

Principal Sabbatical Research Report

Term 2 2009

Topic

The impact that the increasing number of children with special needs is having on our schools.

By: Tony Horsfall
Hutt Central School
6 Railway Avenue
Lower Hutt

Time Period : Term 2 (March, June) 2009

Acknowledgements

- The Ministry of Education for awarding me this opportunity to travel, research, visit schools and engage in professional discussion across a broad range of people – at the same time being able to take time to reflect, relax, and refresh.
- My Board of Trustees for the support of my application, and my colleagues for their willingness to take over my duties at school.
- Special thanks to Judy Pemberton (My Deputy Principal) for her willingness to take on the role of Principal in my absence – and doing an excellent job!
- To Barbara Hay Secretary of WRPPA?? Wellington Regional Primary Principals Association for circulating my questionnaires.
- To all the Principals and Teachers for taking the time to fill out the questionnaires - with so much honesty and passion for the subject.
- A big thank you to the schools that have hosted me and shared so much of the great things that they are doing on behalf of our children.

Executive Summary

The primary issues that are supported by the findings of my questionnaires, interviews and visits to classrooms and schools have been around the areas of Teacher Frustration, Teacher Support and Funding levels.

I observed many excellent examples of quality teaching, quality programmes (especially for those with moderate to severe special needs) in most of the schools and classrooms I visited – but at the same time saw the frustration and stress that teachers and schools are experiencing due to the lack of funding and access to professional support. This is occurring to such a degree that other children must be missing out, and their learning needs being compromised with access to programmes and opportunities being limited due to money being channelled from other areas to make up the shortfall of funding for moderate to severe special needs programmes.

Schools and Communities are year by year having to increasingly fund and resource the support and programmes made available to children with moderate to severe special needs.

- Schools funding money over and above SEG ranged in totals annually \$10,000 to \$ 80,000, with 8 out of the 20 contributing \$20,000 or more, 3 schools contributing \$50,000 or more.
- Total spent on Supporting Special Needs over the allocated SEG in the last 5 years ranged from \$50,000 to \$500,000. Averaging out at approx \$100,000 per school.
- 92% of special needs children in classes were supported by the school budget and programmes

At the same time the MoE are announcing they have increased the funding levels to the education sector to help support special needs – on the other hand children who have previously received support via GSE and MoE Initiatives are having funding levels cut because of budget constraints and increased numbers requesting assistance.

This either means the extra money injected is not actually getting to the children and the schools, or there is a major increase in the number of Special Needs Children requiring support, and the money/budget available does not cover the demand.

This could also be as a result of the Reviewable Resourcing Schemes and Ongoing Reviewable Resourcing application and acceptance process being too tough, and being such a lengthy ordeal for schools and parents to endure. Schools can be discouraged from applying for this support due to the very tight criteria to be met (i.e. any sign of an ability to learn at the slightest, will work against a successful application) .

Schools are either not applying or have had applications turned down once or twice (further applications cannot be made after 3 attempts – ‘3 strikes and you are out’).

Increasing numbers of children not gaining support through ORRS are still in our classrooms relying on the school and SEG grant for support, as well as the goodwill and passion of Teachers.

Only 10 schools have made ORRS applications in the last 5 years with 8 applications successful.

- *“Have not had children that would fit the criteria”*
- *“There is little point if the child has any ability to learn”*
- *“We know the criteria is very tough, past failures have taught us not to waste our time”*
- *“Time and effort needed to play the game not worth it – even when you get funding the hours do not match the need”*
- Schools funding money over and above SEG ranged in totals annually \$10,000 to \$ 80,000, with 8 out of the 20 contributing \$20,000 or more, 3 schools contributing \$50,000 or more.

- Total spent on Supporting Special Needs over the allocated SEG in the last 5 years ranged from \$50,000 to \$500,000. Averaging out at approx \$100,000 per school.

During my travels and visits to various schools I have collected some amazing resources and ideas that could be adapted for use in my own school – it really confirmed for me what amazing, creative, and dedicated teachers and Principals we have in our schools – who do an amazing job at times under extreme conditions and pressure – we make things work and ‘get on with it!’ My thanks and admiration goes out to all those contending with some if not all the issues in my findings on a day to day basis.

- Only 50% of schools thought they had access to expert assistance and advice.
- 70% said they do not have adequate support.
- 80% recorded that staff are reluctant to take on Special Needs children with only 20% happy to accept these children.
- 80% recorded that Special Needs children effect the Teachers ability to do their job.
- 86% said that Special Needs children distract and affect the learning of other children – 14% said they did not.

My questionnaires and interviews as well as informal discussion looked at my main focus area, but also incorporated a lot of the other impacts, issues, and tensions surrounding Special Needs and Inclusion in New Zealand Mainstream Education.

My research has raised many more questions and issues than I have possibly answered – a good example of this is:-

The developmental level of gross and fine motor skills of five year olds entering school and the subsequent flow on effect to their Literacy and Numeracy development is one huge concern that schools are identifying – an area that needs further research.

Get the programmes right at the earliest level and we could see some of the ‘moderate special needs’ we currently experience in schools greatly reduced – adequate funding and support at early childhood could save schools and the government lots of money in the area of moderate special needs in the long term.

School Communities continue to support the MoE policy of inclusion in mainstream education, only to feel let down and not adequately supported by the system that insists through policy that we must enrol these children and give them an equal right to an education.

- 50% of schools who replied have at some stage not accepted an enrolment of a Special Needs child – due to lack of funding and support.
- 60% would not accept enrolment of special needs children if given the choice.

Most schools have very limited Special Education Grants (SEG), and do not adequately cover one term let alone one year. With numbers increasing throughout the year due to increased enrolments, and children coming off previously MOE/government assisted programmes and support.

My research and discussions with Teachers and schools really has highlighted the frustration and stress levels that we all know are out in the sector.

- some of the teachers I spoke to as part of interviews were at breaking point regarding their stress and frustration levels around support and assistance with these children
- 70% said they do not have adequate support.
- 80% recorded that staff are reluctant to take on Special Needs children with only 20% happy to accept these children.
- 80% recorded that Special Needs children effect the Teachers ability to do their job.

On the whole teachers are very committed to the ideals and beliefs behind inclusive education, but are feeling 'put upon' and frustrated by the lack of adequate professional and financial support – Teachers ,Parents and Schools are being left to cope as best they can with what they have.

Purpose

To investigate the impact that the increasing number of children with special needs is having on our schools?

I intend to research the area of special needs education, and how different schools cater for the ever increasing levels of children with special needs within the school environment.

Aspects to be investigated:-

- Impact of special needs children on :
 - pupils
 - classroom teachers
 - teacher aides
 - on schools budget, staffing, resourcing – including need for specialised equipment, and demands on physical spaces.
- What levels of funding and specialist programmes are available in schools, who funds these, and to what level?
- What is 'Moderate Special Needs'? What are the selected schools definitions and criteria? How are these developed and measured? What are the commonalities? Could they be used to develop a standardised definition and criteria?

- Examine funding levels across a variety of schools decile 1 - 10. Compare this level of funding to the actual levels of need.
- Investigate current programmes operating in schools catering for special needs children.
- What schools believe they could offer with sufficient funding? Link this to - comparing levels of funding to the actual levels of need.

Rationale and background Information

Special Education Policy 2000 aims “ to achieve over the next decade, a world class inclusive education system that provides learning opportunities of equal quality to all students” (MoE 1996 Page 5)

New Zealand Curriculum 2007

Activities Undertaken (Methodology)

- Questionnaires sent to schools and teachers.
- School Visits – around Wellington District, Waikato District, and Bay of Plenty District.
- Interviews with teachers of classes that have moderate special needs children.
- Interviews with Special Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) or Teachers with Responsibilities for Special Needs in a school.
- Interviews with school Principals
- Interviews and informal discussions with school community members.

Summary of Findings from Questionnaires and Interviews

Questionnaire 1 (Principals) 20 received

- Number of Pupils 300 – 500+
- Deciles ranged Decile 4 -10
- Approx 50% of schools do not operate a Special Needs Committee.
- Approx 80% have a person designated as SENCO – in 50% of those the fully released Deputy Principal covers this role.
- Of those questioned most had 20+ learning and Behaviour with 6 Of the 20 with 40+
- Across all schools a total of 15 ORRS children enrolled
- Only 10 schools have made ORRS applications in the last 5 years with 8 applications successful.
 - *“Have not had children that would fit the criteria”*
 - *“There is little point if the child has any ability to learn”*
 - *“We know the criteria is very tough, past failures have taught us not to waste our time”*
 - *“Time and effort needed to play the game not worth it – even when you get funding the hours do not match the need”*

- Schools funding money over and above SEG ranged in totals annually \$10,000 to \$ 80,000, with 8 out of the 20 contributing \$20,000 or more, 3 schools contributing \$50,000 or more.
- Total spent on Supporting Special Needs over the allocated SEG in the last 5 years ranged from \$50,000 to \$500,000. Averaging out at approx \$100,000 per school.
- 50% of schools thought they had access to expert assistance and advice.
- 70% said they do not have adequate support with needs.
 - o *“Situation seems to be getting worse year by year”*
 - o *“Lots of advice no help”*
- 100% recorded spending 3-5 hours per week on dealing with issues surrounding Special Needs, of these 50% recorded spending 5+ hours per week.
- 80% recorded that staff are reluctant to take on Special Needs children with only 20% happy to accept these children.
 - o *“Teacher accepting, they see the need and feel the need to step up”*
 - o *“Most Teachers have empathy”*
 - o *“ Teachers feel sense of ‘professional responsibility and step up so that children do not suffer”*
- 80% recorded that Special Needs children effect the Teachers ability to do their job.
 - o *“Extra has to be put in to the job justice”*
 - o *“Support not adequate, so responsibility falls to teachers and school to cope”*
 - o *Huge pressure on Teachers to adapt their entire programme and class environment for one or two children”*
 - o *“pressure on teachers to prepare programmes resulting in extra stress and less energy and time for the rest of the children”*
- 80% agreed that Special Needs Children do distract other children from their learning.
 - o *“Some do not want to learn – time consuming and distracting for others”*
 - o *“Some children are intimidated and scared”*
 - o *“Parents of other children often express issues around management of these children in relation to their child getting an fair deal”*
- 70% agreed that National Standards may have a negative effect on the already reluctant Teachers to take on children with special needs.
 - o *“If there is going to be ‘League Tables’ who will want Special Needs children in their class/school”*
 - o *“Special Needs children maybe exempt from testing, but who is going to determine levels?”*
 - o *“If tested results will be skewed”*
- 50% of schools who replied have at some stage not accepted an enrolment of a Special Needs child – due to lack of funding and support.
- 60% would not accept enrolment of special needs children if given the choice.

- *“Case dependent”*
- *“Would depend on level of support and funding”*

Other Comments:-

- *“Current support levels insufficient to cover the needs”*
- *“ORRS funding and hours not enough, and therefore falls to the school, or causes problems elsewhere in the classroom”*
- *“Teachers concentrating less on their core business of teaching, because of distractions and interruptions”*
- *“We are failing children and parents due to the lack of support and money on the ground to support teachers and children”*
- *“Some ‘experts’ believe that teachers have to change their entire programme and classroom for 1 child”*
- *“We are committed to mainstreaming in principle, but it is not happening in reality due to the lack of funding and support”*
- *“Special Needs Units were closed – the funding was then spread too thin – this was a money saving scheme for the MoE”*
- *“GSE under staffed, underpaid, and under resourced – this then filters down to the classroom as lack of support and advice”*
- *“SENCO role important, but little training, no recognition through staffing for the role”*

Questionnaire 2 Teachers

30 completed questionnaires were submitted.

- There was an even mix of experience across those in the survey i.e. from 1 year to 20 years +.
- 80% of teacher had no special qualifications or training in special needs as opposed to 20% who did.
- Again there was an even spread of year levels taught with highest being Years 1- 4.
- 56% had 25 – 30 children in the class remaining 20 – 25 = 27% and 15 – 20 16%
- 60% had 5 or more special needs children in their room, with the rest evenly spread among the range 1-5.
- 92% of special needs children in classes were supported by the school budget and programmes
- 18% of Special Needs children were supported by other agencies.
- There were a total of 80 programmes across the 30 schools running to assist Special Needs Children.
- 32 instances where other agencies were involved in school for specific children.
- 57% of teachers did not feel supported – with 43% feeling they had support – though of these there were reservations ...
 - *“It took 7 weeks to get organised and operating in the classroom”*
 - *“Support from school excellent. Support from MoE very poor- 4 had this comment.*
 - *“Funding levels too low – school tries but limited funds”*
 - *“GSE not there to help – don’t show up for meetings”*

- If support was made available what would you opt for – 83% opted for Teacher Aide Time, 63% more time, 43% Teacher Support
- Special Needs Children affect Teacher performance? 86% of Teachers said that special needs do affect teacher performance and ability to do their job. 14% said no.
 - *“Not enough time for other children”*
 - *“Special Needs Children exhausting physically and mentally”*
 - *“Salary Units should be available for taking on Special Needs children”*
 - *“Lunchtimes and other down time for teachers , are not down times for teachers with Special Needs children in their class”*
 - *“Yeah! Being spat at, hit and sworn at on a daily basis does effect your performance”*
- 86% said that Special Needs children distract and affect the learning of other children – 14% said they did not.
 - *“Yeah! Being spat at, hit and sworn at on a daily basis does distract and affect the learning of other children”*
 - *“For some children it is an opportunity to be distracted”*
 - *Some lessons and discussions above their understanding, with no Teacher Aide it is hard to cater for them”*
- Teacher time spent on dealing special needs children and issues related Hours per week 0-1 = 3%, 1-2 = 20%, 2-3 = 37%, 3-4 = 27%, 4+ = 13%
- Access to assistive equipment 60% no or very limited access, 40% had good access.
 - *“Time consuming locating and adapting (for one or two children)”*
 - *Space an issue especially for special needs children with extra equipment i.e. computer special tables, chairs etc.*
- 87% felt supported by Senior Management of the school, 57% felt supported by a SENCO (27% did not have one), 40% felt supported by their BoT 26% not with 34% not answered.
 - *“Management and School BoT do what they can”*
- 54% said that their class size did not reflect the number of Special Needs Children, 36% class size did reflect this.
- 70% said that their Teacher Aide had no expertise or training, 30% Yes but lots of buts ...
 - *“School doing this – though what money”*
 - *“Would rather 1 Teacher Aide per class, than having various teachers aides at different times of the day for different children”*
 - *“What is available for TA’s?” “ Would like to know more about what is available for them (TA’s)”*
- 96% said there were ongoing issues that the teacher has to deal with in relation to Special Needs children in their class – Parent meetings, GSE, other parents, problems with children , IEP attendance etc etc etc etc

Other Comments...

- *“Year 7/8 time table difficult to cater for needy children - with routine and programme change”*

- *“Not enough hours in the day to meet with all the agencies involved with a child – they want the teacher when it suits them”*
- *“It would be great if these children were with a trained specialist teacher for the morning and assimilated into the classrooms for topic”*
- *“Funding system seems to be seriously flawed! 12 ½ year old operating at a 7 Year old level gets no funding or extra assistance – he is off to college next year”*
- *“More recognition needs to be given to teachers of these children – often it is the needs of the child that gets all attention and focus”*
- *“I don’t like being spat at, hit, having to wipe bottoms and at the same time being concerned and responsible for the safety of all other children” “I JUST WANT TO TEACH!!!!”*

Conclusion

Increasing numbers of Special Needs are having quite far reaching affects on our schools in the following areas/ways

- Teacher Stress – at very high levels having special needs children in their class – this is on top of all the other pressures that teachers must endure – assessment , National Standards, New Curriculum, Literacy PD, Numeracy PD etc. There must be adequate support for teachers and schools.
- Negative effects on the learning of other children.
- Financial support insufficient in relation to needs of children
- Support agencies under funded and under staffed to be as effective as they should be.
- Teachers are committed to the ideals of Inclusion and mainstreaming, but feel that this is not supported at the Ministry level.
- We are set up to implement the philosophy and principles of inclusion in mainstream school system, but we do not support this belief with the financial and physical commitment to make this a reality.
- Schools and Principals are frustrated by the difficulties in providing sustained skilled and funded support for teachers and children.
- Schools and Teachers are catering for moderate to severe special needs with excellent programmes and commitment – but is this occurring at the expense of our ability to support other children, is it affecting the learning enhancement of other children?
- Get the programmes right at the earliest level and we could see some of the ‘moderate special needs’ we currently experience in schools greatly reduced – adequate funding and support at early childhood could save schools and the government a lot of money in the area of moderate special needs in the long term.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire 1

Sabbatical Research Questionnaire

Principal or School Questionnaire

Term 2 2009

By - Tony Horsfall, Principal Hutt Central School, Lower Hutt, Wellington.

Contact details:

antonyh@paradise.net.nz or

principal@huttcentral.school.nz

Phone contact if you need things clarified or have questions

= (04) 9058150 or 027 628187

Research Topic: - Special Needs

Investigate the impact that the increasing number of special needs children having on our schools?

For the purposes of this survey I have defined Moderate Special Needs as:-

Learning

“Children who show through assessed levels - 2 or more years below their chronological age - in all or any one area – Written, Oral, Reading, Mathematics, Physical movement/coordination”.

Behaviour

“Children who consistently and intentionally cause problems for teachers and other children – resulting in the need for intervention by the teacher and/or school to implement special programmes etc to deal with ongoing behaviours”

NOTE: All information gathered will be treated in the strictest of confidence. Names, school details etc will not be published or shared with anyone – this information is only being gathered to ascertain trends and patterns.
All names and details will remain totally confidential.

♠ **School Information**

♠ - School U grade

- Decile Rating

- Total Number of Pupils _____

- School Operates a Special Needs Committee? _____

- School employs a SENCO _____

- Full number of staff at your school i.e. FTTE _____

♠ **Special Needs Numbers**

- total Number of children in the school with 'Moderate Special Needs'

Total Learning and Behaviour _____

How are these children catered for? MoE (Through GSE) or through school funds.

Number of School Funded - Learning _____
 Behaviour _____
 Learning and behaviour _____

Number of MoE Funded - Learning _____
 Behaviour _____
 Learning and behaviour _____

ORRS

- Total Number of ORRS funded children in you school _____
- How many ORRS applications has your school made in the last 5 years? _____
- How many of these applications have been successful? _____
- If you have not applied for ORRS funding, is there any reason why you have chosen not to submit an application?
-

♠ Indicate approximate figures of how much the school contributes over and above the SEG and TEFA grant, to support these students e.g. from fundraising or other funding areas within the school budget/resources.
 \$ _____

♠ How much do think the school has contributed over the last 5 years towards supporting children with moderate special needs – money that is over and above SEG and TEFA grants. \$ _____

♠ What agencies/para professionals are supporting children, teachers, parents, and or the school:

- Child Youth and Family
- RTLB (Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour)
- RTLit
- MoE Special Education
- Oral Language Speech Therapy
- Occupational Therapists
- Special Education support and advisers
- Interim Response Fund
- EPF (Enhanced Programme Fund)
- Severe Behaviour assistance
- Other _____

♠ Does your school have good access to:-
 Expert Advice

Quality Professional Development

Relevant information/Readings

- ♠ Do you feel that your school is adequately supported in dealing with children with 'Moderate Special Needs'? *Comment*

- ♠ What proportion of "School Management Time" (Daily/weekly) is taken up dealing with issues surrounding children with 'Moderate Special Needs'?

- 1- 2 Hours
 2- 3 Hours
 3- 4 Hours
 5+ Hours Approx how many hours _____

Comment... _____

- ♠ In general how does your staff feel about taking on a child or children with Moderate Special Needs?

- Reluctant
 Happy
 Do not want to take them

Comment _____

- ♠ Do you feel that Children with Moderate Special Needs have an affect on a teacher's ability to do their job?

Comment -

- ♠ Do feel that Children with Moderate Special Needs distract other children from their learning in the classroom?

Comment

- ♠ Do you think that teachers spend a lot of extra time on programme adaptation to cater for Children with Moderate Special Needs – especially in comparison to normal preparation time spent for other children?

Comment

-
-
- ♠ Do you see the new proposed National Standards having an effect on Teacher willingness to accept children with special needs in their class??

Comment

- ♠ Have you ever not accepted an enrolment of a child with known special needs, stating the reason that your school did not have the resources or expertise to cater for the need?
-

- ♠ Given the option would your school accept the enrolment of children with special needs?
-

Any other comments you would like to add that have not been covered in the questions above – please elaborate.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research on Special Needs – if you would like to receive a copy of the collated data in the form of my paper please put your email details below and I would be only too happy to share this with you.

NOTE: All information gathered will be treated in the strictest of confidence. Names, school details etc will not be published or shared with anyone – this information is only being gathered to ascertain trends and patterns.
All names and details will remain totally confidential.

For personal feedback purposes fill out one of the contact methods below if you want me to send you the completed report to you.

Name:

School:

Email:

Mailing Address:

Questionnaire 2

Sabbatical Research Questionnaire

Teacher Questionnaire

Term 2 2009

By - Tony Horsfall, Principal Hutt Central School, Lower Hutt, Wellington.

antonyh@paradise.net.nz or

principal@huttcentral.school.nz

Phone contact if you need things clarified or have questions

= (04) 9058150 or 027 628187

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Behaviour

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♠ **Teacher Information**

- Teacher Experience (Years Taught) _____

- Do you have any Special Needs Teaching qualification or training

- Class Year level _____

- Number of Children in class _____

♠ **Number of Special Needs**

- Total number of children with Moderate Learning and/or Behaviour needs in your class with 'Moderate Special Needs' _____
- How many of these children are supported by your school i.e. through funding of Teacher Aide or extra assistance programmes. _____
- How many of these children are ORRS funded, or supported by an outside agency (Teacher Aide funding or Specialist Teacher assistance) e.g. ACC

- o What school funded and initiated programmes are available for these children

- Parent Reading Programmes
- Perceptual Motor Programmes
- Reading Recovery
- Special Literacy Programmes
- Special Numeracy Programmes
- Social Skill programmes
- Discovery Time
- Specialist Reading programmes
- SPELD
- Dyslexia specific programme
- Specialist Teacher Assistance
- Other

- ♠ What agencies/specialist professionals are supporting children, teachers, parents, in your class:

- Child Youth and Family
- RTLB (Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour)
- RTLit
- MoE Special Education
- Oral Language Speech Therapy
- Occupational Therapists
- Special Education support and advisers
- Interim Response Fund
- EPF (Enhanced Programme Fund)
- Severe Behaviour assistance
- Speech Language Support (GSE)

Other _____

- ♠ Do you feel that you are adequately supported in dealing with children with 'Moderate Special Needs'? *Comment*

♠ What other type of support would be helpful, if made available?

♠ Do you feel that Children with Moderate Special Needs have an affect on your performance as a Teacher?

Comment -

♠ Do feel that Children with Moderate Special Needs distract other children from their learning in the classroom?

Comment

♠ What extra time/hours /effort are required by the classroom teacher to liaise with parents, other professionals, adapt programmes and accommodate children with special needs?

- 0 – 1 Hour
- 1 - 2 Hours
- 2 – 3 Hours
- 3 - 4 Hours
- 4+ please specify _____

♠ Do you have sufficient access to assistive equipment suitable to children's needs e.g. Software, Books, Space, Furniture, adaptive tools etc

♠ Do feel adequately supported by:-

Senior Management Yes No

Comment; _____

Senco Yes No NA

Comment; _____

BoT Yes No

Comment; _____

♠ Does the size of your class reflect the needs you have in the class?

- ♠ Is the Teacher Aide expertise and training sufficient to support teacher, child(ren), and programme – Is there ongoing opportunity for Teacher Aide professional development?

Comment: _____

- ♠ Have you had to deal with ongoing issues arising from having special needs in your class e.g. Parents complaints, other teachers, children concerns.

- Parents
- Teachers
- Children

Comment:

Any other comments you would like to add that have not been covered in the questions above – please elaborate.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research on Special Needs – if you would like to receive a copy of the collated data in the form of my paper please put your email details below and I would be only too happy to share this with you.

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