

PRIMARY PRINCIPALS' SABBATICAL REPORT

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Title and focus of the sabbatical

To clarify the term Priority Learner and the ways that the needs of such learners can be identified.

To gain a clearer understanding of the range of strategies used by schools to meet the needs of these learners.

Priority Learners definition

Priority learners are groups of students who have been identified as historically not experiencing success in the New Zealand schooling system. These include many Māori and Pacific learners, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students with special education needs.

ERO (August 2012)

About the author

I started at Greytown School in 2002 following 7 years as Principal of Gladstone School. My career has focused on full primary schools in rural areas.

Greytown School is a decile 8 full primary school of 320 students situated in Greytown in the Wairarapa. Although it is a decile 8 school it is the only school in a small town and therefore it draws from families from all socio economic groups.

Greytown School has an ethnic demographic of Maori, 19% Pasifika, 5% NZEuro 75%, and Asian 1%.

Acknowledgements

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- The Greytown School Board of Trustees for supporting my application for sabbatical leave.
- Deputy Principal, Neil Preston for his willingness to take over and ably lead the learning at Greytown School providing effective stewardship in my absence.
- The rest of the Greytown School staff who may have had to complete extra duties in my absence.

I also want to acknowledge the Ministry of Education and NZEI for providing this professional learning opportunity and, just as importantly, the chance to experience a period of personal reflection and refreshment. The time has been immensely valuable.

Ministry of Education (MOE) Vision

The vision of the MOE as outlined in Ministry of Education Statement of Intent 2014 – 2018 is to see all children and students succeed personally and achieve educational success. We want every New Zealander to:

- be strong in their national and cultural identity
- aspire for themselves and their children to achieve more
- have the choice and opportunity to be the best they can be
- be an active participant and citizen in creating a strong civil society
- be productive, valued and competitive in the world.

Our purpose is to lift aspiration and raise educational achievement for every New Zealander. Our work and investment priorities are focused on activities that will help the education system flourish and make it possible for everyone to succeed.

To achieve this the MOE provides funding through the operations grant and various support agencies.

The funding in the operations grant is provided as a Special Education Grant (SEG). This grant is on a per capita basis determined by the decile rating of the school.

The MOE Handbook for Schools defines students with special learning needs as students with special education needs who will require extra assistance, adapted programmes or learning environments, and specialised equipment or materials to support them in special or regular education settings.

Special education needs can however be difficult to determine because they can vary from one setting to another. A student may appear to have special education needs in one class but not in another simply because of specific learning or behaviour requirements.

The MOE also provides Targeted Funding For Educational Achievement (TFEA). This fund assists schools to overcome the barriers to educational achievement that are associated with low socio-economic status. This is a priority learner category. This fund is also decile rated on a per capita basis.

Pre-Amble

Although there appears to be an abundant supply of resources there are a large number of children who are performing at a level that is only just above the priority level for funding. The On Going Resourcing scheme is good example of this. Out of the 14 schools visited 8 had ORS applications declined and another 3 had not applied. Once the application for ORS has been deemed unsuccessful by the verifiers the school is left with the problem of how to provide for the learning needs of the child concerned. For those children who do receive ORS funding at the high level this will generally be insufficient to meet the learning needs of the child. For most schools this funding comes from the SEG and TFEA. The main focus of this research is to investigate how schools are using SEG and TFEA to support the learning of priority learners.

The Research

To gain a range of data 14 schools were visited. These schools provided a range of full primary, contributing, intermediate level. They also provided a range of decile level and geographic position. Although 14 is a small sample it quickly became obvious that all schools regardless of decile, level or geographic position were facing very similar issues in providing for priority learners. In fact as the research developed the focus narrowed to looking closely at how the needs of students with special learning needs were being catered for.

The schools

School	Type	Decile	Size	Position
A	Contributing	8	370	Taranaki
B	Full primary	5	340	Taranaki
C	Contributing	2	200	Taranaki
D	Full Primary	10	380	Taranaki
E	Contributing	10	180	Lower Hutt
F	Contributing	6	350	Upper Hutt
G	Full Primary	8	330	Wairarapa
H	Intermediate	3	210	Lower Hutt
I	Contributing	1	160	Manawatu
J	Full Primary	9	600	Manawatu
K	Contributing	4	340	Manawatu
L	Contributing	5	450	Manawatu
M	Contributing	3	270	Wairarapa
N	Full Primary	2	450	Wairarapa

Principals from these schools readily made themselves available to discuss the issues that exist around providing effective learning programmes for students with special learning needs. I would like to acknowledge this and thank these Principals for their time. A consistent factor was the passion they hold for student learning, their desire to provide the best possible learning for all students, and their ability to overcome the frustrations and barriers that develop.

Schools are identifying the students with special learning needs by using a range of standard assessment tools. These include School Entry, 6-Year-old diagnostic, ASSTLe, PAT, Gloss, etc. Generally the schools review the special needs register on an annual basis but are inclined to review the programmes being delivered on a much more regular basis. One school reviews progress weekly. Another common factor was that if the student was not showing achievement progress then the programme being delivered was reassessed and modified. This is generally done on an individual basis even if the student concerned is involved in group activities within the classroom.

All schools have a Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO). Generally the SENCO holds the responsibility of reviewing the programmes being offered, collecting the data and tracking progress.

The interventions being used are wide and varied. It is not possible in this brief investigation to make any comment on the effectiveness of the interventions but schools generally find something that works for them and then commit to it. Resourcing interventions is a major issue for all of the schools concerned. There are four forms of resourcing that needs to be investigated. These are financial, personnel, interventions and time.

Finance

This is provided in part by the operations grant. Included in the operations grant made to schools are the Special Education Grant (SEG) and the Targeted Fund for Educational Achievement (TFEA). All schools are using these funds to provide the special education needs programmes operating in the schools. However what was consistent across all schools, regardless of decile, was that these two funding streams

do not allow the schools to provide the needed programmes. All schools were using further money from the operations grant or locally raised funds to enable the special needs programmes to operate. On average this was somewhere around the \$50,000 mark. This makes special education by far the largest budget item for all of the schools. For low decile schools the SEG and TFEA grants are far greater but then so are the issues. One school has 75% of the children on special education programmes. For high decile schools where SEG and TFEA are almost nonexistent there is still a need to provide special needs programmes. This must be funded some other way.

Schools also receive funding from student sources such as the On Going Resourcing Scheme (ORS). A full list is included later but what became very obvious was that these funds are inadequate to meet the needs of the children concerned. Children with a High ORS classification are a prime example of this. The ORS fund provides some funding to support these children. All schools used this funding to employ teacher aides to either directly support the child or to support the classroom teacher in providing programmes for the child. However all schools were topping up the funding received from the ORS grant to ensure the needs of these children were being met. Meeting the needs of High ORS children was having a serious impact on the ability of the school to provide for the needs of the other children in the school with special education needs. Schools are being very innovative in trying to solve this issue. Such innovations include ensuring more than one ORS child is in a class enabling the resource to be spread, innovative use of the specialist teacher component, use of volunteers and in some cases limiting the hours the child is at school (an agreement between the home and school).

Personnel

There are some key people involved in providing successful special needs programmes. Firstly the Principal must be committed to providing the programme. It is the Principal who manages the finances, employs the staff, approves funding for interventions, organises the physical spaces and provides a school organisation that will cater for the needs of children with special learning needs.

All schools have a SENCO. The SENCO responsibilities can include coordination of the programmes, monitoring progress, managing Teacher Aides, liaison with classroom teachers, reporting to the Board of Trustees, and hosting Individual Education Plan (IEP) Meetings.

Classroom Teachers are becoming a more important component of the provision of special needs programmes. Schools are recognizing that the best person to work with these children is the adult in the room who is best trained to do this. This is the teacher. Teacher aides are being deployed in a number of ways to allow this to happen.

Teacher aides (TAs) are however the key to a successful special education programme. All schools employ TAs to support the teachers and the children involved in the programme. The use of TAs is evolving and gone is the model of using a teacher aide for a 1:1 intervention where often the child was removed from the room for repetitive work often happening without direct supervision from a teacher. The data is showing that this is a very ineffective model.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) of England has conducted some detailed research into this issue. The EEF is an independent grant-making charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement, ensuring that children from all backgrounds can fulfil their potential and make the most of their talents.

The EEF has identified 4 levels of use of teacher aides to support learning in schools. The study is called "Making the Best Use of Teaching Assistants".

At Level one TAs are used as an informal teaching resource for low attaining pupils. The evidence on TA deployment suggests schools have drifted into a situation in which TAs are often used as an informal instructional resource for pupils in most need. Although this has happened with the best of intentions, this evidence suggests that the status quo is no longer an option. School leaders should systematically review the roles of both teachers and TAs and take a wider view of how TAs can support learning and improve attainment throughout the school.

At Level 2 schools use TAs to add value to what teachers do, not replace them. If TAs have a direct instructional role it is important they supplement, rather than replace, the teacher – the expectation should be that the needs of all pupils are addressed, first and foremost, through high quality classroom teaching. Schools should try and organise staff so that the pupils who struggle most have as much time with the teacher as others. Breaking away from a model of deployment where TAs are assigned to specific pupils for long periods requires more strategic approaches to classroom organisation. Where TAs are working individually with low attaining pupils the focus should be on retaining access to high-quality teaching, for example by delivering brief, but intensive, structured interventions.

At Level 3 schools use TAs to help pupils develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning. New research has shown that improving the nature and quality of TAs' talk to pupils can support the development of independent learning skills, which are associated with improved learning outcomes. TAs should, for example, be trained to avoid prioritising task completion and instead concentrate on helping pupils develop ownership of tasks.

At Level 4 TAs are fully prepared for their role in the classroom. Schools need to provide sufficient time for TA training and for teachers and TAs to meet out of class to enable the necessary lesson preparation and feedback. Creative ways of ensuring teachers and TAs have time to meet include adjusting TAs' working hours (start early, finish early), using assembly time and having TAs join teachers for (part of) Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time. During lesson preparation time teachers need to ensure TAs have the essential 'need to knows':

- Concepts, facts, information being taught
- Skills to be learned, applied, practised or extended
- Intended learning outcomes
- Expected/required feedback.

While there was very little evidence of the Level 1 method being used in the schools there was a range of other levels evident. Principals were universal however in wishing to move to use TAs in a way similar to that outlined by the EEF as level 4. Barriers to this have been identified as a lack of opportunity for professional development for TAs, getting time for TA PD, funding, physical space and the need to change the thinking of some long term TAs.

What was very clear was the fact that the delivery of effective programme for students with special needs is highly dependent on well trained and committed TAs.

Interventions

During the visits to schools Principals referred to a number of interventions that were assisting with providing for the needs to students with special learning needs. These are listed below. No attempt has been made to assess the effectiveness of these interventions. Where possible Web Site links have been included.

Walker Learning

Walker Learning uses evidence from how children develop neurologically, developmentally, and through the influences of culture and family, to set up the learning environment to reflect indoor and outdoor learning and places and spaces that reflect calm but stimulating range of investigations with places to explore, experiment and learn.

<http://earlylife.com.au/info/section/walker-learning>

The Learning Stair Case (Steps)

Steps is an effective, easy-to-use, computer-based literacy development program suitable for all levels, from early readers to adults – as well as English language learners. While Steps looks like fun (it is!), it is a serious learning tool which develops all aspects of literacy, including vocabulary, comprehension and verbal

<http://learningstaircase.co.nz/why-steps/>

Nessy

Nessy is an on line programme that specifically focusses on children with dyslexia. However it can be used more widely to assist children with special learning needs.

<https://www.nessy.com/uk/>

Numicom Maths

Numicon provides all you need to create confident mathematicians throughout the whole school, with research-based resources and rigorous teaching support from early childhood to Year 8, including students who struggle with maths.

<http://www.numicon.co.nz/>

Reading Together

Reading Together[®] is a research-based workshop programme which helps parents/whānau to provide effective support for their children's reading (and thereby also supports teachers in their classroom programmes).

<http://www.readingtogether.net.nz/ReadingTogether.aspx>

Little Star Writing

A UK based programme that provides creative writing workshops that nurture aspiring authors and reluctant writers, support individual ideas and expressions, and promote the inspiring and rewarding nature of writing.

<http://littlestarwriting.com/>

Rainbow Reading

The Rainbow Reading Programme is designed to present students with a variety of topics, authors, styles and illustrations to make reading interesting while skills are improved. Each story or article has been carefully selected because of its educational value and attraction to a wide range of students with varying needs and interests.

<http://rainbowreading.co.nz/>

Talk to Learn

'Talk to Learn' is a practical oral language programme for use in junior classes. It was developed to provide teachers with an innovative tool to meet the needs of students beginning school with delayed oral language skills.

'Talk to Learn' is closely linked with the New Zealand Primary Curriculum and teachers can expect to continue to meet teaching goals. It was designed to be used with 5-8 year old students with identified language delays. The activities can be used in a small group situation of approximately five students with one teacher or support person. Specific language skills are consistently practised in each session. The variety of short, fun tasks are central to the success of the programme. The theme for the language group is ideally related to the topic study in the classroom. This ensures that students receive continuous exposure to the same information.

<http://www.papakuraeducation.co.nz/english-literacy-resources/talk-to-learn-book-and-cd-by-jeanette-van-der-wal-ros-de-candole-eleanor-de-vries-emma-cameron.html>

Train the Brain

Train the Brain aims to empower students with complex learning disabilities to recognize and optimize their potential and to overcome the combined effects of learning disabilities and the social and psychological implications of not being successful in an academic environment.

<http://www.trainthebrain.co.nz/>

Seasons for Growth

Seasons for Growth is a program for children, young people or adults who have experienced significant loss or change. Seasons for Growth is based on the belief that change, loss and grief are a normal and valuable part of life. It examines the impact of changes such as death, separation, divorce, and natural disaster upon our lives, and explores how we can learn to live with and grow from these experiences.

The core intentions of this program are the development of resilience and emotional literacy to promote social and emotional wellbeing. The program is educational in nature and does not provide therapy.

<https://www.goodgrief.org.au/seasons-for-growth>

Reading Recovery

This programme is still operating in 12 of the 13 primary schools visited. One school discontinued reading recovery at the end of last year and is putting the saved resource into other reading assistance programmes. Reading Recovery is one of the interventions that is partly supported by Ministry of Education funding.

Reading Recovery is an effective early literacy intervention designed to significantly reduce the number of children with literacy difficulties in schools.

Reading Recovery provides daily one to one teaching with a specially trained teacher for children making the slowest progress in literacy learning after a year at school. It is supplementary to classroom instruction.

<https://www.readingrecovery.ac.nz/>

Explode the Code

Individualized instruction and reinforcement based on continuous assessment. It is supported by auditory and visual cues to promote independent learning. The programme has robust reporting features that provide ongoing progress monitoring. It engages students and provides online delivery available across school and home. It is based on a phonics curriculum in one comprehensive program, effective for year level and intervention instruction.

<https://www.explodethecode.com/>

SPRING into Maths

SPRING is a maths intervention programme which endeavours to accelerate the learning of number concepts for students who need extra support. The components are levelled at whatever level students are currently at, and covers these aspects:

S Start counting – counting forwards and backwards

P Patterns – looking for patterns

R Reinforcing strategy - Counting all objects to solve +/- equations

I Identifying numbers – ordering, identifying bigger and smaller numbers etc.

N Number facts – basic facts

G Game

<http://www.topmarks.co.uk/Flash.aspx?f=SpringNumber>

Accelerating Learning in Literacy

Accelerating Learning in Literacy is a 15-week intervention for year 1-8 students who have had at least 40 weeks of schooling and are below or well below National Standards in reading or writing.

This intervention is a supplementary support to lift student achievement. It is in addition to, and connected to, students' classroom programmes.

Accelerating Learning in Literacy (ALL) uses the expertise within the school to undertake a short-term intervention to accelerate the progress of students below and well below National Standards in reading and/or writing. The intervention is in addition to effective classroom teaching. Teachers are supported to inquire into their practice and share their learning.

Accelerated Learning in Mathematics

Accelerating Learning in Mathematics is a 15-week intervention for year 1-8 students who have had at least 40 weeks of schooling and are below (and sometimes well below) National Standards in mathematics.

This intervention is a supplementary support to lift student achievement. It is in addition to, and connected to, students' classroom programmes.

Accelerating Learning in Mathematics (ALiM) uses the expertise within the school to undertake a short-term intervention to accelerate the progress of students below the National Standards in mathematics. The intervention is in addition to effective classroom teaching. Teachers are supported to inquire into their practice and share their learning.

Mathematics Support Teacher

Mathematics Support Teacher (MST) is a supplementary support that targets students who are well below the National Standard in mathematics. It runs for two years. The MST will initially work with small groups of students to accelerate their progress, before integrating successful interventions into classrooms in partnership with teachers.

The MST teacher is supported to develop expertise in accelerating this cohort of students, and to transfer that learning across the school. The MST is required to undertake a post-graduate paper each year.

<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD/School-initiated-supports/Programme-for-Students-PfS>

North East Pathways

This is an example of a project that is being developed between schools and the local council to engage students in learning using sport.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jm0hol8PdHI>

Reading Mileage

Most schools visited had some system of supervised reading that increased the amount of reading some children are doing. These ranged from service clubs such as Lions and Rotary, homework clubs, whanau support groups, grandparent readers, library readers etc.

Prime Maths

PR1ME mathematics is a composite of the approaches used by the three top-performing nations in primary mathematics education according to TIMSS: Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong.

<http://nz.scholastic.com/en/scholastic-prime-mathematics>

See Saw

Not an intervention as such but a way of recording and sharing learning achievement. It empowers students to independently document what they are learning at school. Students can “show what they know” using photos, videos, drawings, text, PDFs, and links. You can also import directly from most popular apps.

<http://web.seesaw.me/>

Reading Eggs

Reading Eggs is an online programme that offers individual one on one lessons that allows students to progress at their own pace. The programme focus is on phonics and sight words.

<http://readingeggs.co.nz/>

Mathletics

Mathletics is the next generation in online Math learning platform, helping students enjoy maths and improve their results.

www.mathletics.co.nz

Time

The resource of time was added during this study. It quickly became obvious as the visits to schools progressed that the one thing that was difficult to qualify or quantify was the use of time by all of the people involved. Time has a cost whether that be financial or just something that impacts on the lives of the people involved. Communication amongst professionals involved in a special needs intervention is crucial to the success of that intervention. Such communication takes time and this time has to come from somewhere. It is one of the things that can impact upon general classroom programmes as teachers with a high number of children with special learning needs spend a disproportionate percentage of the work time available on these children. It then becomes difficult for the teacher to adequately prepare for the rest of the class. The professional teacher will manage this but often at some personal cost as this time affects time that should be spent with family on recreational activities etc. It is very clear that catering for children with special learning needs seriously adds to the workload of all of those involved. Schools are struggling to manage and recognise this.

Summary

There are some very effective programmes operating. All schools report considerable shifts in achievement for most children with special learning needs.

All schools have to top up special needs funding to provide the minimum programmes required.

High ORS students create a considerable extra demand on special needs funding.

The use of teacher aides in classrooms to release the teacher to work with children with special learning needs is becoming far more common.

There is a need for more in-depth and relevant professional development for TAs.

Programmes being offered are becoming more effectively reviewed and generally of shorter duration.

A wide variety of interventions are being used.

Ministry of Education funding streams are varied but generally inadequate to meet the needs of the school and the students.

Principals, and their staff, are professionally committed to improving achievement outcomes for children with special learning needs.

References

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Learning Media 2003.

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Education July 2006.

Research and Evaluation of Narrative Assessment and Curriculum Exemplars for Students with Special
Education Needs. Rosanne Bourke and Mandia Mentas. Ministry of Education March 2010

Appendix

Funding Sources available to support children with special learning needs.

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology is the specialised equipment and technology that students with special education needs, use in class to participate and learn.

Learning and Behaviour (RTLb)

The Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) service works with kura and kaiako or schools and teachers to find solutions for student learning and behaviour needs.

School High Health Needs Fund

The School High Health Needs Fund supports students at school and kura who have significant health conditions. The fund pays for a teacher's aide when the student has a high health need and care is needed for more than 6 weeks.

Outreach Service

Teachers from the Specialist Teacher Outreach Service (Outreach Service) can travel to schools in their local areas to support students on the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS). To get support, the students must be enrolled in their local school and in the Outreach Service. The specialist teacher works as part of the student's support team, which includes their class teachers, Special Education staff, support staff and family or whānau.

The Physical Disability Service

If a student at school has a physical disability, the Physical Disability Service can help to support them to learn at school. The service works with teachers and schools to help them adapt the environment around the student to meet students' needs.

Day special schools for students with high needs

Special schools give support to students who have high needs. There are 2 kinds of special schools: day schools and residential schools.

Day special schools are part of the schooling network in New Zealand and offer specialist teaching to students who have a high level of need. They teach students from years 1 to 13.

Residential special schools

Residential special schools – for students with vision, hearing, behavioural and learning needs

Residential schools are for students who have:

- low vision or hearing
- severe behavioural needs
- high educational, social and emotional needs.

Residential schools can be used when a student's education at their local school is not working for them.

Support for children who are blind or have low vision

Children or students who are blind or have low vision can get support from the Blind and Low Vision Education Network of New Zealand (BLENNZ).

BLENNZ employs specialist teachers to support children and students at their local early childhood education centres or schools.

Supporting children who are deaf and hard of hearing

Children who are deaf and hard of hearing can get support from the Ministry's Advisers on Deaf Children (AoDCs) and Resource Teachers of the Deaf (RTDs).

Behaviour Services and Support

Behaviour Services and Support has a team of specialists who will assist if a student is experiencing extreme behaviour difficulties. A specialist will work with the student, teachers, family and whānau.

Regional Health Schools

Regional health schools for children who can't attend school because they are unwell

If a child is unwell and can't go to school, then teachers from regional health schools can teach them.

Who regional health schools are for

The schools are for children who are:

- unwell and can't go to their usual school for a long period (they may have a physical or mental illness)
- in a health-funded mental health programme
- returning to their usual school after being away for a long time and need support.

Communication Service

The Communication Service employs speech-language therapists who support children with high communication needs in schools.

Intensive Wraparound Service (IWS)

The Intensive Wraparound Service (IWS) is for the small number of students with highly complex, challenging behaviour across several settings – at school, with their family and whānau, and in the community. The challenging behaviour could be social, emotional, and educational, and its cause may involve an intellectual learning difficulty.

The service is for students in Years 3 to 10. It's run from Special Education regional offices.

High and Complex Needs

HCN funding is available for short-term, intensive interventions aimed at addressing the severe and current needs of the most challenging children or young people. For every child or young person supported by HCN funding, there will be an interagency team of professionals, family and whanau working together on one plan to improve their wellbeing. The funding and support is provided by the Child, Youth and Family service.