Because not all schools are welcoming of disabled learners, there is an uneven distribution of disabled learners across schools. Higher decile schools tend to have fewer disabled learners than lower decile schools.

Finding 3: Many disabled learners are positive about going to school and have teachers who are kind, helpful, and care about them, but a significant proportion do not feel accepted, and are not supported to engage in learning or to participate in wider school activities.

Many disabled learners talked positively about going to their school. The majority indicated they enjoy going to school, feel safe while there, and have kind, helpful teachers who care about them.

However, a third of learners do not feel they belong at school, accepted for who they are, or supported to learn in a way that suits them. Too many disabled learners are not able to take part in school activities as much as other students and, concerningly, a third of whānau reported that their child does not have close friends at school. Sadly, one in four disabled learners at secondary school indicated they are not supported to take the courses that interest them most.

Finding 4: Schools with a high numbers of Māori students tend to report more inclusive leadership and culture, and better engagement with whānau of disabled learners.

Parents and whānau who have a disabled child in a school with a high Māori student roll tended to be more positive about the inclusive culture of their child's school. More than half of these parents and whānau were satisfied with how the school encourages other students to include their child (compared to 43 percent of parents and whānau from schools with a low Māori roll) and three-quarters were satisfied with how the school deals with any issues/concerns they raise about their child's learning (compared to 68 percent of parents and whānau from schools with a low Māori roll).

SENCOs from schools with a high Māori roll were also more positive about their school's inclusive culture.

Finding 5: Many teachers are not confident in teaching disabled learners, particularly those with more complex needs. Learners with more complex needs report poorer outcomes and experiences.

Most teachers are not confident in teaching disabled learners, particularly those with more complex needs (who have significant difficulties with learning, concentrating, remembering, accepting change, managing self, and relating to others). Most teachers also lack confidence in working in a culturally responsive way with Māori disabled learners.

Disabled learners with more complex needs reported poorer experiences and outcomes at school than learners with mainly physical and sensory difficulties. Only half of the parents and whānau of learners with complex needs feel their child's schoolwork has the right amount of challenge (compared to 81 percent of parents and whānau of learners with mainly physical and sensory difficulties).

Finding 6: The curriculum is designed to be flexible and inclusive, but curriculum guidelines and tools are not well aligned, and the majority of teachers are not using them.

While the curriculum is flexible, and the Ministry of Education have developed resources to support teachers to adapt the curriculum for disabled learners, most teachers are not accessing and using them. Interviews with experts and teachers highlighted a lack of consistency across guidelines and resources and links between curriculum areas and assessment guidance is unclear.

Finding 7: The quality and inclusiveness of education varies significantly between schools, resulting in inequity in outcomes for disabled learners. There are, however, pockets of good practice, particularly in schools in lower socio-economic communities.

The quality and inclusiveness of education varies significantly between schools. This results in an uneven distribution of disabled learners across schools, and inequity in outcomes for disabled learners. There is, however, good practice in schools in lower socio-economic and more diverse communities. Lower socio-economic schools better met the needs of disabled learners and their whānau than higher socio-economic schools.

Finding 8: Most schools are physically accessible, but schools with older buildings face challenges and the process for making alterations can be complex and slow.

We found that most schools are generally physically accessible. However, schools with older buildings still face challenges and the process for making alterations can be complex and slow.

Parents and whānau of disabled learners were mostly satisfied with the way schools ensure their child can access key areas around the school but some reported that modern learning environments with large open classrooms can create sensory overload for some disabled learners, in particular neurodivergent learners.

Finding 9: There is insufficient involvement of learners and whānau in planning for their learning and pathways.

Many parents and whānau were not satisfied with the level of input they have in developing their child's learning goals and pathway plans. Few schools have good processes for gathering feedback from disabled learners and their parents and whānau about how well the school is meeting their needs and how to improve.

Finding 10: Some whānau are not aware of their child’s education rights or how to raise concerns. When complaints about experiences at school are made, they are not resolved effectively.

We heard examples of parents and whānau who were not even aware of their child’s education rights or how to raise concerns or make complaints, which impacted on their ability to advocate for their child. Sadly, this lack of knowledge has resulted in some parents withdrawing their child from the school.

More than a quarter of parents and whānau have made complaints about their child’s experiences at school to the Ministry of Education. Of these, most were not happy with the response they received or that it was resolved effectively. Māori whānau were particularly unhappy with how complaints were responded to.

Finding 11: Support for disabled learners is not always well coordinated and a lack of information sharing impacts on pathways for learners.

Coordination of supports continues to be a concern. A third of parents and whānau were not happy with how the school is supporting their child’s access to specialist support.

SENCOs were similarly unhappy with the lack of information sharing between specialists, agencies, ECE, and other schools, often resulting in poor transition experiences for disabled learners into their school.

Four areas for action

In the last 18 years, ERO has undertaken 11 evaluations of provision for disabled learners and found that the quality and inclusiveness of education is too variable. Based on this evaluation, we have identified four areas to raise the quality and inclusiveness of education for these priority learners.

Area 1: Strengthening prioritisation and accountability

Area 2: Building school leaders’ and teachers’ capability

Area 3: Empowering disabled learners and their whānau

Area 4: Better coordination and increased collaboration

Area 1: Strengthening prioritisation and accountability

To increase the prioritisation of disabled learners in schools, and the visibility of how well they are doing in terms of learning and progress achievement, ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education (MoE), ERO, Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People (Whaikaha), and New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) work together to develop and implement the following six recommendations.

- **Recommendation 1:** Establish a clear way of identifying disabled learners in the education system and report annually on education experiences and outcomes for these priority learners (MoE, Whaikaha).

- **Recommendation 2:** Provide guidance to Boards and schools on expectations for provision of education for disabled learners and what needs to be in place in all schools; and provide support for Boards on how to understand how well their school is meeting the needs of disabled learners (MoE, ERO, NZSTA).
- **Recommendation 3:** Include provision and outcomes for disabled learners as a focus for all school evaluations (ERO).
- **Recommendation 4:** All schools to report on plans for provision for disabled learners as part of their strategic plans and report on progress in their annual reports (MoE).
- **Recommendation 5:** Boards to report on provision for disabled learners as part of Board Assurance Statements (ERO).
- **Recommendation 6:** Act when a school persistently discourages enrolment of disabled learners (MoE).

Implementing these six recommendations will provide greater visibility at a national level of how well disabled learners are doing in terms of learning and progress achievement, and improve support and accountability for school leaders on their legislative obligations and how these should be enacted.

Area 2: Building school leaders' and teachers' capability

To increase disabled learners' sense of belonging and acceptance in school, parent and whānau engagement in planning for their child, teachers' confidence in teaching disabled learners (and in ways that are responsive and respectful of their cultural identity) and in working with teacher aides, we recommend that the Ministry of Education, ERO and the Teaching Council work together to develop and implement the following recommendations.

- **Recommendation 7:** Strengthen new principals' and initial teacher education focus on teaching disabled learners (for example, through placements that provide experience of teaching these learners) (MoE, Teaching Council).
- **Recommendation 8:** Strengthen Beginner Teacher Induction and mentoring focus on teaching disabled learners (MoE, Teaching Council).
- **Recommendation 9:** Ensure guidance around professional standards for teachers (Our Code, Our Standards) makes explicit the expectations for inclusion of disabled learners and encourages take up of disability specific training (Teaching Council).
- **Recommendation 10:** Include disability as a priority in Professional Learning and Development (PLD) provision for principals and teachers (MoE) and hold targeted events on key aspects of teaching disabled learners (Teaching Council).
- **Recommendation 11:** Review the quality of disability specific PLD provision for principals and teachers (ERO).
- **Recommendation 12:** Put in place, and increase the use of, guidelines, resources, and supports (assessment, curriculum, scaffolding etc) for teachers of disabled learners, including supports to notice, recognise, and respond to progressions for disabled learners (MoE).

Together, these recommendations will build school leaders' and teachers' knowledge and capability to teach disabled learners and, in doing so, improve disabled learners' experience of, and outcomes at, school.

Area 3: Empowering disabled learners and their whānau

To increase disabled learners' and parents and whānau understanding of their education rights, how to raise concerns or make a complaint about their experience at school, or to get someone to advocate on their behalf, we recommend that the Ministry of Education and ERO implement the following recommendations.

- **Recommendation 13:** Ensure there is an accessible and culturally responsive, resource for disabled learners and whānau on their education rights and entitlements, options for provision and pathways, and how to raise concerns, and ensure there is access advocacy support if they need it (MoE).
- **Recommendation 14:** Put in place an independent mechanism for complaints, and report annually on the number of complaints, themes, and resolutions (MoE).
- **Recommendation 15:** Investigate and act when a school persistently fails to meet the needs of disabled learners (MoE, ERO).

Implementing these recommendations will ensure disabled learners and their whānau are informed of their education rights and will provide greater visibility and accountability of complaints at a national level.

Area 4: Better coordination and increased collaboration

To improve the coordination of supports for disabled learners, and pathways both in and beyond school, we recommend that the Ministry of Education lead a programme of work, supported by other agencies who also provide support for disabled learners (Ministry of Social Development (MSD), Oranga Tamariki, Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People (Whaikaha), Ministry of Health (MoH), Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), to develop and implement the following recommendations.

- **Recommendation 16:** Clearly define specialist roles (e.g., Learning Support Coordinators, SENCOs, and Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour), and ensure that these professionals, Ministry of Education specialist services, and associated resource work as a joined-up team to assess and support disabled learners (MoE).
- **Recommendation 17:** Put in place the tools and guidance required to ensure that information follows disabled learners across education settings (MoE).
- **Recommendation 18:** Improve coordination across agencies on how education support – within the context of broader supports – for disabled learners is delivered and how they work together and with whānau (Whaikaha (lead), MoE, MSD, Oranga Tamariki, MoH, and ACC).
- **Recommendation 19:** Facilitate schools to more strongly collaborate and share resources and expertise (MoE).

These recommendations will ensure smoother pathways and allocation of supports for disabled learners and build capability across schools to provide improved experiences and outcomes for disabled learners.

Conclusion

Together, these recommendations have the potential to significantly improve education experiences and outcomes for disabled learners. It will take coordinated and focused work across these agencies to take forward these recommendations and ensure change occurs. Improving education for these learners has the potential to dramatically improve the lives of a group of learners that our system has, thus far, poorly served.





Part 11: Next steps

ERO, in partnership with HRC and ODI, has evaluated the quality and inclusiveness of education for disabled learners in mainstream English medium schools. We have identified 11 key findings and four areas for action. The recommendations outlined under each area for action require development and approval from Ministers. We propose that relevant agencies report back to Ministers in July 2023.

ERO has evaluated education for disabled learners in schools and early learning services 11 times in the last 18 years. It has found persistent issues with the quality and inclusiveness of education provision for these priority learners. We have made recommendations to strengthen the quality of their education.

Given the issues we found, we will continue to monitor, evaluate, and report on education for these learners. We are intending to review this provision again in 2026/27. It is our hope that, by that time, we will see improvements based on the action areas we have identified:

- greater prioritisation and accountability of education experiences and outcomes for disabled learners
- stronger capability of school leaders and teachers in teaching disabled learners
- more informed and empowered disabled learners, parents and whānau, and greater visibility and accountability of complaints
- improved pathways and allocation of supports for disabled learners and improved capability across schools to provide quality, inclusive education for disabled learners.

Implementing the recommendations

The recommendations outlined in Part 10 are high level and require a coordinated work programme across the Ministry of Education, ERO, Teaching Council, and Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People. We recommend that the agencies develop implementation plans and report back to Ministers on progress by July 2023.

For ERO's part, we will:

- work with other agencies to develop guidance for Boards and schools on expectations for education for disabled learners and what needs to be in place, and support for Boards on how to understand how well their school is meeting the needs of disabled learners
- include provision and outcomes for disabled learners as a focus for all school reviews
- require that Boards report on provision for disabled learners as part of their Board Assurance Statements
- review the quality of disability specific PLD provision for principals and teachers
- investigate when schools persistently fail to include and meet the needs of disabled learners.



Appendices

Appendix 1: List of previous ERO reports on inclusive education

- Inclusive practices for students with special needs in schools (2015)
- Including students with high needs: Primary schools (2013)
- Including children with special needs in Early Childhood Services (2012)
- Including students with special needs: School questionnaire responses (2012)
- Including students with high needs (2010)
- Evaluation of the Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour Service (2009/2004)
- Resource teachers: Learning and behaviour governing and managing RTLB clusters (2018)
- School's provision for students at risk of not achieving (2008)
- Partners in learning: Parents' voices (2008)
- An evaluation of ORS (2005)

Appendix 2: Methods

Our evaluation questions

This evaluation focused on examining the following key questions:

- 1) How well are disabled learners doing in terms of learning, wellbeing, experience, and engagement in schools?
- 2) What is the quality and inclusivity of education provision for disabled learners?
- 3) How strong are the system enablers that support inclusive, high-quality education?
- 4) What key actions could lead to improved outcomes for disabled learners?

How this evaluation is different from previous ERO reviews

As part of ERO's mandate, we undertake national evaluations on inclusive practices for disabled learners in schools and early learning. In the last 18 years, ERO has undertaken 11 evaluations of education provision for disabled learners – the last one was in 2015.

This evaluation reflects an evolution in Aotearoa New Zealand's journey towards embedding inclusive education for disabled learners. It has a greater emphasis on the quality and effectiveness of school practices and outcomes for learners and whānau. It therefore took a different approach from previous ERO reviews.

- Previous ERO evaluations of inclusive education were undertaken alongside regular ERO school reviews. They were based on school (mainly leaders) perspectives. In contrast, this evaluation was undertaken as a separate national project.
- This evaluation has a stronger focus on examining learner outcomes and learner and whānau perspectives.
- Through a voluntary sample of schools, this evaluation took a deeper look at effectiveness of school and teaching practices across a wider range of areas, and heard from a wider range of school staff.
- ERO partnered with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) on this evaluation to pool our collective expertise and independent advisory roles.
- ERO also worked closely with an Expert Advisory Group with a range of expertise, including lived experience of disability, whānau, academics, practitioners, and agency officials.
- The evaluation was guided by latest research on the key components of quality, inclusive education for disabled learners at the school and system levels.

Analytical framework

In developing an analytical framework for this evaluation:

- we looked at international and national commitments to inclusive education (see Appendix 3)
- we reviewed the latest national and international research on inclusive education for disabled learners (see Appendix 5)
- this helped us develop a conceptual socio-ecological model which places the disabled learner (and their whānau) at the center of the education eco-system which consists of classroom, school and system level factors that interact with each other
- we used a simplified theory of change to identify the following levels for analysis:
 - outcomes for disabled learners (learning, engagement, and wellbeing)
 - inclusive classrooms and schools providing quality teaching and learning for disabled learners
 - system enablers supporting inclusive education for disabled learners
- we developed a detailed evaluation framework which identifies key components that support inclusive education at the level of the classroom, school, and education system (see Appendix 4). The framework was tested and refined with experts and practitioners.

Mixed methods approach to data collection

This evaluation used a complementary mix of quantitative and qualitative data sources to ensure breadth and depth in examining the key evaluation questions:

- a) ensuring **breadth** to provide system judgement on the key evaluation questions and a national picture through:
 - online surveys of a sample of schools (principals, SENCOs, teachers, teacher aides)
 - online surveys of disabled learners and their parents and whānau, which were sent out via schools and disability networks
 - literature review, administrative data, interviews with key informants and experts.
- b) ensuring **depth** in understanding how schools are (or are not) being inclusive, what good looks like, and what needs to improve, through:
 - case studies which entailed interviews with schools and site visits
 - interviews with disabled learners and their parents and whānau
 - online focus group with disabled youth – recent school leavers (iLead).

Case studies – School interviews and site visits

A sample of 21 schools across the country were invited to participate in the case study component of this evaluation. We selected schools which had significant experience with disabled learners (identified through the Ministry of Education's ORS data) and ensured good regional and demographic coverage across the country. The interviews were conducted by ERO's team, which included those with specialist experience in reviewing school practice. At each school we interviewed the school principal, SENCO, and a few teachers and teacher aides. We also reviewed key school documents (for example, school's charter, analysis of variance report, SENCO reports to the Board, and a sample of IEPs). Most of the school interviews were conducted during Term 4 of 2021 and Term 1 of 2022. To minimize risks of Covid-19 transmission, most of these interviews were conducted via videoconferencing. Eight school site visits with observations were conducted in May 2022.

Profile of schools which participated in the field work:

- School type: 12 primary, two intermediate, six secondary, and one composite school
- Regional spread: three in Auckland; two in Northland; five in Wellington–Porirua–Hutt Valley; three in Palmerston North; one in Bay of Plenty; three in Christchurch; one in Dunedin; two in Invercargill; and one on the West Coast
- Ethnic spread: 13 schools with over 25 percent Māori students; five schools with over 20 percent Pacific students
- Decile spread: 14 in Deciles 1-3; five in Deciles 4-7; and two in Deciles 8-10.

The interviews with school staff were guided by semi-structured questions that were developed from the framework on inclusive school practice. Based on analysis of key school documents, and interviews with key school staff (principals, SENCOs, teachers, and teacher aides), the evaluation team assessed each school against 26 indicators across six levers in the framework. This assessment led to a description of how the school was performing on each lever and indicator. It also helped the evaluation team identify examples of good practice and to understand what the key contributing factors were. Similarly, the team was able to identify examples of issues and challenges that schools were facing, and understand the main contributing factors. The insights from the school interviews were used to identify particular areas/questions to examine further through surveys, and also helped in understanding the patterns that emerged from the survey data.

Interviews with parents and whānau of disabled learners

We conducted interviews with 21 parents and whānau of disabled learners. Thirteen of the parents had their disabled child join them in the interview. Each interview was led by either a disabled, Māori or Pacific interviewer partnering with a Senior Evaluator. To minimize risks related to Covid-19 transmission, the interviews were conducted remotely via phone or videoconferencing (depending on the preference of the parent).

Most (17) of the families were nominated by the schools which participated in the case studies. The remaining four were invited through disability networks.

Profile of the disabled learners, parents and whānau who we interviewed:

- 10 in primary, 10 in secondary, and one in a rural composite school
- Ethnic spread: six Māori; five Pacific; and 10 Pakeha or other.

We also conducted an online focus group with six disabled youth (age range 19-28) from the iLEAD committee (three of the participants were of Pacific descent).

School surveys

We invited 375 schools to participate in online school surveys. These schools represent 24 percent of the total 1,563 English medium state and state integrated non-specialist schools which, based on Ministry of Education 2020 data, have at least one ORS funded student.

We emailed the principal of the 375 schools. When a principal accepted the invitation to participate, we contacted their Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCO) or leader of learning support, to complete the SENCO survey and to forward the surveys on to teachers and teacher aides who work with disabled learners in their school. In March 2022, we received survey responses from the following school staff:

- 101 principals and school leaders across 94 schools
- 124 SENCOs and learning support leaders across 106 schools
- 772 teachers across 102 schools
- 448 teacher aides across 98 schools.

Profile of schoolsⁿ which responded to the survey:

- Type: 42 percent primary; 44 percent secondary; 7 percent intermediate; and 7 percent composite
- Decile: 20 percent Decile 1-3; 56 percent Decile 4-7; and 25 percent Decile 8-10
- Urban/rural^o: 65 percent main urban area (population of 30,000 or more); 7 percent secondary urban area (population 10,000-29,999); 15 percent minor urban area (population size 1000 to 10,000); and 13 percent rural area (population under 1000)
- Region: 20 percent Auckland; 18 percent Wellington; 13 percent Canterbury; 8 percent Waikato; 8 percent Bay of Plenty/Wairariki; 8 percent Otago/Southland; 8 percent Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatu; 6 percent Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti; 6 percent Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast; and 5 percent Northland/Tai Tokerau

ⁿ Based on SENCO survey responses.

^o [Geographic areas - concepts - Stats NZ DataInfo+](#).

- Size of student roll: 15 percent very small to small; 34 percent medium; and 51 percent large-very large
- Number of ORS students: 42 percent had 1 to 5 ORS students; 31 percent had 6 to 11 ORS students; and 26 percent had more than 11 ORS students.

Parent and learner surveys

We sent out online surveys to parents and whānau of disabled learners through two channels:

- a) schools who participated in the case studies or surveys
- b) disability support organizations and networks.

The survey had two sections. Parents and whānau were invited to complete the first half and their disabled learner the second half. Parents or learners who needed help to complete the survey were invited to contact the Office for Disability Issues who could organize NZ Sign Language interpretation or someone to help read or explain the questions over the phone or by Zoom.

We received survey responses from a total of 355 disabled learners and 509 parents and whānau^p. Of these, 41 percent were from a school which had participated in the school surveys, and 31 percent were from schools which did not participate in the school surveys. The remaining 29 percent did not identify the school their child was attending.

Profile of parents and learners who responded to the survey in March 2022:

- Ethnicity^q: 75 percent Pakeha; 17 percent Māori; 6 percent Pacific; and 11 percent other
- Region^r: 27 percent Auckland; 18 percent Wellington; 18 percent Canterbury; 7 percent Waikato; 6 percent Manawatu-Whanganui; 5 percent Bay of Plenty; 5 percent Tasman; 4 percent Northland; 3 percent Taranaki; 2 percent Nelson; 2 percent Southland; 1 percent each from Gisborne, Hawke's Bay, Marlborough, Otago; and less than 1 percent from West Coast.

Of the 509 parents and whānau respondents, 363 provided the name of their child's school which represented the following profile:

- School type: 39 percent primary; 5 percent intermediate; 4 percent composite; and 52 percent secondary
- Rural/urban: 74 percent main urban area (population of 30,000 or more); 11 percent secondary urban area (population 10,000-29,999); 9 percent minor urban area (population size 1000 to 10,000); and 6 percent rural area (population under 1000)
- Decile: 15 percent Decile 1-3; 46 percent Decile 4-7; and 40 percent Decile 8-10.

^p Response rates vary for individual questions in the survey.

^q 80% of respondents indicated their ethnicity. Respondents could select multiple ethnicities.

^r 80% of respondents indicated the region of the school their child is attending.

Interviews with sector experts, stakeholders

Twelve interviews were conducted with key experts and stakeholders in the sector including:

- Ministry of Education: Learning Support Directorate, Curriculum, Learning Support Managers and RTLBs from four regions
- Teaching Council
- School Trustees Association
- NZQA
- three academics.

Analysis of administrative data

As noted elsewhere in the report, there is a lack of systematic administrative data on disabled learners. The only detailed administrative data that was available for time series analysis was ORS data from the Ministry of Education.

Analysis, sense-making, and testing of recommendations

At the end of interviews with each school, the interviewers had synthesis and sense-making discussions to assess the practice at each school against the evaluation framework.

The interview data and open-ended comments from surveys were analysed and coded to identify key themes. The quantitative survey data was analysed using SurveyMonkey and Excel.

Following analysis of the data from the surveys and interviews, sense-making discussions were conducted to test interpretation of the results, findings, and areas for action with:

- ERO's team of specialists in reviewing school practice
- Māori education experts
- Pacific education experts
- Expert Advisory Group
- Steering Group.

We then tested and refined the findings and recommendations with the following organisations to ensure they were useful and practical:

- Ministry of Education
- Teaching Council
- School Trustees Association
- NZQA
- Office of the Children's Commissioner.

Informed consent

Survey of parents and learners

Before parents and learners agreed to complete the online survey, they were informed of the purpose of the evaluation and the survey. The information provided assurance that:

- participation was voluntary and anonymous
- neither the parent, their child, nor their school will be named or identified in the reports
- parents and their child can withdraw their consent to participate or choose not to answer any questions.

Parents and whānau indicated their consent by proceeding to complete the survey.

Interviews with parents and whānau and learners

Parents and whānau and learners who were invited to participate in an interview were provided with an information sheet which explained the purpose of the interview and the evaluation. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and they could change their mind at any time. Any personal information they shared would be treated as confidential and the report would not identify them, their child or their child's school. If the parent and whānau agreed to participate in the interview, we also asked their consent for the interview to be recorded. Parents and whānau were asked how they preferred to talk to us (by phone or videoconference), and whether their child would be participating in the conversation. If their child was to participate, parents were asked if their child had any communication needs that we needed to consider or arrange support for. Parents provided their consent by completing and submitting a written consent form to ERO.

Surveys of school principals and leaders, SENCOs, teachers, and teacher aides

School staff were informed of the purpose of the evaluation and the survey before they agreed to complete the survey. They were assured their participation was voluntary, and their responses would be kept confidential. No details identifying themselves or their school would be reported publicly. They could withdraw their consent to participate at any time or choose not to answer any questions, without any consequences to them.

Interviews with school principals and leaders, SENCOs, teachers, and teacher aides

School staff were informed of the purpose of the evaluation before they agreed to participate in an interview. They were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw consent to participate, and permission to use their information, at any time. They were told that the interviews were not an evaluation of their school, and that they and their school would not be identified in the resulting national report. They were assured their information was confidential and would be kept securely subject to the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982, Privacy Act 1993, and the Public Records Act 2005 on the release and retention of information. Interviewees provided their consent to participate in an interview by completing and submitting a written consent form to ERO. Their verbal consent was also sought to record their online interviews.

Security

Audio files and notes from interviews with schools, disabled learners, and their parents and whānau, will be stored digitally for a period of six months after the research is completed. During this time, the data will be held in secure password protected project folders with access limited to project team members only.

Limitations of this evaluation

There are limitations to this evaluation.

In terms of scope, this evaluation:

- does not examine specific intervention programmes, or funding
- does not make judgements about individual schools or teaching practices of individual teachers.

In terms of the evaluation findings:

- these are based on learners, parents and whānau, and schools who responded to our survey and interviews. The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on response rates and limited most interviews to over the phone or videoconferencing. Responses from Pacific disabled learners and their families were particularly low
- as noted elsewhere, there is a lack of standardised, administrative data on disabled learners, therefore most of the measures in this evaluation are self-report measures
- there is no current counterfactual data on outcomes for non-disabled learners.

Appendix 3: Key principles underpinning this evaluation

Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Ka Hikitia Ka Hāpaitia (Māori Education Strategy)

principles:

- Te Whānau: Education provision responds to learners within the context of their whānau
- Te Tangata: Māori are free from racism, discrimination, and stigma in education
- Te Kanorautanga: Māori are diverse and need to be understood in the context of their diverse aspirations and lived experiences
- Te Tuakiritanga: Identity, language, and culture matter for Māori learners
- Te Rangatiratanga: Māori exercise their authority and agency in education

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) article 24, including General Comment 4 – Right to Inclusive Education^s

Article 24 recognises disabled people have the right to access an inclusive, quality education on an equal basis with others. Reasonable accommodation of students' requirements, and the right of students to receive support, should be consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

An inclusive education system that meets the requirements of Article 24 of the Disability Convention must demonstrate:

- equality of access to an inclusive, quality education
- reasonable accommodation of the requirements of disabled students
- the delivery of support within the general education system; and
- support measures that are effective, individualised, provided in an environment that maximises academic and social development, and consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

The following four principles (the four 'A's) has been identified as central to an inclusive education framework.

- Availability – this requires that “functioning educational institutions and programmes must be available in sufficient quantity”. This includes teaching staff and resources. In order to ensure that the quantity of services is sufficient to meet needs, accurate data gathering, and monitoring are required.
- Accessibility – this requires that the entire inclusive education system is accessible, including: buildings and physical infrastructure; information and communication systems; transport systems and services; support services and reasonable accommodation in all educational environments, including sport and recreational programmes and facilities; and economic accessibility in the form of free primary education and (ideally) free secondary education.
- Acceptability – this entails “an obligation to design and implement all education related facilities, goods and services in a way that takes full account of and is respectful of the needs, expectations, cultures, views, and languages of persons with disabilities”.
- Adaptability – this requires an education environment that can be adapted to the diverse needs of students.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) lists 42 rights, and Article 23 of the CRC refers specifically to disabled children. Under the right to special disability care, a disabled child has the right to special care, education, and training to help him or her enjoy a full and decent life in dignity and achieve the greatest degree of self-reliance and social integration possible. New Zealand ratified the UNCRC in 1993.

^s [Making Disability Rights Real 2014-2019_compressed.pdf \(hrc.co.nz\)](#)

The New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026

The New Zealand Disability Strategy guides the work of government agencies on disability issues. The Strategy realises the rights of disabled people and supports implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in New Zealand.

Three principles and two approaches are proposed to implement the Strategy. The three principles are: Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and ensuring disabled people are involved in decision-making that impacts them.

The two approaches are: Investing in our whole lives – a long-term approach; and Specific and mainstream services – a twin-track approach.

The Strategy identifies eight outcome areas:

- Outcome 1 – Education: We get an excellent education and achieve our potential throughout our lives
- Outcome 2 – Employment and economic security: We have security in our economic situation and can achieve our full potential
- Outcome 3 – Health and wellbeing: We have the highest attainable standards of health and wellbeing
- Outcome 4 – Rights protection and justice: Our rights are protected, we feel safe, understood and are treated fairly and equitably by the justice system
- Outcome 5 – Accessibility: We access all places, services and information with ease and dignity
- Outcome 6 – Attitudes: We are treated with dignity and respect
- Outcome 7 – Choice and control: We have choice and control over our lives
- Outcome 8 – Leadership: We have great opportunities to demonstrate our leadership.

The National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP), which set out the Government's priorities for education to ensure the success and wellbeing of all learners.

- Ensure places of learning are safe, inclusive, and free from racism, discrimination, and bullying.
- Have high aspirations for every learner/ākonga, and support these by partnering with their whānau and communities to design and deliver education that responds to their needs, and sustains their identities, languages, and cultures.
- Reduce barriers to education for all, including for Māori and Pacific learners/ākonga, disabled learners/ākonga and those with learning support needs.
- Ensure every learner/ākonga gains sound foundation skills, including language, literacy and numeracy.
- Meaningfully incorporate te reo Māori and tikanga Māori into the everyday life of the place of learning.
- Develop staff to strengthen teaching, leadership, and learner support capability across the education workforce.
- Collaborate with industries and employers to ensure learners/ākonga have the skills, knowledge, and pathways to succeed in work.

He Pikorua, which is the Ministry of Education's practice framework for all Ministry specialist practitioners and RTLB and enacts the Learning Support Delivery Model:

- Mokopuna and whānau-centred
- Collaborative
- Strengths-based
- Culturally affirming and responsive
- Inclusive
- Ecological
- Evidence informed

Enabling Good Lives (EGL) principles:

- Self-determination
- Beginning early
- Person-centred
- Ordinary life outcomes
- Mainstream first
- Mana enhancing
- Easy to use
- Relationship building

Appendix 4: Evaluation framework

1) Components of quality, inclusive education practice in schools

Lever 1: Effective Leadership	
Indicator	What good looks like
School leaders set clear expectations for equity and inclusion, wellbeing, and achievement for disabled learners	<p>The school's vision for inclusion and equity is articulated in its strategic and annual plans, board documents, and promoted by school leadership</p> <p>There is shared understanding of this vision among the leadership team, staff, learners, and families</p> <p>Leaders articulate high expectations and aspirations for disabled learners</p>
Leadership planning and resourcing for staff capability and capacity for inclusive education	Leadership provides highly effective ongoing development (PLD) and support for teachers and learning support staff to be effective, inclusive, and culturally responsive practitioners
Leaders promote a school culture that values disabled learners and their whānau	<p>Disabled learners and their whānau are valued and welcomed into the school</p> <p>Interactions between schoolteachers/staff and disabled learners and their whānau are mana-enhancing</p>
Leaders are well supported to build capability and effectiveness in inclusive practices	Support is regularly provided for leaders to reflect on, and improve, their practice, including the provision of PLD opportunities for inclusive practices
School leaders ensure alignment of policies, procedures, and practices with current national legislative requirements	Shared, articulated understanding of rights based legislative and regulatory requirements in school policies and procedures (e.g., restraint, transition, enrolment)

Lever 1: Effective Leadership	
Indicator	What good looks like
Inquiry and evaluation are effectively used to promote innovation and improvement in inclusive practices and equity of outcomes	<p>Effective use of data for supporting decisions about sustaining or changing interventions or practices to support disabled learners</p> <p>Effective use of internal evaluations which include disabled learner and whānau voice to improve the learning experiences and wellbeing and achievement for disabled learners</p> <p>Feedback is regularly sought and acted upon from disabled learners and their parents</p>
The guiding principles of Ka Hikitia Ka Hāpaitia are promoted and evident in approaches for inclusion and equity	<p>The school is giving practical effect to all five principles of Ka Hikitia Ka Hāpaitia: Te Whānau, Te Tangata, Te Kanorautanga, Te Tuakiritang, and Te Rangatiratanga, in their inclusive education policies and practices for disabled learners</p> <p>The school is effectively partnering with Māori disabled learners and their whānau to realise their aspirations, valuing te ao Māori conceptualisation of disability and inclusion</p>

Lever 2: Quality Teaching (including responsive curriculum, assessment, and supportive environment)	
Indicator	What good looks like
Responsive curriculum and assessment	
Development of responsive and meaningful curriculum for disabled learners	<p>Curriculum design seeks to incorporate prior knowledge of the learner and their context, including learner and their whānau or aiga aspirations</p> <p>Appropriate adaptation of learning resources in response to diverse needs</p> <p>Teachers develop localised and culturally responsive curriculum linked to individual education/learning goals</p>
Students and whānau agency in defining success, progress, and next steps	<p>Teachers develop IEP goals collaboratively with learners and their whānau</p>
Flexible assessment options provided	<p>Assessments are adaptable and individualised to clearly identify strengths and areas of development</p> <p>Assessments reflect high expectations of disabled learners</p>
Use of assessment as feedback loop	<p>Teachers use assessments effectively for planning next steps in IEP/ILP/learning goal documentation</p> <p>Learners and their whānau have assessment information and knowledge of their learning progress and next steps</p>

Lever 2: Quality Teaching (including responsive curriculum, assessment, and supportive environment)

Indicator	What good looks like
Quality Teaching	
Teachers demonstrate effective teaching practice for disabled learners	Teachers have high expectations which shape appropriate progression planning, which is clearly communicated to learners and whānau
	Teachers and learning support team regularly seek feedback from learners and their whānau
	Teachers create positive classroom conditions and foster inclusive, collaborative (peer-peer) and independent learning
	Teachers demonstrate culturally responsive practices for disabled Māori learners to succeed as Māori, aligned to the principles of Ka Hikitia Ka Hāpaitia and Tātaiako Teachers demonstrate culturally responsive practices for Pacific learners aligned to the principles of Tāpasa
	Teachers and learning support teams have adequate release time for analysing data, evaluative thinking and collaborative planning for improvement and make evidence-based changes to improve their practice
	Teachers plan for the best use of additional resources like teacher aides to optimise learning for all disabled learners challenging practices of segregation and event or activity-based exclusion
	Class teachers lead the IEP process and identify the additional resources needed, such as RTLB Teachers as IEP coordinators lead all communication with parents, whānau and specialists and clarify roles and responsibilities
	Teachers share detailed classroom support plans and IEP goals with teacher aides to ensure engagement, participation, and achievement of all learners

Lever 2: Quality Teaching (including responsive curriculum, assessment, and supportive environment)	
Indicator	What good looks like
Supportive environment	
The social and emotional environment supporting wellbeing and learning for disabled learners	<p>Staff collaborate to provide an environment which is welcoming and fosters a sense of safety and belonging for disabled learners and their whānau</p>
	<p>Expectations are set and communicated for all learners to guide behaviour and expectations for positive, inclusive participation in learning</p> <p>Disabled learners are treated with dignity and respect</p> <p>Support for developing a positive self-view and self-efficacy in learning is evident</p> <p>Support is sensitive and responsive to learner identity to their right not to be discriminated against (including age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender identity, language, race and sexual orientation)</p>
	<p>Teachers foster emotional safety and support positive peer relations for disabled learners, proactively addressing bullying and discriminatory behaviour</p> <p>There are frequent opportunities and spaces provided for positive peer relationships to be formed and nurtured</p>

Lever 3: Inclusive physical environments	
Indicator	What good looks like
The physical environment supporting access and learning for disabled learners	<p>Organisation and arrangement of physical environments effectively support safe, mana-enhancing, and barrier free access to learning and social opportunities for disabled students</p> <p>School policy documents indicate how new builds and upgrades should align with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)</p>
	<p>Appropriate resources and equipment are available to support full participation in all activities</p> <p>EOTC programmes are planned for all learners to access and safely participate in out-of-school learning experiences</p>
	<p>Specially designated spaces to support self-regulation are built into classroom and school design</p>

Lever 4: Partnership with learners, parents and whānau	
Indicator	What good looks like
Educationally focused engagement of learners, parents and whānau	School leaders and teachers invest time in getting to know their disabled learners, parents and whānau, invite their input and value the knowledge they bring to the school community
Disabled learners and whānau agency	Learners and their whānau are empowered to co-design planning and assessment for learning and define success and map progression and pathways for disabled learners Individualised adaptations and differentiated learning effectively respond to learners' needs and aspirations and promotes their success
Collaboration and meaningful partnerships with disabled Māori learners, their parents and whānau	Leaders, teachers and learning support staff demonstrate a collaborative and culturally responsive approach to addressing the holistic needs of the learner Māori learners and whānau aspirations are sought and acted on Regular communication with whānau to share information and progress and seek guidance on culturally responsive approaches

Lever 5: Coordination of learning support through networks, transitions and pathways	
Indicator	What good looks like
Coordination of effective transition into and within school	<p>Mana-enhancing processes for welcoming new learners and their whānau</p> <p>Policy guidelines support effective and adaptable transitions processes</p>
	<p>Transition plans are designed in partnership with learners and whānau</p>
	<p>Accurate and relevant knowledge and information is shared across agencies, schools and specialists to ensure smooth transitions for learners and whānau</p>
Coordination for effective transition and pathways out of school	<p>Transition plans and pathway are developed in partnership with learners and whānau</p> <p>Learner and whānau aspirations for the future are sought and acted upon by teachers and school leaders</p>
	<p>Accurate and relevant knowledge and information is shared across agencies, schools and specialists to ensure smooth transitions for learners and whānau</p> <p>School leaders, teachers and specialists provide a range of pathways and options for learners and whānau to consider as they plan for transition out of school (for e.g., Alternate Education programmes, dual enrolment options, specialised vocational courses, university/polytech degrees are explored and viable pathways identified)</p>
Effective collaboration and communication between agencies, specialist services and schools	<p>Leaders, teachers, and specialists meet regularly and collaborate on Engagement for Learning plans</p> <p>Leaders, teachers, and specialists demonstrate shared understanding of principles for engagement, participation and assessment for inclusive education</p>
	<p>Leaders, teachers, and specialists effectively share knowledge and learn from progress and achievement data analysis</p>
	<p>Leaders, teachers, and specialists have the opportunity to learn from each other's inclusive education practices within clusters/communities of learning (Kahui Ako)</p>

2) System level supports for quality, inclusive education

System enablers	What good looks like
<p>Expectations for inclusion and equity (including collaboration with Māori, Learner agency, parent agency, disabled community agency)</p>	<p>Educational policies and plans articulate clear expectations for inclusion and equity that are aligned with UNCRPD + UNCROC</p> <p>Schools have clear understanding of the education system's expectations for inclusion and equity</p> <p>An education system that honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi and supports Māori-Crown relationships, especially in developing policy and plans for disabled learners</p> <p>Disabled learners, their whānau and disability support groups are included in the development of educational policies and plans</p>
<p>System monitoring, evaluation and accountability</p>	<p>Relevant data about participation, engagement, and achievement of all disabled learners are effectively and systematically collected and analysed</p> <p>Evidence and insights from data are used to inform policies and plans</p> <p>Data on Māori disabled learners are being effectively collected and used to improve education outcomes for Māori learners</p> <p>Stakeholders can identify and challenge non-inclusive, discriminatory, and inequitable policies and practices</p>
<p>National curriculum and assessment</p>	<p>The national curriculum framework offers adaptability to respond to diverse disabled learners across all learning areas and courses</p> <p>Assessment systems are flexible, responsive and enable reporting on progress and achievement for all disabled learners</p> <p>The national curriculum framework and assessment systems are responsive to Māori disabled learners</p>
<p>Workforce capability</p>	<p>Teachers and learning support staff have the skills and confidence to deliver quality and inclusive education for disabled learners</p> <p>Teachers and learning support staff are supported to improve their skills in inclusive education practice for disabled learners, including Māori learners</p>

System enablers	What good looks like
Inter-agency working	<p>Specialists and agencies work well together in supporting disabled learner's education, including Māori learners</p> <p>Learners and whānau understand how to access the support needed</p> <p>Māori disabled learners and whānau understand how to access the support needed</p>
Pathways and transitions	<p>Transitions are well planned, coordinated, and responsive to individual disabled learners</p> <p>Transitions are well planned, coordinated, and responsive to Māori disabled learners</p> <p>Agencies and educational institutions collaborate with the learner and whānau to develop the educational pathway based on learner and whānau aspirations and range of options available</p>

Appendix 5: Annotated bibliography

We carried out an extensive review of national and international literature on what high quality, inclusive education practice looks like for disabled learners when they are learning with their non-disabled peers. This annotated bibliography sets out how this literature evidence base informed the development of the framework for this evaluation of the quality and inclusiveness of education provision for disabled learners in schools.

Learner outcomes

UNICEF. (2017). *Inclusive Education Understanding Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. https://www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org/eca/files/IE_summary_accessible_220917_0.pdf

This document provides an overview of the General Comment on education, recognising the right to inclusive education for all disabled people. It interprets inclusive education as a fundamental human right for every child with disability and sets out what governments must do to make it happen.

This document was fundamental to our understanding of inclusive education for disabled learners, as framed by the UNCRPD and UNCRC.

Oliver, M. (2004). *The social model in action: If I had a hammer*. In C. Barnes and G. Mercer (Eds.), *Implementing the social model of disability: Theory and research* (pp. 18-31). The Disability Press.

Mike Oliver is one of the most influential authors of the social model of disability. He argues that disability is a socially constructed phenomenon when the environment – both social and physical – presents challenges for individuals who may have physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments and, therefore, disables them.

The social model of disability is now the internationally recognised way to view and address “disability”. It marks a significant paradigm shift in attitudes towards disabled people. As the model adopted by the UNCRPD, and the New Zealand Disability Strategy, it has been the model of disability applied to all aspects of this evaluation.

Hickey, H., & Wilson, D. (2017). *Whānau hauā: Reframing disability from an indigenous perspective*. *MAI Journal*, 6(1), 82-94.

In this research paper, Huhana Hickey, a Māori disability advocate, refers to the medical and social models of disability as individualised and western, and as not relevant to many indigenous disabled people who may have a holistic, collective, and relational world view of disability. The authors propose the concept of whānau hauā or “Māori families living with disability” as an alternative Māori approach to disability locating the individual within the whānau, and as the whānau being collectively impacted by disabling conditions present in the environment.

This concept of the individual disabled learner located within their whānau was used in our evaluation for data gathering and analysis of the data. It informed our methodology for the survey design and qualitative semi-structured interviews.

Cologon, K. (2019). *Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation*. Macquarie University for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA). https://www.cyda.org.au/images/pdf/towards_inclusive_education_a_necessary_transformation.pdf

This report, commissioned by Children and Young People with Disability Australia, is a follow up from their 2013 in-depth literature review examining the evidence base for inclusive education. This report builds on that research base for inclusive education, examining 400 research papers and reports published over the last six decades.

This report attempts to define inclusive education, and critically examines the barriers to inclusive education. It also identifies the practices of segregation and micro exclusion that exist within inclusive education settings. It has a chapter dedicated to “ableism in education”, helping readers to examine unconscious bias in education provision.

This report highlighted the outcomes of inclusive education for disabled and non-disabled children and young people and helped frame our understanding of ableism in the context of education provision for disabled learners. It also drew our attention to practices of segregation and micro-exclusion, which we were able to build into our survey and interview tools, helping make this evaluation more nuanced in its understanding of participation and inclusion of disabled learners.

Kearney, A. (2009). *Barriers to school inclusion*, PhD Thesis, Massey University

Alison Kearney’s thesis explores the issue of bullying and its impact on disabled learners in New Zealand schools, and links this to social exclusion within inclusive schools. Some of the key findings of this thesis helped inform our understanding of micro-exclusions and to define what good looks like for a schoolwide culture of inclusion of disabled learners.

Hehir, T. (2016). *A summary of evidence on inclusive education*. Alana Institute in partnership with Abt Associates. https://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf

The Alana Institute Reports’ lead author, Dr Hehir, examined the performance of 68,000 students with disabilities in Massachusetts. Hehir found that, on average, the greater the proportion of the school day spent with non-disabled students, the higher the mathematic and language outcomes for students with disabilities. Hehir’s reviews indicate that students with disabilities educated in mainstream classrooms outperform their peers who have been educated in segregated settings.

This review of multiple research studies, undertaken in different parts of the world, helped inform our understanding of why inclusive education of disabled learners in mainstream settings, with their peers, matters. It also helped inform our understanding of what good looks in highly effective and inclusive education settings.

Components of effective practice

Mitchell, D. (2015). Inclusive education is a multi-faceted concept. *Centre for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 5(1), 9-30.

In this paper, the author advocates for a multi-faceted approach to inclusive education, emphasising the need for legislative and policy level changes to be embedded into practice through changes in school leadership, teacher education, parent engagement, and for classroom teaching and learning practices that go beyond “placement” of disabled learners. The paper presents a brief synthesis of international research to elaborate on the concepts of “accommodation” and “modification” of curriculum and assessment for disabled learners. Each facet of inclusive education is presented with a criterion and indicators that can be used as a basis for planning inclusive education and for evaluating its quality.

This paper was foundational in the development of our evaluation framework and in defining what good looks like for school leadership and quality teaching.

Berryman, M., Nevin, A., SooHoo, S., & Ford, T. (2015). Culturally responsive contexts: Establishing relationships for inclusion. *International Journal of Special Education*, 30(3), 39-51.

In this chapter, the authors theorise within an alternative framework that they refer to as culturally responsive inclusion. Based on key understandings derived from Kaupapa Māori and Freirean philosophies, the authors theorise educational disparities can be associated with the power imbalances in classrooms and schools because of increasing diversity disrupting the composition of the dominant mainstream. “We still expect all students to be represented within the same curriculum, pedagogy and testing regimen or we form separate enclaves, and the divide becomes even wider”. The authors argue that when diverse students have physical and/or learning disabilities, these situations and inequities are further exacerbated.

The framework proposed for culturally responsive methodologies challenges traditional notions of professional experts working with objectivity, and calls for meaningful engagement with parents and whānau by establishing respectful and trusting relationships.

This framing of culturally responsive and meaningful engagement was applied in our understanding of what good looks like for parent and whānau engagement in this evaluation.

Hornby, G. (2014). *Special education today in New Zealand. Special Education International Perspectives: Practices across the globe. (Advances in Special Education)*, 28, 679–696.

Hornby presents the historical context for the provision of special education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The article presents a critique of policies and practices, prior to the new Learning Support Action Plan. He argues that Aotearoa New Zealand has followed a similar journey to inclusive education as other OECD countries. Interestingly, he argues that New Zealand has gone further in legislating inclusion of disabled learners in mainstream classrooms, but with less development of provision for these learners. This has led to a situation where many disabled learners are not getting the specialist help that they need, contributing to the largest achievement gap in the developed world.

This article contributed to our understanding of the historical context of education provision for disabled learners in Aotearoa New Zealand in comparison to other jurisdictions.

Ok, M. W., Rao, K., Bryant, B. R., & McDougall, D. (2016). *Universal design for learning in Pre-K – Grade 12 classrooms: A systematic review of research. Exceptionality: A Special Education Journal*, 25(2), 116–138.

The authors of this research review analysed 13 studies to investigate the impact of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) based instruction on academic and social outcomes for kindergarten and school aged students. They reported mixed findings and variability in UDL guidelines and components, as well as variability in the effectiveness of UDL based interventions.

This article informed our understanding of the wider literature and effectiveness of UDL in the context of school based instructional design strategies for inclusion of disabled learners.

Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why. Best Evidence Synthesis*. Retrieved from <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/60170>

This paper presents a synthesis of 134 New Zealand and overseas research studies and reviews. The big finding of this Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) is that when school leaders promote and/or participate in effective teacher professional learning, this has twice the impact on student outcomes across a school than any other leadership activity. This BES also identified that New Zealand principals, compared to international peers, spend less time on those activities that make the most difference.

This evidence synthesis of best educational leadership practices informed our indicators for effective school leadership for inclusion, participation, and achievement of disabled learners.

National Council for Special Education. (2021). *Sensory spaces in schools.* <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/NCSE-Sensory-Spaces-in-Schools-2021.pdf>

This paper, published by the National Council for Special Education in Ireland, advocates for educational provision which is inclusive of all learners. This paper is based on research evidence, and specialist practitioner experience, and frames the need to have dedicated sensory spaces in all schools as an inclusion strategy. These sensory spaces are designed for learners who are overstimulated by the school environment and need quiet spaces, as well as for learners who need sensory input to help self-regulate their response to environmental triggers when needed.

This paper informed our understanding of what good looks like when neurodivergent learners are included in mainstream classrooms and the physical environment and equipment needed to facilitate this inclusion.

Carroll-Lind, J., Bevan-Brown, J., & Kearney, A. (2007). *Critique of the New Zealand draft curriculum. An inclusive/special education perspective. Report to the Ministry of Education.* http://www.tki.org.nz/r/nzcurriculum/references_e.php#c

In this report, the authors critique the current New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) and examine its effectiveness as an inclusive curriculum for all learners, including disabled learners, who are at risk of exclusion, marginalisation, and underachievement. They argue that an inclusive national curriculum should be one curriculum for all students, rather than one for regular students and one for students with special educational needs, and that the curriculum levels imply norm-based judgements that are linked to age or year groups. According to them, level one guidance in the NZC is most problematic as it suggests a terminal age range and not present a pre-level one transition, which is needed for learners who are not ready for level one when they start school at five.

The responsive and adaptive curriculum guidance on what good looks like was informed by this New Zealand based research report.

Bourke, R., Mentis, M., & Todd, L. (2011). Visibly learning: Teachers' assessment practices for students with high and very high needs. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(4), 405-419.

This paper examines the assessment practices of teachers working with students with high and very high special educational needs funded through ORS, both in mainstream and special schools. Data was collected through a national survey which sought to determine the type of assessment practices used, reasons for using different approaches, the role of the person carrying out the assessment, and levels of confidence in assessing disabled learners in relation to their learning. The use of learning stories as a form of narrative assessment was also explored. The results showed that teachers were largely responsible for assessment, and that the three main assessment methods used included collecting examples of work, observations, and anecdotal records. Approaches such as narrative assessment and learning stories were used by some teachers in school-based settings. In this study, teachers reported that through narrative assessment they could demonstrate that disabled learners with high and very high needs were visibly learning. It also helped parents and learners engage in meaningful conversations about their learning.

This paper informed our indicators for what good looks like when schools adopt flexible and responsive assessment practices which can document achievement and progress for all disabled learners.

Carrington, S., & Elkins, J. (2002). Comparison of a traditional and an inclusive secondary school culture. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 6(1), 1-16.

This research is based on a case study of secondary schools in Australia. The authors analysed interview data to reveal differences between the schools using three main categories: 1) model of support and the role of the special educator; 2) student focused or content-focused culture; and 3) beliefs and attitudes relating to inclusive schooling and teacher responsibility for catering for diverse learning needs. Based on these categories the authors grouped secondary school cultures into "inclusive" or "traditional".

This research evidence informed our evaluation framework indicators for social and emotional inclusion of disabled learners in secondary learning environments, and for inclusive school cultures.

Stevens, K. (2019). Supporting teacher confidence and perceived competence in relation to culturally responsive pedagogy utilising communities of learning Kahui Ako. *Kairaranga*, 20(2), 30-39.

This article, written by an across community teacher, highlights the role communities of learning or Kahui Ako can play in building teacher confidence and capability in relation to their culturally responsive pedagogy. It also defines what makes a community of learning successful and how it can be used to accelerate Māori learners' achievement as Māori.

This informed our understanding of what good looks like when schools collaborate and share strategies to build teacher capability and confidence in culturally responsive pedagogies.

Alton-Lee, A. (2003). Quality Teaching for diverse students in schooling. Best Evidence Synthesis. Retrieved from <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515>

This report is one of a series of best evidence syntheses, commissioned by the Ministry of Education. It is part of a commitment to strengthen the evidence base that informs education policy and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This best evidence synthesis (BES) identifies ten characteristics of quality teaching, derived from a synthesis of research evidence linked to student outcomes.

The report states that the central professional challenge for teachers is to “manage simultaneously the complexity of learning needs of diverse students”.

The framework applied in this BES rejects the notion of a “normal” group, and “other” or minority groups of children, and constitutes diversity and difference as central to the focus of quality teaching. Diversity, in this BES, includes ethnicity, socio-economic background, home language, gender, special needs, disability, and giftedness.

The research evidence synthesised in this BES formed the basis for the indicators of quality teaching in our evaluation framework.

Mutch, C., & Collins, S. (2012). Partners in learning: Schools’ engagement with parents, families and communities in New Zealand. *School Community Journal*, 22(1), 167-187.

This article presents the historical background and key findings from literature about engagement between schools and parents and whānau in Aotearoa New Zealand. Based on their evaluation of over two hundred New Zealand schools, the authors present six key factors that are critical to enhancing and strengthening parent and whānau engagement: school leadership; respectful relationships; school culture; learning partnerships; community networks; and effective communication.

This article helped inform our understanding of what good looks like for effective partnerships with parents and whānau. It also informed the development of our survey and interview guides on how well schools were doing in this aspect.

System enablers

Ainscow, M. (2020). Inclusion and equity in education: Making sense of global challenges. *Prospects*, 49, 123-134.

This article provides an introductory commentary on the papers in the special issue of *Prospects* on inclusive education. It outlines a research-based framework that can be used for contextual analysis. It highlights the importance of setting system level expectations for equity and inclusion of disabled learners. “A culture of inclusion within an education system requires a shared set of assumptions and beliefs amongst senior staff at the national, district, and school level that value differences, believe in collaboration, and are committed to offering educational opportunities to all students.” The article concludes by arguing that emphasising inclusion and equity within national education systems can potentially improve the quality of education for all learners, disabled and non-disabled .

This article by Ainscow in the special issue of *Prospects* was instrumental in developing the theoretical framework applied at a system level in this evaluation.

UNESCO. (2017). *A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education.*

UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254>

This UNESCO guide is intended to support government education policy developers in embedding inclusion and equity in educational policy. It provides an assessment framework to review, decide on actions, and monitor progress. It also includes the evidence that informed the framework, and examples of initiatives contributing to more inclusive and equitable education systems in different parts of the world.

The UNESCO 2017 guide for inclusive education influenced the evaluation framework development and emphasised the principles of inclusion and equity across the three levels of the education system, and the indicators within each component of the framework.

UNICEF. (2020, July). *Producing disability inclusive data: Why it matters and what it takes.* UNICEF. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/producing-disability-inclusive-data-why-it-matters-and-what-it-takes/>

To break the cycle of invisibility, this resource developed by UNICEF urges member states to build effective systems for disability data collection. The argument proposed is that inclusive data are the key to eliminating discrimination based on disability, and to accelerating the development of inclusive policies and programming. To help ensure that the experiences and needs of disabled people are adequately reflected in the evidence being generated, this UNICEF resource recommends that disabled people are included in all stages of the data collection process.

This resource acknowledges that while different data collection efforts in different jurisdictions face different challenges, there are common issues to consider when planning, designing, and implementing inclusive data collection. This document also provides general recommendations and guidance for government departments who are working together to gather and analyse national disability data.

The system enabler indicators for monitoring and accountability at a national level to report on outcomes for disabled learners was informed by this UNICEF resource.

Macfarlane, S. (2012). *In Pursuit of culturally responsive evidence based special education pathways in Aotearoa New Zealand: Whaia ki te ara tika*. PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury.

Sonja Macfarlane developed the He Ritenga Whaimōhio framework to show how the concepts of Tika, Pono and Aroha can inform and broaden the evidence being gathered to inform educational practice. Te Ao Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi wrap around the three kete (baskets) or categories of evidence.

- Tika-Research: Research that is culturally grounded, relevant, authentic, and realistic
- Pono-Practitioner knowledge and skills: Practice interactions that have cultural integrity, are reasoned, just and fair
- Aroha-Whānau: Interactions with whānau that enable whānau voice, knowledge, perspectives, and participation.

This research study informed the methodology, survey, and interview tools design, and analysis of the data and provided a Te Tiriti based structure for our evaluation framework.

Berryman, M. (2015). Conclusion: Relationships of interdependence – Making the difference together, in *Working with Māori children with special education needs*. In J. Bevan-Brown, M. Berryman, H. Hickey, S. Macfarlane, K. Smiler, & T. Walker (Eds.), *Working with Māori Children with Special Education Needs*. He mahi whatahirahira (pp. 241–257). NZCER Press.

This chapter emphasises the importance of learning from the past and listening to Māori children and whānau. It explores the key components of culturally responsive, evidence-based, special education practice and describes holistic and inclusive responses to educating all, especially those with identified special education needs. “Māori have a culture that is based on inclusion, and a collective, reciprocal approach to learning and teaching that values all students and takes responsibility for finding ways to meet their needs, be they intellectual, physical or spiritual, or their need for being connected and included with whānau ... Inclusion is about valuing and including all children for what they arrive with and for the families that stand beside them.”

All the chapters in this book influenced the theoretical framing of this evaluation and this chapter, in particular, informed the historical context section of this evaluation and deepened our understanding of culturally responsive, inclusive education for Māori disabled learners.

Appendix 6: Types of learning support services 2020/2021

Mainly Ministry provided services	Description	
Te Kahu Tōi: Intensive Wraparound Service	Provides a comprehensive youth and family/whānau-centred response for children and young people who are experiencing significant challenges in their lives. Te Kahu Tōi provides an additional tier of support for students whose needs have exceeded existing Learning Support capabilities.	
Te Kahu Tōi: Intensive Wraparound Service – Te Awa unit	Te Awa Unit (TAU) is a service for young people aged 11-17, who are in the care of Oranga Tamariki, and in the Auckland region. The service is managed through the Ministry of Education's contracted provider, the Northern Health School and works in co-operation with Oranga Tamariki.	
Ongoing Resourcing Scheme	Services and supports for children and young people with the highest ongoing levels of disability and need for specialist learning support.	
Early Intervention Service	Early Intervention Service provides specialist support for children who have an identified need from birth until they start school.	
Communication Service	Supports children from school entry with oral language and literacy skills. Targeted at early primary school years (ages 5-8).	
Behaviour Services	Supports behaviour issues, focusing on building positive relationships and inclusive learning environments.	
School High Health Needs	Provides schools with short-term funding for teacher aides to support students with health needs to develop independence in managing their health condition.	
Physical disability services	Provides physiotherapy and occupational therapy services at school/kura to support students with a physical disability to participate and learn.	
In-class support	Funding to make a contribution towards providing a teacher aide for learners with continuing high learning needs, who are not funded through ORS.	

(Source: Highest Needs Review)

*648 receive support through Specialist Service Providers, not included in gender and ethnicity breakdown.

	Cost (\$m) 2019/20	Number of learners 2020/21	Gender 2020/21	Ethnicity 2020/21	Age 2020/21
	17.544	417	Male: 88% Female: 11% Gender diverse: 1%	Māori: 44% Pacific: 3% European: 50% Other: 6%	5-12 years: 55% 13-18 years: 45%
	1.557	39	Male: 74% Female: 26%	Māori: 72% Pacific: 5% European: 15% Other: 8%	5-12 years: 33% 13-18 years: 67%
	149.740	10,444	Male: 68% Female: 32%	Māori: 30% Pacific: 16% European: 54%	5-12 years: 55% 13-18 years: 37% 19 or over: 8%
	67.894	16,215*	Male: 70% Female: 30%	Māori: 30% Pacific: 12% European: 49%	0-1 years: 3% 2-3 years: 41% 4 years: 42% 5 years or over: 14%
	23.115	8,858	Male: 70% Female: 30%	Māori: 35% Pacific: 14% European: 52%	5-12 years: 99% 13-18 years: 1%
	46.807	5,132	Male: 85% Female: 15%	Māori: 45% Pacific: 9% European: 54%	5-12 years: 85% 13-18 years: 15%
	14.743	2,274	Male: 59% Female: 41%	Māori: 23% Pacific: 6% European: 61%	5-12 years: 96% 13-18 years: 4%
	3.480	634	Male: 68% Female: 31% Gender diverse: 1%	Māori: 21% Pacific: 4% European: 66%	5-12 years: 86% 13-18 years: 14%
	18.153	4,725	Male: 71% Female: 29%	Māori: 42% Pacific: 16% European: 40%	5-12 years: 68% 13-18 years: 32%

Appendix 7: Detailed description of learner groups and survey response rates

Group	Disabled Learner needs for adaptation and support	Parent Survey respondents ^t	Disabled learner survey respondents ^u
A	<p>Mainly physical impairments (such as Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy) and/or</p> <p>sensory impairments (such as deafblind, blind, low vision, deaf, and hard of hearing) and require support, accommodation, or adaptations with one or more of the following functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → walking, climbing steps → self-care such as feeding or dressing themselves → seeing, hearing → being understood by family or outside the family. 	67 (13%)	52 (15%)
B	<p>Neurodivergent learners (such as those relating to dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorder) and require significant support with any one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → accepting changes in their routine → managing their emotions → relating to others. 	67 (13%)	61 (17%)

^t Eighteen percent of respondents were not classified into a group due to missing data, four percent did not indicate significant functional difficulties in any area.

^u Four percent of respondents were not classified into a group as they did not indicate significant functional difficulties in any area.

Group	Disabled Learner needs for adaptation and support	Parent Survey respondents [†]	Disabled learner survey respondents [‡]
C	<p>Mainly intellectual/cognitive impairments (such as Down Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome, Prader-Willi Syndrome) and require significant curriculum and teaching adaptation to support difficulties with learning, remembering, concentrating, and support with communication needs.</p>	56 (11%)	52 (15%)
D	<p>Most complex needs relating to intellectual/cognitive impairments, communication and self-care, and neurodiverse requiring significant support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → curriculum and teaching adaptation to support difficulties with learning, remembering, concentrating → support with accepting change, managing self, or relating to others → support with communication and self-care. 	108 (21%)	90 (25%)
E	<p>Complex needs relating to intellectual/cognitive impairments, and neurodiverse, and requiring significant support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → curriculum and teaching adaptation to support difficulties with learning, remembering, concentrating → with accepting change, managing self, or relating to others. 	96 (19%)	84 (24%)



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