EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE
TE TARI AROTAKE MATAURANGA

Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Early Childhood Services

December 2012

New Zealand Government

www.ero.govt.nz

Foreword

The Education Review Office (ERO) is an independent government department that reviews the performance of New Zealand's schools and early childhood services, and reports publicly on what it finds.

The whakataukī of ERO demonstrates the importance we place on the educational achievement of our children and young people:

> Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa
> The Child – the Heart of the Matter

In our daily work we have the privilege of going into early childhood services and schools, giving us a current picture of what is happening throughout the country. We collate and analyse this information so that it can be used to benefit the education sector and, therefore, the children in our education system. ERO's reports contribute sound information for work undertaken to support the Government's policies.

All children should have the opportunity to participate in early childhood education, including children with special needs. Not only do these children have the right to take part in early childhood education, the education and care they receive should be inclusive. ERO recently evaluated how well early childhood services included children with special needs. This report presents the findings from that evaluation. It also discusses what it means to be inclusive, some of the challenges facing services and areas for improvement.

Successful delivery in education relies on many people and organisations across the community working together for the benefit of children and young people. We trust the information in ERO's evaluations will help them in their work.

Dr Graham Stoop
Chief Review Officer
Education Review Office

December 2012

Contents

Overview

A Government priority is that every child has the opportunity to participate in early childhood education (ECE). This Education Review Office evaluation of how well early childhood services include children with moderate to severe special needs supports this priority.

ERO undertook this evaluation in 268 early childhood services (ECS) reviewed in Terms 3 and 4, 2011. Just over a third of services (104) had children with moderate to severe special needs[1] enrolled. The evaluation focused on the following questions:

- How well do transitions ensure the continuing wellbeing, learning, and development of children with moderate to severe special needs?
- To what extent are children with moderate to severe special needs supported to be confident and capable learners?
- How inclusive is the service of children with moderate to severe special needs?

Nearly all of the 104 services were very inclusive (44 percent) or mostly inclusive (49 percent) of children with special needs. The main characteristics of very inclusive services included:

- believing that children with special needs were capable and confident learners
- having and practising very inclusive processes and practices
- accessing and providing additional support as appropriate
- working collaboratively with parents and key professionals from other agencies.

Carefully managed transitions into, within, and from almost all services (97 percent) ensured the continuing wellbeing, learning and development of children with special needs. Similarly, ERO found children with special needs were well supported to be confident and capable learners at 91 percent of services. In these services, educators knew the child and their strengths and interests. They had also developed positive relationships with the child and their whānau. Appropriate programmes had been developed collaboratively that allowed children with special needs to equitably take part in all activities and access resources. Specialists and educators worked together to share information and strategies to work with children with special needs. Assessment showed children with special needs as confident and capable learners.

In the few services found to be less inclusive, (seven percent) it was not a lack of the right attitude that limited quality. Rather it was a lack of shared understanding, knowledge of strategies, and pedagogy to adapt programmes, as well as limiting physical environments. ERO found that in these services the overall quality of teaching for all children was poor.

Regardless of the service's inclusiveness, ERO found little self review related to the progress of children with special needs in most services. Only a few services

[1] Referred to as 'children with special needs' for the remainder of the report.

undertook self review that focused on outcomes for children with special needs. In most cases self review was informal and spontaneous.

In the 164 services that did not currently have children with moderate to severe special needs enrolled, ERO evaluated how well placed the services were to enrol this group of children. If services had enrolled children with special needs in the past, ERO discussed successes and challenges. ERO found that most of these services were well placed to enrol children with special needs.

ERO also found that regardless of the level of inclusiveness, services faced challenges in transitioning and supporting children with special needs. These included working collaboratively with parents who may be reluctant to acknowledge their child had a special need or were previously unaware of it. Difficulties with making referrals and accessing funding and support were also highlighted. Some services were better placed than others to successfully address these challenges.

It is pleasing to see that leaders and educators in the majority of services have the positive attitudes and practices needed to fully support children with special needs during transitions and in their learning and development. However, it is now time for services to extend their self review to better understand and plan for practices and programmes that result in positive outcomes for children with special needs.

Next steps

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education reviews:

- how it works with all services to facilitate processes for services making referrals and seeking funding
- the provision of education support workers.

ERO recommends that managers and educators of early childhood improve their:

- shared understanding of inclusion
- knowledge of appropriate strategies for including children with special needs
- shared understanding of pedagogy so adaptations to programmes are appropriate.

ERO recommends that managers also undertake self review of outcomes of programmes for children with special needs and, in particular, focus on:

- recording processes, including those for individual education or development plans
- reviewing individual education or development plan outcomes
- expanding educators' understanding of inclusion through professional development and learning.

Introduction

This report presents the findings of ERO's evaluation of how well early childhood services included children with special needs. It presents information about services with these children enrolled, as well as about services that do not currently have children with special needs enrolled.

Success for All in early childhood

A Government priority is that every child has the opportunity to participate in early childhood education (ECE). The goal is to increase the participation, and the quality of participation, in early childhood education for groups with traditionally low participation rates, including children with special education needs. The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) describes a child with special educational needs as a child who needs extra support because of "a physical disability, a sensory impairment, a learning or communication delay, a social, emotional or behavioural difficulty, or a combination of these."[2]

The Ministry of Education's *Success for All* policy actively promotes inclusion for all children in both schooling and early education settings. In its *Statement of Intent 2010-2015*,[3] the Ministry of Education stated:

> *Children with special education needs have difficulty actively participating in regular ECE settings without appropriate support. Many of these children will start school at a disadvantage to their peers. We need to increase participation rates for these groups while maintaining high quality ECE provision for all. (p11)*

As part of this focus, the Ministry will:

> *…work with ECE providers, families, whānau and communities [and health agencies]… to ensure we identify and respond early to children with special education needs. We will work with those communities to ensure that our Early Intervention services for children with special education needs are promoted and delivered appropriately. (p14)*

The Ministry expects early childhood services to provide inclusive education and care for children with special needs. It describes inclusion in an early childhood service as every child being valued as a unique individual and supported to be fully involved in all aspects of the curriculum. *Including Everyone, Te Reo Tātahi, Meeting Special Education Needs in Early Childhood* [4] describes inclusion as:

- an ongoing process rather than a result

---

[2] Retrieved 27 April 2011. http://www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/YourChild/SupportForYourChild/ExtraSupport/EarlyInterventionServicesAndSupport.aspx

[3] Ministry of Education (May 2010) *Statement of Intent 2012-2015*. Wellington: Crown.

[4] Ministry of Education (2000) *Including Everyone, Te Reo Tātaki, Meeting Special Education Needs in Early Childhood*. Wellington: Ministry of Education: p10.

- a journey towards responsive, reciprocal relationships
- encompassing attitudes, resources, participation and curriculum.

The Ministry of Education, Special Education (Special Education) provides services to children who have been identified in their early years as having special education needs. These services are specific to the individual child's needs, with the overall aim of enabling them to participate in ECE and preparing them to transition into school.

New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki,*[5] states that the curriculum assumes the care and education of children with special needs will be encompassed within the principles, strands and goals set out for all children in early childhood settings. It is expected that an Individual Programme (IP) will be developed for children with special needs.

The Human Rights Act 1993 prevents discrimination in enrolment, stating that it is unlawful for an educational establishment to discriminate on the grounds of disability, unless they cannot reasonably provide special services or facilities.[6] Once services have a child with special needs enrolled, they must meet their obligations under the licensing regulations and obligations that apply to them. In particular, the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008 require every licensed service provider to:

- plan, implement, and evaluate a curriculum that is designed to enhance children's learning and development through the provision of learning experiences and that is consistent with the curriculum framework prescribed by the Minister
- make all reasonable efforts to collaborate with the parents, and where appropriate, the family or whānau of the enrolled children in relation to the learning and development of, and decisions making about, those children
- obtain information and guidance from agencies with expertise in early childhood learning and development to support the learning and development of enrolled children, and work effectively with parents, and where appropriate the family or whānau.[7]

Inclusive education in early childhood education

Recent New Zealand research about including children with special needs in early childhood education highlights current thinking about inclusive practices as well as identifying barriers to inclusiveness.

What is inclusion?

Inclusion begins with recognising that all children and their families have the right to access high quality early childhood education. This right is not affected by disability. Inclusive practices are intended to identify and remove barriers to full acceptance, participation and learning for all children. Inclusion recognises that many challenges

[5] Ministry of Education, (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Wellington: Ministry of Education: p11.
[6] Source: s21, s57-60 Human Rights Act 1993.
[7] Source: Regulation 43, Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008.

associated with disability are embedded in socio-cultural attitudes and practices. Inclusive practices aim to alter policy, organisation, structure and pedagogy so children with special needs can take their rightful place as full and valued members of their education communities. Inclusion does not entail a one-size-fits-all "mainstream" approach,[8] but seeks to recognise and respond to diversity, without isolating children with special needs and removing them from everyday activities at the service. Inclusive practices allow educators to "support individual needs within the regular context." [9] Inclusive educators think about the child as a learner.[10]

What does inclusion look like?

In ECE, inclusion involves educators taking steps towards actively identifying barriers to learning and participation, and adapting aspects of their practice to resolve these.[11] This might involve altering the physical environment to facilitate inclusion, or using teaching approaches not typically found in education settings, for example, sign language. The aim is to not only help children with special needs take part in the regular activities, but also challenge negative attitudes toward disability.

Recent research about ECE providers in New Zealand has characterised successful services as ones where staff "were not simply tolerating or accommodating [children with special needs and their whānau] but communicating an ethos of equality, fairness and providing a service underpinned by the principles of inclusion and provision of a quality education for all."[12] Rather than viewing disability as the defining feature of the child's experience and identity, high quality inclusive education involves seeing *all* children as children first and foremost. An educator interviewed in a research project exemplifies this attitude: "You don't think of them as special needs. They're just part of the group."[13] To think this way, educators need more than an acceptance of an inclusive philosophy. They also need knowledge of inclusive practices.[14]

An important part of this process of creating an inclusive environment is to develop collaborative relationships within a community of practice, made up of educators,

---

[8] Higgins, N., MacArthur, J., & Morton, M. (2008) Winding back the clock: the retreat of New Zealand inclusive education policy. *New Zealand Annual Review of Education 17*, 145-166. p146.

[9] Corbett, J. (2001) *Supporting inclusive education: A connective pedagogy.* London: Routledge Falmer. Cited in Stark, R., Gordon-Burns, D., Purdue, K., Rarere-Briggs, B., & Turnock, K. (2011) Other parents' perceptions of disability and inclusion in early childhood education: implications for the teachers' role in creating inclusive communities. *He Kupu The Word, 2, 4*, 4-18. p5.

[10] Dunn, L. (2008) Perceptions of inclusive early intervention. Parents, early childhood teachers, speech-language therapists, early intervention teachers and education support workers describe their understandings and experience of their shared task. *New Zealand Research In Early Childhood Education Journal, 17*, 19-32.

[11] Purdue, K. (2006) Children and disability in early childhood education: "special" or inclusive education? *Early Childhood Folio 10*, 12-15.

[12] Gordon-Burns, D., Purdue, K, Rarere-Briggs, B., Stark, R., & Turnock, K. (2010) Quality inclusive early childhood education for children with disabilities and their families. *International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 8,1*, 53-68. p56.

[13] Purdue, K. (2009) Barriers to and facilitators of inclusion for children with disabilities in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood 10, 2*, 133-143. p136.

[14] Cullen, J. (2000) Early intervention: an inclusive approach. In D. Fraser, R. Moltsen, & K. Ryba (Eds) *Learners with Special Needs in Aotearoa New Zealand* (2nd Ed). Palmerston North: Dunmore, 211-236.

specialists, and parents and whānau that support one another in promoting inclusion.[15] In particular, "it is important that parents of children with special needs are viewed as experts [about] their children, and are thus treated as equal and valued members of the 'teaching' team."[16] Parents of other children at the service also have an important role, as their acceptance and valuing of children with special needs is vital to the full sense of community and inclusive participation.

What barriers are there to inclusion?

Despite the principles of inclusion underlying legislation and policy and its inherent presence in *Te Whāriki*, research suggests that inclusion in actual practice varies widely from service to service.[17] Children with special needs are often seen as requiring special education separate to the mainstream. This limits their attendance and full participation in the regular life of the service. Separation gives rise to a number of barriers to inclusion, including hostility from other children's parents, resourcing issues, and a lack of knowledge about how to include children with special needs.

Research indicates that some parents of children who attend services where there are children with special needs enrolled held the view that "if children with disabilities were deemed to be too different, too difficult or too disabled to teach, or their participation in centres was seen as interfering with the learning of other children, and as taking up time, money or attention from the deserving 'normal' children, then their enrolment, attendance and participation in early childhood education should be questioned."[18] Such attitudes can present a very significant deterrent to children with special needs and their families' sense of belonging and acceptance.

Some services in research studies considered themselves insufficiently resourced to provide the kinds of intervention necessary for effective inclusion. In this case, the attendance of children with special needs was seen as a resourcing issue rather than a human rights issue. Researchers have suggested that some services use resourcing as an excuse to exclude children with special needs who they would prefer not to teach.[19] However, there is also acknowledgement of external constraints by researchers who state that evidence "highlights the facts that inadequate resourcing, especially funding... is one of the main barriers to inclusion."[20]

---

[15] Purdue, K. (2009) Barriers to and facilitators of inclusion for children with disabilities in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood 10, 2*, 133-143.
[16] Gordon-Burns, D., Purdue, K, Rarer-Brigs, B., Stark, R., & Turnock, K. (2010) Quality inclusive early childhood education for children with disabilities and their families. *International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 8,1*, 53-68. p 61.
[17] Purdue, K. (2009) Barriers to and facilitators of inclusion for children with disabilities in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood 10, 2*, 133-143. p133.
[18] Purdue, K. (2009) Barriers to and facilitators of inclusion for children with disabilities in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood 10, 2*, 133-143. p135. See also Fourie, A. (2010) Who will look after my child? The complexities of working with families of children with special needs. *Early Education, 48 Spring/Summer*, 14-17.
[19] Purdue, K. (2009) Barriers to and facilitators of inclusion for children with disabilities in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood 10, 2*, 133-143. p139.
[20] Gordon-Burns, D., Purdue, K., Rarere-Briggs, B., Stark, R. & Turnock, K. (2012) Key factors in creating inclusive early childhood settings for children with disabilities and their families. Gordon-Burns, D., Gunn, A., Purdue, K. & Surtees, N. (Eds) *Te Aotūroa Tātaki Inclusive early*

Even when these tangible barriers were not present, researchers say educators sometimes lacked an understanding of how to effectively adapt their environment and pedagogy to be inclusive. This can lead, for example, to 'velcroing',[21] whereby education support workers (ESW) attach themselves to children with special needs, which works against inclusive measures and can isolate these children. Educators may also abdicate their responsibilities to ESWs, and fail to interact effectively with children with special needs.[22]

Research about inclusiveness in New Zealand early childhood services highlights the need for educators to go beyond an inclusive philosophy to inclusive action that ensures all educators have appropriate knowledge and strategies to be inclusive of children with special needs and their whānau.

Education support workers

The Ministry funds the employment of education support workers (ESW) through either their Special Education or a small number of providers.[23] ESWs work alongside educators to support the inclusion of children with the highest needs. ESWs work under the guidance of an early intervention specialist, and as part of a team of parents, whānau, specialist education practitioners, educators, and health professionals. This team works together to develop an IP to support the inclusion of the child in the service.

Ministry-funded ESW time is additional to other adult support available from an early childhood service, and any specialist staff involved. The maximum funded hours are 15 per week. ESWs are not funded during the school holidays. They are not intended to replace the role of the educator, nor provide fulltime one-to-one support for children. The level of support needed for the child to be included in the service is negotiated between the Ministry, the service, the parents, whānau and aiga. The Ministry is currently developing national criteria for this decision-making process.[24]

---

childhood education: Perspectives on inclusion, social justice and equity from Aotearoa New Zealand. Wellington: NZCER, 155-174: p168.

[21] Gordon-Burns, D., Purdue, K, Rarer-Brigs, B., Stark, R., & Turnock, K. (2010) Quality inclusive early childhood education for children with disabilities and their families. *International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 8,1*, 53-68. p 58.

[22] Macartney, B. (2008) "If you don't know her, she can't talk": noticing the tensions between deficit discourses and inclusive early childhood education. *Early Childhood Folio, 12*, 31-35. And Purdue, K. (2009) Barriers to and facilitators of inclusion for children with disabilities in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood 10, 2*, 133-143.

[23] CCS Disability Action, Champion Centre, Conductive Education, McKenzie Centre, Ohomairangi Trust, and Wellington Early Intervention Trust. Occasionally, ESWs may also be employed directly by an early childhood service.

[24] Information for this section comes from the Ministry of Education's draft *National ESW Guidelines (2012)* and from discussions with Ministry personnel.

Methodology

ERO's framework for evaluation

ERO gathered information during regular education reviews in services during Terms 3 and 4, 2011. Where children with moderate to severe special needs were currently enrolled, reviewers collected information in response to the following key questions:

- How well do transitions ensure the continuing wellbeing, learning, and development of children with moderate to severe special needs?
- To what extent are children with moderate to severe special needs supported to be confident and capable learners?
- How inclusive is the service of children with moderate to severe special needs?

Appendix One includes investigative prompts used in the evaluation, which may be used for services' own self review.

In services where no children with moderate to severe special needs were currently enrolled, ERO asked whether these services had previously enrolled children with special needs, or been asked to do so but had not. When services had previously enrolled or been asked to enrol children with moderate to severe special needs, ERO asked managers and educators about their successes and/or challenges. Where they had not been asked to enrol children with special needs previously, ERO talked with managers and educators to determine how well placed the service was to be inclusive if asked to do so in the future.

ERO also asked Special Education staff and advocates from disability action groups to comment on anecdotal evidence they had received from parents about their children's inclusion in services. They were asked to comment on the following:

- information about services saying they cannot enrol a child with special needs
- limits placed on attendance by children with special needs
- parents' involvement in planning for their child's learning at the service
- the inclusion of children with special needs by other parents and children and the development of positive relationships.

Data collection

During each service's review, ERO collected information from a variety of sources including:

- discussions with managers and educators at the service
- informal discussions with parents, whānau and aiga of children with moderate to severe special needs
- observations of interactions between parents, whānau and aiga of children with moderate to severe special needs and educators
- documentation related to the operation of the service and to the learning of children with moderate to severe special needs.

Data for this evaluation was gathered from 268 services reviewed in Terms 3 and 4, 2011. More information about the sample is in Appendix Two. All data was collected by ERO review officers in the normal course of their review activities. *ERO's Approach to Reviews in Early Childhood Services (Draft) 2012* sets out the process for education reviews.[25]

The term 'educator' as used in this report includes teachers (qualified and registered) and parent educators. ERO's evaluation focused on children with moderate to severe special needs and this group of children are mostly, referred to as *children with special needs* in this report.

Findings

Including children with special needs

What did ERO ask?

How inclusive is the service of children with moderate to severe special needs?

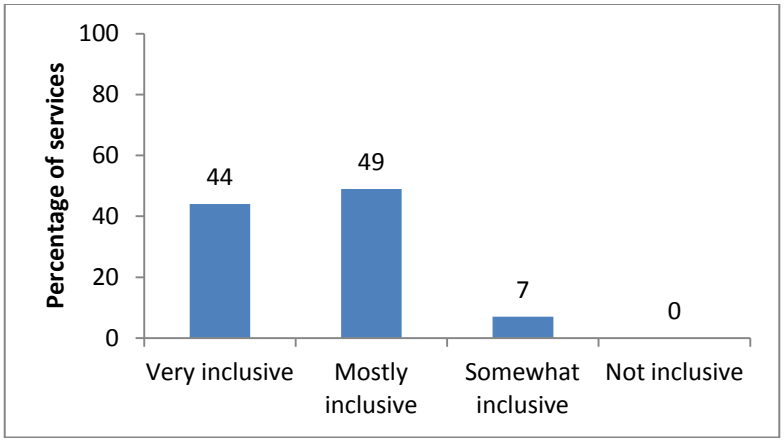
What did ERO find out?

ERO made an overall judgement about each service's inclusiveness. Figure 1 shows that 44 percent of services were *very inclusive* of children with special needs, with a further 49 percent *mostly inclusive*. Seven percent of services were *somewhat inclusive*, and no services were *not inclusive* in any way. Kindergartens were over-represented in the group of services that had children with moderate to severe special needs enrolled when compared to the national sample. However, there were no statistically significant differences between service types and their inclusiveness.[26]

Figure 1: Services' inclusiveness of children with special needs

[25] See http://www.ero.govt.nz/Review-Process/For-Early-Childhood-Services-and-Nga-Kohanga-Reo/ERO-Reviews-of-Early-Childhood-Services/ERO-s-Approach-to-Reviews-in-Early-Childhood-Services-DRAFT-2012

[26] Differences in ratings between the types of services were checked for statistical significance using a Kruskal-Wallis H test. The level of statistical significance for all statistical tests in this report was $p<0.05$.



Very inclusive services

The main characteristics of services that were very inclusive of children with special needs included:

- believing that children with special needs were capable and confident learners
- having and practising very inclusive processes and practices
- accessing and providing additional support as appropriate
- working collaboratively with parents and key professionals from other agencies.

Mostly inclusive services

The main characteristics of services that were mostly inclusive were similar to the very inclusive group. However, some variability of practice often meant that inclusion was not as good including:

- a lack of documentation to help ensure a shared understanding across the service and sustainability of good practice
- limitations in the physical environment
- educators unable to fully meet the child's needs without ESW support due to adult:child ratios or lack of pedagogical knowledge
- poor adaptation of the curriculum.

Somewhat inclusive services

Services that were seen as only somewhat inclusive often had the right attitude to inclusion, but lacked the skills and knowledge to put this into practice. These services were characterised by a lack of procedures for identifying and celebrating children with special needs' strengths and interests. Overall, they could not show how well their programme supported children's learning and development and they needed to improve the quality of planning and assessment for all children rather than just for children with special needs.

Transitions

What did ERO ask?

How well do transitions ensure the continuing wellbeing, learning, and development of children with moderate to severe special needs?

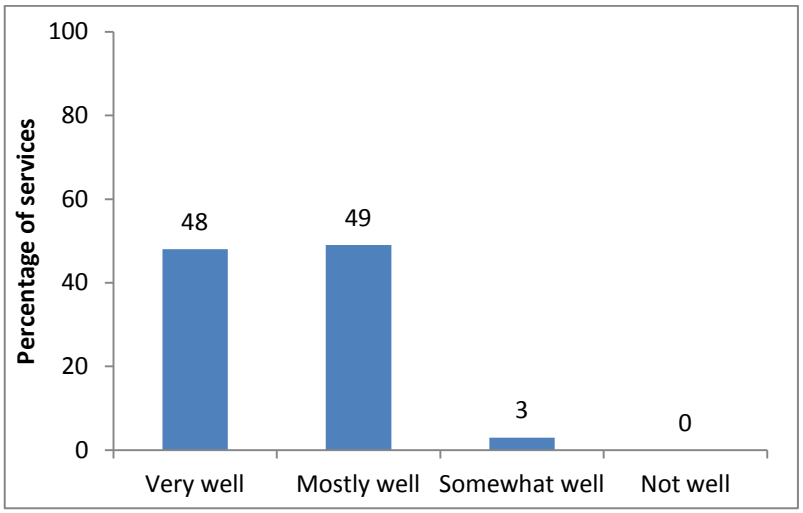
ERO's focus was on transitions into and within the service, and transitions from the service to another service or school. ERO based its evaluative judgements around four sets of indicators:[27]

- knowing the child's strengths and needs
- relationships with the child
- the physical environment
- self review that focused on the effectiveness of transitions.

What did ERO find?

As shown in Figure 2, transitions at almost all services ensured the continuing wellbeing, learning and development of children with special needs. Forty-eight percent transitioned children with special needs very well, and a further 49 percent transitioned them mostly well. Three percent of services were rated as transitioning children with special needs only somewhat well. There were no statistically significant differences between service types.[28]

Figure 2: How well transitions ensure the continuing wellbeing, learning and development of children with special needs



Knowing the child's strengths and needs

Forty-eight percent of services were judged as ensuring children's continuing wellbeing, learning and development very well during transitions. Adults at these services knew the child and their parents, whānau and aiga well. By listening and responding to parents' wishes and concerns, leaders in these services ensured that transitions were planned and responsive to individual needs, including flexibility in timing and the length of transition processes, with the child dictating the pace. They

[27] See Appendix One for the individual indicators in each set.
[28] Differences in ratings between the types of services were checked for statistical significance using a Kruskal-Wallis H test.

stated it was important to have continuous conversations with parents, whānau and aiga to be non-judgemental and supportive.

> *The child had come to the service after the parent had been asked to remove him from another service. The manager worked to ensure that the child was transitioned into the service in a sensitive and supportive manner. Staff made sure the child had a number of settling visits prior to commencing. They made contact with the agencies that had started to be involved in the child's life. The manager and head teacher made sure that the staff at the service were aware that they were enrolling a child that would need ongoing support.*

When children with already identified special needs were transitioning into this group of services, a number of factors were identified as good practice. These included:

- leaders talking with whānau and aiga, and support agencies to gather information before the child started attending
- leaders and whānau and aiga talking about expectations and routines to ensure consistency between the service and the child's home
- the child and whānau/aiga visiting the service to build familiarity and relationships
- educators visiting the child's home to establish relationships
- educators adapting routines to help settle the child
- educators encouraging parents to stay with their child until the child felt settled
- services having a key educator responsible for leading the transition
- leaders sharing information about the child with other educators sensitively
- where appropriate, leaders liaising with other services that the child was either concurrently or previously enrolled
- in home-based services, managers undertaking an extensive matching process between child and whānau/aiga and educator to meet the child's needs.

> *Transition would not have been as successful for the continuing wellbeing, learning and development of the child without external support from appropriate ESW funding. Special Education has been very supportive during the transition with weekly phone calls and ongoing learning support. The services appreciated the speed at which access to funding and an education support worker was gained.*

In cases where the child's special needs had not already been identified, services said good transition practices were important for parents to feel confident about sharing concerns about their child's development. Sharing of information meant leaders and educators could advocate on behalf of parents with agencies, such as Special Education,[29] to apply for funding and timely support.

[29] Special Education has a national, regional and district role focused on strengthening the Ministry of Education's overall special education direction and providing special education services to children and young people with high and very high educational, social, behavioural, and communication needs.

Many of these good practices were also apparent in transitions within and out of services. Written transition plans, developed with parents, set out strategies for transitions between groups within the service/sessions, or to another service or to school. In particular, this group of services were proactive when children were transitioning to school, often helping with ORS[30] funding applications, contacting schools, planning meetings, preparing information, and accompanying the child and their whānau and aiga on school visits. In some cases, school teachers were invited to attend IP meetings to learn about the child's needs and to discuss strategies for working with the child.

> *The service has strong professional relationships with the school and has effective ways of communicating face to face through reciprocal visits, planned meetings, telephone calls, and sharing documentation. Staff from the school are invited to attend and participate in individual planning meetings at the service prior to the child's transition.*

Many of the factors mentioned above were present in the 49 percent of services where transitions mostly ensured children's continuing wellbeing, learning and development. Educators were welcoming. Most services had appropriate processes and policies to ensure good transitions including talking sensitively with parents new to the service; collaborating with parents, whānau and aiga about transitions, and liaising effectively with schools. Many also had good relationships with other professionals and agencies working with the child.

However, ERO found variable practice in particular areas. Mostly this was in transitions where generic processes were apparent, especially transitions to school. Some of these services, while inclusive, did not document shared understandings of inclusive practices for educators and parents to use. In a few services, parent involvement in decision-making was variable. In one service, educators believed that management did not adequately access external funding and support to help them provide appropriate programmes and resources for children with special needs.

The continued wellbeing, learning and development of children with special needs during transitions was not ensured in three percent of services. These services were welcoming, but had no specific transition practices. Parents were informed about decisions made, but not included in conversations. Special Education help for providing appropriate resources and support was not adequately accessed. This lack of collaborative relationships places parents outside the teaching team, rather than as an equal and valued member. Involving parents, whānau and aiga in this way is essential to inclusive practice.

Relationships with the child

Good relationships between children with special needs and adults and other children in the service were seen as critical to ensuring successful transitions for children with special needs.

[30] The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) provides support for children with the highest level of need to help them join in and learn alongside other children at school.

In the services with very good transitions, educators strived to know the child and their strengths and needs, were aware of other professionals working with the child, and fostered good relationships between the child and other children and their parents.

In these services educators worked hard to maintain a positive and inclusive tone. All educators were involved in supporting the child and understanding their needs and strengths. To enable this collective responsibility, educators were involved in developing and using IPs to support the child, as well as, in some cases, undertaking professional learning and development (PLD) to implement strategies outlined in the IP. Educators also responded to parents' need to receive positive support and be listened to.

Educators modelled positive interactions with all children, and encouraged them to be inclusive. In these services, children with special needs had close relationships with the educators and other children. In some, assessment was used as a way to help other children understand the strengths and interests of children with special needs, as shown in the second extract below.

> *The educators talked with other children about this child's needs, which have heightened the children's level of understanding and tolerance.*

> *The educators create photo books that star the child and that are shared with other children. These are positive ways of recognising their strengths and interests.*

Educators were proactive in facilitating the ongoing success of children with special needs. They fostered manākitanga, and other children were accepting of children with special needs.

> *The head teacher related one occasion of physical bullying which was dealt with carefully but firmly. She spoke with the group of children responsible in a non-threatening way, praising them for telling her about the incident, then explaining why they should not harm someone. She also talked to the parents of this group so they knew what had happened and how the head teacher had dealt with it in a no-blame way. She had to tell the parents of the boy, which she found extremely difficult. She also used mat time to talk to the whole group about caring for others. This was handled sensitively and effectively.*

Educators modelled appropriate and effective strategies to help other children engage with children with special needs and acknowledged them as competent learners who had strengths to build on.

Parents at many services with very good transitions acknowledged the educators' teamwork that ensured they knew and understood their child, and the work they did to advocate for them when working with key agencies. Most of these services had strong links with Special Education and the other professionals that worked with the

child. They shared information and collaborated on strategies for working with the child.

> *Relationship development between service staff is a key to success, especially the relationship between the supervisor, parents, the child, the education support worker, and outside agencies (speech-, occupational- and physio-therapists). Educators acknowledge that if relationships and communication are not open, honest and regular this could prove a challenge for the service to ensure the continuing wellbeing, learning and development of the child.*

> *There is a lot of ongoing face-to-face communication between the families and the teaching team. Information about the child, health needs, support services and development is shared in partnership. Families show a deep sense of trust in the educators and are confident to share information with them, and to seek support and advice. The educators are advocates for the child and the family in enquiring about and securing support services. Educators are experienced and have strong knowledge and connections in the local area to enlist specialist help.*

In the services with mostly good transitions, collaborative planning with parents and agencies for IPs and learning about strategies and approaches helped the child in their learning and development. Most of these services also had good relationships with agencies and parents, with both formal and informal communication as appropriate. However, practices to help other children and their parents get to know and understand children with special needs were more variable. Less evident was the modelling of appropriate strategies to facilitate these relationships and to celebrate the child's strengths and interests so they and other children could develop positive relationships.

In the very few services with poor transitions, there was limited understanding of the need to use different strategies and approaches to help educators, parents, children and other professionals to develop positive relationships to ensure transitions were successful.

Physical environment

Transitions are eased when the environment is welcoming, respectful and inclusive. Services are also required to provide a physical environment that is appropriate to the abilities of the children attending.[31] In the services with good or very good transitions, educators were patient and understanding. A purposeful, supportive and nurturing tone was apparent. The layout of the physical environments in these services was appropriate, with ready access to resources. Services had installed equipment that was needed to facilitate inclusion such as ramps, handrails and the placement of furniture and resources.

[31] Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008 and Early Childhood Education Curriculum Framework, PF1.

Self review

Most services did not undertake self review of the impact of their transition practices on the inclusion of children with special needs and the outcomes for these children. In the small number of services that undertook self review focused on transitions for children with special needs this mainly centred on transitions to school. In half of these services, self review was informal and spontaneous as issues arose. Teachers were reflective about their practices, but had little or no documentation to refer to in the future. In the remaining few services, self review was ongoing and planned, as well as spontaneous. Educators, parents and specialists were involved in this self review through surveys and meetings. This overall lack of self review focusing on transitions for children with special needs hampers services' ability to provide a highly inclusive environment that successfully creates a community of practice for each child with special needs.

Challenges

This evaluation identified some challenges for services in effectively transitioning children with special needs to ensure their continued wellbeing, learning and development. The vast majority of challenges were identified by leaders at services, and clustered around the service provided by Special Education. Leaders commented on:

- funding delays after referral to, and assessment by, Special Education
- children who they viewed as requiring an education support worker (ESW) but not meeting Special Education funding criteria
- the deficit-based model for funding
- reductions in government funding that were then covered by the service
- funding for ESWs not provided for all the hours that the child attends
- ESWs not funded for school holidays, which for some children, limited their attendance due to a subsequent lack of support for their high needs
- lack of Special Education support during transition to school.

Other challenges identified included the availability of ESWs, and some parents' unwillingness to recognise their child's special needs. The comments below exemplify some of these challenges.

> *The biggest challenge relating to the transition of the child with cerebral palsy is that Special Education, education support workers are not employed during the school holidays. This means that the child is unable to attend the service for six weeks during the school holidays.*

> *A child identified as having developmental delay was referred to Special Education once they were enrolled. It took a long time to receive funding, and be allocated funded support hours and an education support worker. This was difficult and disappointing for the child's parent.*

As this child is in the process of transitioning to school, one of the challenges identified is the gap in access to support for the child once they move from the service to the school. Educators saw this as having a negative impact on the child and family settling and transitioning well.

While identifying these challenges, leaders and educators in the highly inclusive services, and many of the mostly inclusive, did not limit attendance to ESW-funded hours. The Ministry has an expectation that a child with special needs will attend for the hours agreed to by the Ministry, parents, whānau and aiga, and the service, but that hours of attendance may not match the ESW-funded hours for a child.

Confident and capable learners

What did ERO ask?

To what extent are children with moderate to severe special needs supported to be confident and capable learners?

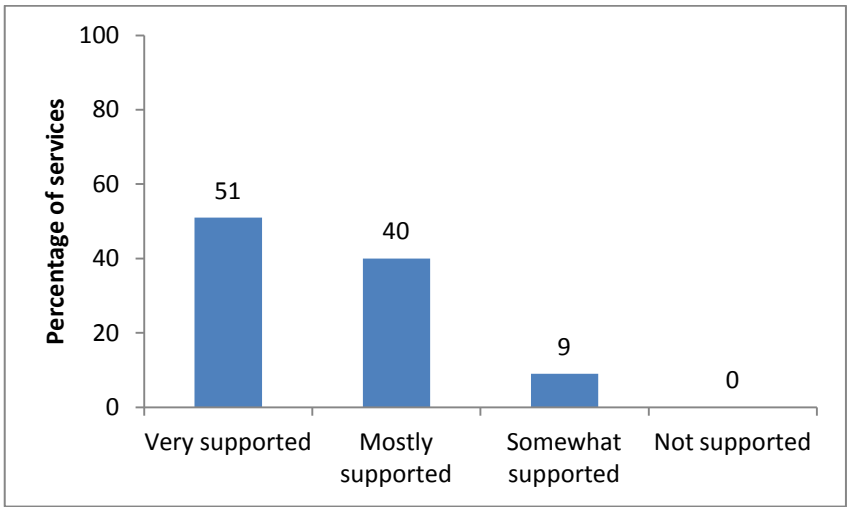
Review officers based their evaluative judgements around six sets of indicators:[32]

- access to the programme
- the Individual Programme (IP)
- developing the programme
- implementing the programme
- relationships with the child
- self review focused on outcomes of the programme.

What did ERO find?

Figure 3 shows that children with special needs were very well supported to be confident and capable learners at 51 percent of services, and mostly well supported at 40 percent of services. At nine percent of services, children with special needs were only somewhat supported. There were no statistically significant differences between service types.[33]

Figure 3: Children with special needs are supported as confident and capable learners



Access to the programme

In the 51 percent of services where children with special needs were very well supported as confident and competent learners, children had equitable access to

[32] See Appendix One for the individual indicators in each set.
[33] Differences in ratings between the types of services were checked for statistical significance using a Kruskal-Wallis H test.

experiences and opportunities available at their service. Children's attendance at the service was mostly decided together by the educators and the parents, with input from other key professionals, and with the child's health and wellbeing given priority. Many of these services had modified their physical environment to allow independence for children with physical disabilities. Accessibility to resources was ensured and specific resources were purchased to help children participate in all aspects of the programme. These services included and supported children with special needs in all activities, including participating in excursions.

> *Educators support the child to be fully involved in all aspects of the programme. For example, he is sometimes physically assisted by staff as his main needs relate to mobility and gross motor skills. They allow him to take risks; for example, climbing, participating in obstacle courses, dancing. While aspects of the environment make movement from some areas challenging, staff recognise these and support him to overcome any barriers to his participation.*

In the 40 percent of services where children with special needs were mostly supported to be confident and competent learners, attendance at the service was conditional. While attendance was seen as being flexible to meet the needs of the child and their whānau, and was negotiated with parents and other key professionals, these children were less likely to attend without their education support worker. Some services identified a lack of sufficient funded ESW hours as a barrier to equitable access, with some services saying their adult to child ratio limited children with special needs' access to the curriculum if they did not attend with a dedicated education support worker. Some services also identified the provision of appropriate resources and access to the outdoor environment as challenges.

However, most of these services expected that children with special needs would participate fully in the programme. The programme and resourcing were adapted to engage and stimulate the children, who were included in excursions with invitations extended to parents to accompany them if they wished.

In the remaining nine percent of services, where children were only somewhat supported, educators' poor professional understanding of the image of children with special needs as confident and competent learners limited practice.

The Individual Programme

Te Whāriki has an expectation that children with special needs attending an early childhood service will have an Individual Programme (IP) developed collaboratively between educators, parents and other key professionals. In very supportive services, these IPs were developed collaboratively; strategies were shared with all educators as well as parents; and educators worked together to implement and review the IP. Where practice was particularly effective, the IP linked to *Te Whāriki*, and assessment was focused on the desired outcomes identified in the IP.

> *Staff work closely with the multidisciplinary team which includes the early intervention teacher, speech therapist, physiotherapist and occupational therapist, and the Ministry. An IP is in place for the child and all staff are responsible for implementing and considering the IP*

when planning and delivering programmes. Communication between the service, parents and support workers is open and the IP is written collaboratively. The child's parents describe this as a consultative and negotiated process.

IPs are developed and discussed collaboratively with all key stakeholders and goals are clearly set and monitored. Laminated copies of strategies to encourage language development are present around the service and it is not left just to the ESW. All staff were observed affirming what he was saying and modelling correct language patterns.

Many of the services where children with special needs were 'mostly supported' had developed IPs for the children. Parents and other key professionals worked collaboratively with educators to develop the IP. Similarly, IPs were discussed in team meetings so all educators knew and could implement the strategies in the IP. Only a few services carried out assessment or reporting against the IP goals. Without this review, educators and other professionals are unable to appropriately assess how goals were met, and to revisit and develop new ones.

In the remaining nine percent of services, half did not have IPs for children with special needs. In the other half, while IPs had been developed collaboratively with parents and key professionals, not all educators were effectively implementing the strategies identified in the IP effectively.

Developing the programme

Services that supported children with special needs very well had frequent and ongoing communication with, and support from, Special Education and other specialists. This enabled educators to be responsive to children's special needs, and to seek PLD and information from specialists. Information from parents of children with special needs was sought, considered and shared when programmes were developed. In many of these services, educators and education support workers collaboratively develop and share strategies.

Family, educators and support services meet together to develop the programme for each child with special needs. All the educators meet to discuss the child's learning, development and wellbeing at the end of each day, and then to formally plan to meet their needs at the end of each week. They have shared responsibility for supporting all children.

In services that were mostly effective in supporting children with special needs, parent partnerships were important to developing an inclusive programme. In these services, ERO found positive, trusting and reciprocal relationships, where parents' aspirations were supported and information about children was shared. Educators were sensitive to parents' needs and concerns, and considered all contributions to the programme's development valid and valuable.

Educators and the education support workers know the children and their families well. This knowledge and strong relationships over time

help them to understand the needs of the child, why they may behave in a certain manner, and to appreciate small changes over time.

As in the very supportive services, professionals from agencies such as Special Education often helped educators to identify experiences, strategies and activities to support learning and development. However, in some services, educators were not using developmental information effectively to determine programmes. Programme planning was not always clearly linked with parent aspirations, and planning was less specific for children with special needs than for other children.

In the remaining services, practices for developing programmes were variable. Half of these services accessed support from key agencies, shared strategies with parents, or asked for parent contributions. In the other services, educators did not ask parents about their aspirations for their child. This meant they were not able to adequately meet children's special needs or support them as confident and capable learners.

Implementing the programme

Effective implementation of a collaboratively developed IP is crucial to the wellbeing, learning and development of children with special needs. In very supportive services, specialists worked with the children, parents and educators, enhancing and adapting the programme, and providing valuable resources and intervention strategies. Assessment involved parents, education support workers and educators. Children with special needs were viewed as confident and capable learners. Links to *Te Whāriki* were made, learning and relationships were highlighted, and next steps were identified that responded to children's interests and achievements.

Children's successes were celebrated through verbal affirmation, portfolios that showed progress with skills and dispositions, photobooks of children showing their learning and enjoyment in their relationships with others, and in some cases, graduation ceremonies. In these services, children with special needs had positive warm relationships with other children. Educators encouraged friendships, and education support workers involved other children in specific programmes to help children develop skills to establish and maintain successful social interactions.

Socialisation skills and a sense of inclusiveness are an important part of the programme, valued by the parents, and are strongly fostered by the staff. Children are aware that there are other ways of being and doing things that are just as right as others.

The ways in which the programme was implemented in mostly supportive services were similar to very supportive services. However, overall practices in this group of services were variable, and educators did not implement the programme as effectively. Reasons for this included:

- assessment information that was either poor quality or was not used to inform planning
- children with special needs being held responsible for an unsettled tone in the service at times
- the ESW not understanding their role and the practices agreed to in the IP
- educators finding it difficult to support children with special needs when their ESW was absent.

In the remaining services, the quality of teaching was poor for all children. While interactions were affirming and respectful in some of these services, in others they were variable. Educators in only a very few of these services understood and implemented strategies to support children with special needs' wellbeing, learning and development.

> *Educators had minimal engagement with children during the session, despite their good knowledge about them and high levels of appreciation by parents. The education support worker did not use appropriate strategies. Portfolios did not celebrate the success or progress towards IP goals or reflect parent aspirations. Staff meeting minutes showed educators held a deficit view of children with special needs.*

Relationships with the child

Children with special needs in very supportive services had a strong sense of belonging that their parents and educators supported and nurtured. ERO observed happy and engaged children, and parents spoken to said they saw the service as an extension of their family. Educators took the time to know the child and were sensitive to behavioural signs that signalled the need to increase support so the child could participate fully in the programme. This support often included one-to-one educator time.

Educators encouraged a sense of empathy and understanding among children at the service which, along with certain strategies, helped children with special needs feel a sense of belonging and connection with others. Effective strategies included educators:

- authentically role modelling positive interactions
- encouraging tuakana-teina relationships
- encouraging children to be accepting of differences
- collaborating to ensure group play and friendships
- explaining to children about all children's differences
- teaching children different strategies for difficult situations.

> *A review of the programme led to a focus on social competencies and a theme of 'Playing as a Good Friend', which is now evident in the harmonious and settled tone of the service. There is a sense of support and affirmation at all levels: adult to child, adult to adult, and child to child. The aim is for all children to become more resilient and identify themselves as competent and confident. Children are 'armed' with strategies for dealing with difficult situations – what to say or do. These are evident in wall displays and prompts, photobooks, dramatic play, authentic conversations, educators' modelling and children's play.*

Only a few of services acknowledged and celebrated the cultural identity of children with special needs. They were more likely to do so if the child was Māori. Few

services considered what they needed to know about children's cultural background, and values and beliefs from their parents and whānau.

In mostly supportive services, relationships with children were more variable. In many, children with special needs had a strong sense of belonging and good relationships with their peers, but this was not always the case. The recognition and affirmation of children's cultural background was also less likely.

In services where ERO saw poor relationships, educators did little to foster positive interactions, cultural backgrounds were not recognised in planning or assessment, and the overall poor quality of teaching limited social interactions.

Self review of the programme

Overall, services' self review of the impact of the programme on outcomes for children with special needs as confident and competent learners was poor. When self review of programmes relating to outcomes for children with special needs was undertaken it was mostly informal and spontaneous. In many services, self review was poorly understood and not outcomes-focused. When effective self review was undertaken it focused on outcomes and processes affecting outcomes such as:

- children's progress and development, including against IP goals
- the impacts of inclusive practices
- educators' awareness of inclusion
- implementation of, and modifications made to, programme planning
- PLD identified and undertaken
- adaptations to the physical environment.

> *The service's focus for self review in 2010-2011 was provision for children with special needs. The review identified ways in which staff could continue to improve their practice by extending their implementation strategies for teaching children with special needs. Educators have undertaken PLD to develop strategies such as Makaton sign language, physical exercises, behaviour management strategies, and building trust between children and adults.*

ERO is concerned that most services are not undertaking self review of how their programme influences outcomes for children with special needs. Attitudes, practices and barriers that can hinder children with special needs' full inclusion into the life of the service can be identified, challenged or highlighted as factors influencing outcomes for children with special needs.

Challenges

Challenges were identified for services in effectively supporting children with special needs to be confident and competent learners. In services where practice was not very supportive, these challenges were mostly about working collaboratively with education support workers, especially educators' capability to support children with special needs when the education support worker was absent. In some services this was related to expertise, and in others to adult-to-child ratios.

> *A challenge for educators was when the education support worker was not present. This was particularly noticeable with the two children with moderate to high autism who at times needed more support than educators were able to provide given their need to supervise and support all children with the 2 educators to 30 children ratio.*

In very supportive services, the challenges identified were mostly related to Special Education funding delays and provision. Home-based services identified a need for Special Education to work more closely with them, and other services said they had become 'magnet'[34] services. In some services, there was limited ESW support for the high number of children with special needs enrolled. One service had 17 children with special needs on their roll. ERO found that this was placing strain on their capacity to effectively include children with special needs.

How well placed were other services?

What ERO asked?

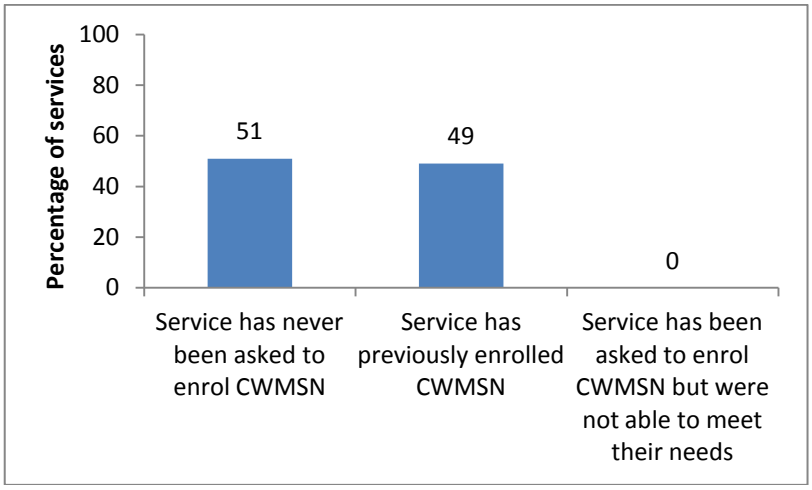
In services where no children with moderate to severe special needs were currently enrolled, ERO asked questions relating to one of three scenarios:

- In services where staff had not been asked to enrol children with moderate to severe special needs, ERO asked questions to determine how well placed the service would be to include them.
- In services where children with moderate to severe special needs had been previously enrolled, ERO asked questions about the successes, issues and challenges staff had experienced.
- In services where staff had been asked to enrol children with moderate to severe special needs, but were not able to meet the child's needs, ERO asked questions about why the service was unable to enrol these children, in particular focusing on issues surrounding enrolment.

Figure 4 shows that of the 164 services that did not currently have children with moderate to severe special needs enrolled, 51 percent had never been asked to enrol children with special needs. Forty-nine percent of services had previously enrolled children with special needs, while no services said they had been asked but were unable to meet particular needs.

[34] This term draws on the notion of magnet schools in the USA. These schools offer a specialised curriculum or particular philosophy that attracts certain students across a wide geographical area. In this context, the term is used to signify services that have a reputation beyond their immediate community for a particularly philosophy, in this case, inclusiveness of children with special needs.

Figure 4: Services with no children with special needs currently enrolled



Services that had never been asked to enrol children with moderate to severe special needs

Just over half of services that did not currently have a child with moderate to severe special needs enrolled, had never been asked to do so.[35] ERO made a judgement about how well placed a service in this group was to enrol these children if asked to do so. ERO found that:

- 19 percent (16 services) were not well placed to enrol children with special needs
- Six percent (five services) were possibly well placed to enrol children dependent on the nature of their special needs
- 75 percent (62 services) were well placed to enrol children with special needs.

Not well placed

Of the 19 percent of services that were not well placed, ERO considered that if not for the physical environment, which could not be adapted, four services would have been well placed. In three services, teaching was generally of poor quality, and educators had limited pedagogical knowledge to work, or experience of working, with children with special needs. These services also lacked relationships with external agencies, such as Special Education. Seven services had an inclusive culture and support from their umbrella association, but educator-turnover or the absence of a fully registered ECE educator meant the teaching practice was variable. Educators' ability to seek information from parents in a sensitive way and to provide an individualised programme was questionable. Educators in the remaining two services, although operating in an environment that was physically inclusive, expressed surprise that they would be asked to enrol children with special needs as this was not appropriate in their culture.

Possibly well placed

Five services were possibly well placed depending on the nature of the child's special needs. These services had limitations because of the physical environment that would

[35] From the total sample of 268 services, this category accounts for just under a third of all services.

make it difficult for children in wheelchairs or older children with limited mobility to access essential parts of the service, such as toileting facilities.

Well placed

Three-quarters of the services in this group were well placed to enrol children with moderate to severe special needs if asked to do so. Managers and educators displayed an understanding of inclusion and the environment was welcoming and warm. ERO observed inclusive practices such as flexible transition practices, good quality relationships and interactions among educators and children, responsive programmes, and meaningful partnerships with parents and whānau. Educators in some of these services had previously undertaken appropriate PLD, and had support networks, both through umbrella associations and externally, to help them develop strategies for supporting children with special needs. Some services were part of a multi-site organisation, where children with special needs were enrolled in adjacent services, and managers and educators were very aware of inclusive practices in their sister service.

Services that have previously enrolled children with moderate to severe special needs

Forty-nine percent of services that did not have children with moderate to severe special needs currently enrolled had previously done so.[36] Many of these services had an inherently inclusive philosophy that provided for equitable opportunities for learning that celebrated differences, was nurturing, and fostered a sense of belonging and wellbeing.

Most of these services were able to provide both anecdotal and self-review information about successful experiences for children with moderate to severe special needs. These included:

- children with special needs developing confidence as learners
- supporting, involving, working and communicating with parents
- working with, and learning from, specialists
- positive transitions into, within, and from the service, including to school
- children accepting differences and understanding others.

Almost all these services also identified challenges they had met when enrolling children with moderate to severe special needs. The most commonly identified challenge was working with Special Education, in particular slow response times for assessment and subsequent funding, inadequate funding, low ESW hours, and limited accessibility to and availability of specialist help. Services also identified financial challenges, such as purchasing resources, and providing additional staffing to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children at the service. Some services also indicated they had had to work with parents to help them accept their child needed additional support, and to communicate about support, interventions and specialist help.

[36] From the total sample of 268 services, this category accounts for just under a third of all services.

Other challenges included the appropriateness of the physical environment, accessing and affording PLD for educators, and handling behavioural challenges and others' perceptions of that behaviour. Some services felt there was a limit to how many children with moderate to severe special needs they could enrol at one time due to perceived negative impacts on staffing, resources and children already enrolled at the service. This was often attributed to decreases in funding and an inability to afford additional staffing, rather than a capacity of educators to cope, or a lack of desire to be inclusive.

Special Education and disability action groups

Information received from the Ministry of Education Special Education offices and providers around New Zealand, and from disability action groups showed that many services were inclusive and made great efforts to fully include children with moderate to severe special needs. They qualified this by stating that attitudes towards inclusiveness were very dependent on the head teacher or manager and their ability to model good practice.

Special Education and disability action group representatives reported that very few children were turned away from services. Where this did occur, services had said they would not enrol the child without full ESW hours, where the physical environment was not suitable, where the service had existing children with special needs enrolled, or where the adult-to-child ratio meant educators could not ensure their and other children's safety. One disability action group representative stated that ratios in kindergartens, for example, were higher than in education and care services, and it was becoming more common for kindergartens to decline or discourage enrolment. One provider contracted to Special Education stated that a few services had a 'verbal policy' of only one child with special needs at a time. Other services had extra forms and requirements to even consider whether the service might enrol the child.

It was common for children with moderate to severe special needs to attend on a limited basis. This was sometimes related to toileting issues, but usually to ESW hours, in particular, children's attendance being deferred when the ESW was sick, or during school holidays when ESWs were not funded by Special Education. Special Education staff reported that at times, this limitation on attendance was justified due to the nature of the special need, but at other times, it was not.

Respondents felt that parent involvement in their child's learning and IP meetings was mostly good, and many services welcomed parent involvement. However, some parents reported feeling isolated, and that they felt they would be putting their child at risk if they were to challenge practices such as limited attendance. Parents of other children enrolled at the service were generally accepting of children with special needs until aggressive behaviour affected their child. Some Special Education providers advised that educators needed to do more to educate other parents. One provider commented that adults usually had more problems being inclusive than children.

Most respondents commented on educators' capability to support children with special needs. They felt that some services were not well placed to support children with special needs. Comments were generally about the following:

- educators not valuing IPs or following through with IP strategies consistently
- parents feeling forgotten between IP meetings
- a lack of collaboration by educators when problem solving about behaviour
- educators' lack of ability to model positive social interactions for children
- educators' lack of ability to cope with children with special needs
- educators not engaging with a child when their ESW was at the service, exemplified in assessment, and as shown in the quote below:

> *"The education support worker is often viewed as being attached to the child and the staff take a hands off approach when the support person is there."*

Commentary

Legislation, Ministry of Education expectations, and the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, all send clear and strong messages to early childhood services about inclusion of children with special needs. ERO's evaluation of services' inclusion of children with moderate to severe special needs indicates that many services are doing a good job, but that leaders and educators also face challenges in doing so.

New Zealand research on inclusion in early childhood services, and anecdotal evidence from the Ministry of Education Special Education and advocates from disability action groups, highlight some of these challenges. The challenges, identified in this evaluation, generally stem from a lack of knowledge and strategies about including children with special needs, rather than a lack of an inclusive philosophy.

Overall, over two-fifths of services were *very inclusive*, and just under half were *mostly inclusive*. Most services that did not currently have children with moderate to severe special needs enrolled were well placed to include these children. For the remaining seven percent of services (with special needs children enrolled) that were only *somewhat inclusive,* the main reasons for this lack of inclusion were a lack of shared understanding, knowledge of strategies, and pedagogy to adapt programmes, and limiting physical environments, rather than a lack of the right attitude. In these services, ERO found the quality of teaching for all children was often poor.

ERO's main concern, identified across all services, regardless of inclusiveness, was a lack of self review about the impact of practices and programmes on outcomes for children with special needs. Self review with an outcomes focus for children with special needs was only undertaken in a few services, and it was mostly informal.

Challenges were also identified across services, from the *very inclusive* to the *somewhat inclusive*. Service leaders and educators identified challenges in working collaboratively with parents who were either previously unaware, or did not want to acknowledge, that their child had a special need. Many other challenges centred on working with Special Education about referrals, funding, and the provision of education support workers (ESWs). Children with special needs who attended services for more than 15 hours per week, were not funded for ESW hours over and above those 15 hours, or during school holidays. These challenges were magnified in some services where adult-to-child ratios were low, or where the service had a reputation of including children with special needs and this 'magnet' attraction was overwhelming their capacity to meet each child's individual needs.

This evaluation has identified four ingredients for a *very inclusive* service:

- believing that children with special needs are confident and capable learners
- having and practising inclusive processes and practices
- accessing and providing additional support
- working collaboratively with parents and specialists.

Next steps

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education reviews:

- how it works with all services to facilitate processes for services making referrals and seeking funding
- the provision of education support workers (ESWs).

ERO recommends that managers and educators of early childhood improve their:

- shared understanding of inclusion
- knowledge of appropriate strategies for including children with special needs
- shared understanding of pedagogy so adaptations to programmes are appropriate.

ERO recommends that managers also undertake self review of outcomes of programmes for children with special needs, and in particular focus on:

- recording processes, including those for individual education or development plans
- reviewing individual education or development plan outcomes
- expanding educators' understanding of inclusion through professional development and learning.

Appendix 1: Investigative prompts

How well do <u>transitions</u> ensure the continuing <u>wellbeing, learning, and development</u> of children with moderate to severe special needs?	***Knowing the child's strengths and needs*** • What foundation information is available to parents/whānau about how the service includes children with special needs? • What does the service do to let parents/whānau know that children with special needs are welcome? • How did the service find out about the child's special needs? Eg parents/whānau; other professionals; notice, recognise, and respond • How is support sought and is it available? Knowledge, funding, Special Education, specialist help • How does the service work with parents, other agencies and educational institutions at key transition points? • In what ways are parents involved in transitions? In, within, and out. • How are whānau of Māori children involved in transitions, how are cultural protocols observed? • In what ways are key professionals involved in and consulted about transitions? • How are schools and other educational institutions involved in transitions? Who is involved? ***Relationships with the child*** • In what ways do educators, and other parents and children at the service get to know and understand the child? • What does the service know about the other agencies that are involved with the child and their whānau? ***Environment*** • Is the social environment inclusive and welcoming? In what ways? • Is the physical environment inclusive and welcoming? In what ways? ***Self review*** • Does self review of transitions investigate outcomes for the child and their whānau? Who is involved?
To what extent are children with moderate to severe special needs <u>supported as confident and competent learners</u>?	***Access to programme*** • In what ways is there equitable access to experiences and opportunities? What does the service do to ensure this? • How is attendance decided? Days, hours, support? • How does the physical environment support the child's learning? • In what ways are excursions and other events inclusive of the child? ***Individual Programme*** • In what ways are Individual Programmes developed? Collaboratively? Is the service involved? • Are Individual Programmes in place, of good quality, and include assessment and outcomes? Do they link to Te Whāriki?

	• Do ALL educators have a good understanding of the Individual Programme? • In what ways is the team implementing the Individual Programme? ***Developing the programme*** • In what ways are parent partnerships well-developed and appropriate? • How has the service accessed external support? • What support has the service received from other agencies to meet the needs of the child? • In what ways is liaison with key professionals appropriate? • How are aspirations of parents, whānau and aiga for their child supported? As Māori, Pacific etc? ***Implementing the programme*** • In what ways does the service maximise the child's access to the programme AND adapted the programme to support the child's learning and participation? • Do educators have a good understanding of teaching strategies for the child? And how are these implemented in practice? • How is assessment credit-based and focused on what the child can do? How are next steps identified? • Who is involved in assessment? In what ways are the child and their whānau involved? • How is external support used? What happens when the ESW and /or other key professionals are/aren't at the service? • In what ways are parents/whānau involved in the programme? • In what ways are interactions with other children healthy and appropriate? • In what ways is the child's successes celebrated? • How is the child's sense of cultural identify affirmed? ***Relationships with the child*** • Does the child appear to have a sense of belonging? How is this supported? • Does the child appear to have good relationships with their peers? How are these supported? • In what ways is the child's cultural background recognised and affirmed? ***Self review*** • Does self review of support investigate outcomes for the child and their whānau? Who is involved in self review?

Appendix 2: Sample

Data for this evaluation was gathered from 268 services reviewed in Terms 3 and 4 2011. Table 1 shows the types of services in the overall sample.

Table 1: Service types for overall sample

Service type	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage[37]
Education and care	159	59	62
Kindergarten	53	20	17
Playcentre	37	14	12
Home-based Network	18	7	9
Casual Education and Care	1	<1	<1
Total	268	100	100

The types of services in this sample were representative of national figures.

The data in this evaluation is analysed in two groups – services that had children with moderate to severe special needs currently enrolled, and those services that did not. Tables 2 and 3 show the types of services in these two groups.

Table 2: Service types for sample of services with children with moderate to severe special needs enrolled

Service type	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage
Education and care	57	55	62
Kindergarten	35	33	17
Playcentre	3	3	12
Home-based Network	9	9	9
Casual Education and Care	0	0	<1
Total	104	100	100

The sample of services with children with moderate to severe special needs currently enrolled is not representative of national figures.[38] Education and care services and Playcentres are under-represented, and kindergartens are over-represented.

[37] The national percentage of each service type is based on the total population of services as at July 2011. For this study, it includes education and care, kindergarten, Playcentre, home-based networks, and casual education and care.

[38] The differences between observed and expected values were tested using a Chi square test.

Table 3: Service types for sample of services without children with moderate to severe special needs enrolled

Service type	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage
Education and care	102	62	62
Kindergarten	18	11	17
Playcentre	34	21	12
Home-based Network	9	5	9
Casual Education and Care	1	1	<1
Total	164	100	100

The sample of services who do not currently have children with moderate to severe special needs enrolled is not representative of national figures. Kindergartens and home-based networks are under-represented, and Playcentres are over-represented.