

Special Education Policy

Special Report to Annual Meeting 2008

Annual Meeting 2007 agreed that a report on NZEI Te Riu Roa special education policy would be presented to Annual Meeting 2008. This work has been done by a group broadly representative of NZEI's membership, including members of the National Executive ("the working group"). Members were involved through a consultation document to all worksites and in District Council focus groups.

Members' responses from the 2007 consultation document were analysed and summarised into main ideas. The working group identified which of these could be supported by research, best practice and/or practitioner knowledge and which would need further information.

Further analysis sorted the responses into three broad emerging themes.

- What NZEI members as education professionals "believe"
- What NZEI members as education professionals "know"
- What NZEI members as education professionals "need"

Consultation with members through District Council focus groups in April

and May 2008 built on the earlier consultation and responses. These meetings were facilitated by members of the working group who had participated in a training day as preparation.

The focus groups recorded responses to three discussion starters.

- In the context of the right to education for all, discuss what is important when considering special education
- Quality teaching and learning for children and young people with special education needs occurs when ...
- NZEI members are best supported to provide quality teaching and learning for children and young people with special education needs when ...

The working group considered the focus group reports, confirmed the main ideas, checked that a wide range of members' perspectives were included, and began writing the new special education policy document.

The Policy Document

The special education policy statements sit within NZEI's broader policy framework. They are not intended to replace that broader policy but to add the special education perspective, or to complement that policy.

The working group considered ways in which other unions in Australia and in Great Britain had structured their policies. Of particular use were the Australian Education Union (AEU) Draft Guidelines (2004) for the development of its policies.

The working group agreed that statements of principle should begin and frame the NZEI special education policy.

These statements of principle would:

- express what NZEI members believe in and wish to achieve in special education
- be readily accessible and public
- guide the union when making public statements
- remain relevant over time.

Once these initial statements of principle are agreed, action statements and statements of position can be developed. For greatest effect, the action statements, statements of position and some procedural guidelines can be developed rapidly in response to need and can be easily withdrawn or amended once a particular issue is no longer current.

The terms 'inclusion' and 'mainstream' are not used in these policy statements. There is no common understanding of these terms among NZEI members and without the benefit of wider discussion the use of these terms could be unnecessarily divisive.

The working group believed however, that the following National Union of Teachers (NUT) definition of "inclusion" encompassed the range of views provided by members during the consultation.

"... 'inclusion' should not be defined as all pupils being included in the mainstream but as all schools working together as part of an inclusive education service to meet students needs in the most appropriate setting." (National Union of Teachers [NUT], 2006, p.5)

The attached draft policy document is the beginning of the work of updating NZEI's special education policy.

Current Policy

As part of the process of review, the working group considered NZEI's current special education policy. Existing policy statements that could be considered 'high level' or statements of principle were identified. The rest were positional, task, or action oriented.

The identified high level principled statements were 'tested' against the emerging themes. While all could be fitted into one or more of the three themes, some of the language used to express the principles had, over time, often become outdated.

Many of the action and task-oriented policies had lost their immediacy, been superseded or were no longer relevant.

However the working group agreed that the existing policy statements should be retained while the new policy was being developed. This would ensure that none of the flavour of the older policy was lost.

A Way Forward

One of the tensions noted by the working group was that Annual Meeting policy debates almost always involved adding action or task oriented policies that were not necessarily connected to statements of principle. Time for debate was often limited and consequently the policy had simply expanded without constraint.

The working group believes that members should be able to discuss what action, process or task oriented policy should be developed from the statements of principle. This should happen in such a way that includes all members' perspectives and strengthens the work to date.

The working group anticipates that from time to time the core principle statements would also be reviewed and updated.

The working group recommends that the next steps in special education policy development should be:

- to link the special education policy to other NZEI policies and principles identified in QPE421C

- the addition of a glossary of terms (and note the usefulness of this for all policy statements)
- to continue work on the statements of position, procedural guidelines and action statements. (*Members have suggested through the consultation a number of areas for NZEI to be engaged in.*)
- to consider the best way for members to discuss special education in a way that maintains the integrity of the statements of principle and keeps action/task oriented policy statements current and 'of the moment'
- subsequent to the adoption of this report, remove policy items that are no longer relevant or are in conflict with the new policy.

Working Group

Members of the special education policy review working group were: National Executive members Diane Leggett, Vinny Ridgeway, Megan Rich, Fiona Matapo and Nigel Wilson. They were joined by Ester Watson (Conifer Grove School), Bronwyn Peacock (Nelson Park School), Cristina Gnida (GSE Hutt), Gael Trevathan (Sara Co-

hen School), Jill Merrick (Titahi Bay School), John Harper (Ashburton College), Amy Mitchell (Stepping Stones Childcare Centre) and Andrea Andresen (Somerville School).

Recommendations

That the report *Special Education Policy Review* be received.

That the recommendations of the Special Education Policy Review working group be progressed through the NZEI 2008/09 work programme.

Special Education Policy – Draft Document

A. Policy Scope

1. Students with special education needs are not defined by those special education needs. Their right to participate in the New Zealand education system is the same as that for all other students
2. The special education policy statements:
 - are supported by the standards of the Right to Education framework – Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Adaptability (*Human Rights Commission, 2004, p261*)
 - add the special education perspective to, and complement NZEI policy
 - are neither sector nor setting specific. Rather, they represent and have been developed from the collective strength of NZEI members' experience and knowledge and their work across the education sector whether as teachers, special-ists or support staff.

- represent the perspective and aspirations of NZEI members. They are not intended to represent perspectives of special education lobby groups, parent groups, networks, or other agencies.

B. The Right to Education for All

1. NZEI asserts the right to education for all students within a quality public education system.
2. In a quality public education system the culture of centre/school/kura is conducive to supporting children, young people and their whānau. This means each centre/school/kura:
 - embraces diversity and is accepting of all students. The culture/mauri/essence/unique-ness of each student is acknowledged and valued
 - is supportive of students, staff, whānau/family
 - has policies and procedures in place and in practice.

3. Education is a shared responsibility with all involved contributing and working together so that learners succeed. Students with special education needs benefit most from relationships shaped from this shared responsibility when:

- relationships between home, family/whānau, relevant agencies and centre/school/kura are established at the earliest opportunity and are maintained throughout a student's learning pathway. These relationships are especially important at times of transition and change
 - decisions about the most appropriate centre/school/kura are jointly made by whānau/caregivers, teachers and other professionals
 - there is clear communication. Information is shared between whānau/caregivers, students where appropriate, centre/school/kura staff, agencies and the community.
4. Cultural, physical and emotional safety is paramount. NZEI notes the tension between balancing the

rights of individual students with the rights of all students, staff, whānau/caregivers and community

C. Quality Teaching and Learning

1. All students have unique needs and are to be treated as individuals. Learning for students with special education needs means placing students at the centre, respecting and responding to their learning needs.
2. Quality teaching and learning for students with special education needs means:
 - learning is student-centred, meaningful and relevant
 - outcomes include both social and academic achievement
 - strengths are nurtured and celebrated
 - students are safe and secure.
3. This can be achieved when:
 - The curriculum is accessible to all students
 - There is a range of readily available resources both material

and staffing to meet individual need

- teachers have a strong knowledge of the learning continuum and are able to identify and work to meet individual learning needs
- teachers have the primary responsibility for students learning and are well supported and resourced to do this
- teachers, support staff and specialists work together and there is clarity and acceptance of the role of each
- learning goals are jointly understood and everyone works towards them
- strong effective support systems are in place and are responsive to the needs of students, their families/whānau and teaching staff.

D. Support for Special Education

1. The provision of special education should be needs-based and not contestable.
2. NZEI supports the ongoing maintenance of a range of learning en-

vironments within a coordinated service. This is best demonstrated when:

- provision is appropriate to need, is in place on entry and remains throughout the system
 - there are clear pathways within the service with access to, and between a continuum of learning environments, and where transition issues are minimised
 - parental choice is balanced between the needs of the child and the equitable provision of specialist resources that enable the placement.
3. The rights of the students to access the curriculum and the ability of staff to provide quality teaching and learning should be assured. Ensuring needs are met is a collective responsibility.
 - Locally, centre/school/kura, family/whānau, the community and relevant agencies are responsible for working together to make decisions appropriate to the teaching and learning needs of students
 - Government is responsible for providing the resources to enable the

- best decisions to be made to ensure students' learning needs are met
- The Ministry of Education as the key central agency has the responsibility of working together with local education communities to ensure resources are provided as equitably as possible. This does not necessarily mean an equal distribution of resources, but does mean the provision of the best possible teaching and learning irrespective of geographic location, socio-economic circumstance or disability.
4. Special education provision should be tangible. This means:
- transparent and easily accessible processes for funding, staffing, property, materials, or professional learning for staff
 - clear and available information for centres /schools/kura and families/whānau
 - timely access to the appropriate specialist or agency and the provision of close support and guidance as needed.
5. For NZEI this would be achieved by ensuring:
- time for preparation, planning, and building relationships with family/whānau, agencies, teachers, specialists and support staff
 - ongoing professional learning so that well qualified teachers, specialists and support staff build their expertise and knowledge
 - sufficient specialist staff with the experience and understanding to work in Miro Maori classes/centres
 - access to up to date research and best practice is readily available
 - teacher staffing levels provide for appropriate student numbers
 - specialist staffing levels so that there is equitable provision and manageable caseloads
 - special education teacher aides and support workers who have sufficient hours to be an effective support for teachers and students

- job security for teachers, specialists and support staff through centrally funded positions
 - safe and secure learning environments and workplaces.
6. NZEI notes the implications for:
- initial teacher education and the need to include special education components in programmes
 - sufficient government funding to ensure an effective and equitable provision.

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