

Principal's Sabbatical Report
Term 2 2012
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**To Investigate Ways to Better Meet the Needs of the Increased
Number of NE Children with Diagnosed Learning/Behaviour Issues**

Acknowledgements:

My sincere thanks goes to the Ministry of Education and NZEI for the opportunity to spend some time reflecting on my practice as a Principal and to research an issue which is very relevant to my school and to the schools in our cluster.

I am grateful to the Manuka School Board of Trustees for allowing me to have a term to complete this study.

My sincere thanks also go to Deb Barclay [Acting Principal] and the Senior Management team who led the school so competently, and to our staff who continued to do their work to their usual excellent standards.

I wish to acknowledge the support of the Principals, Sencos and educational personnel in New Zealand, England and Finland who supported my research into this issue.

Rationale

Over the past 3 years the 5 primary schools of the Glenfield cluster have had a noticeable increase in the number of NE (new entrant) children beginning school with diagnosed learning and behaviour issues. Most of these children enter school with no support and the schools are finding it difficult to access timely support or resources to give these children a good start to their schooling. As decile six and seven schools the SEG grants are not adequate enough to meet the needs of these children as well as the older SN children in the school. We have put in place support programmes such as Talk to Learn, alphabet groups, PMP, VAMP etc. These programmes are mostly run by teacher-aides, who also work in classrooms with the children, at a major cost to the school. The demands of meeting the needs of SN children are resulting in deficit budgets for some of our cluster schools. I wanted to know if this was a trend across other school clusters and if so, how are they coping with this influx of mainstream NE children. Are there other programmes or better systems and processes to support these children when they first enter school?

Methodology

- Questionnaires and follow up contact with schools
- Readings and research

- Interviewing educators
- Comparing SN in New Zealand, England and Finland
- Discussion with educators in England
- Discussion with MOE SE personnel
- Seminar by Dr Pasi Sahlberg from Finland

Findings

New Zealand

Twenty two questionnaires were sent out to a range of decile 1-10 schools in the wider Auckland area. A copy of the questionnaire is attached to this report. Fourteen were returned giving a 64% return. The only deciles not included in the returned questionnaires were the decile 8 and 9 schools.

Over the past 3 years the 14 schools have had 87 NE children begin school with identified learning /behaviour needs. Of these children only 15% [13] received funding to support their entry into school. The diagnoses the children came with included the following: autism, aspergers, speech/language difficulties, global delay, hearing impairment, cerebral palsy, vision impairment, ADHD, GAT, neuropsychological disorder, dyspraxia, Marfans syndrome, Vaters syndrome, benign tremor and low muscle tone, Down syndrome, dyslexia, attachment disorder, ODD and auditory processing. Of the 13 children who received funding, 7 received ORRS funding, 2 received GSE Early Intervention transition, 3 received MoE behaviour funding and 1 received severe high health needs funding.

Eighteen children received resource support such as OT, PT, EI support in the classroom for 2 months, educational psychologist, classroom support worker [MoE SE] and speech therapy but some of the 18 children were those who also received funding support.

Classroom teachers received support in a number of ways although some received no support at all. Seven teachers attended transition meetings or had visits from EI workers prior to the child starting school. One teacher went to a course related to the child's needs and 3 teachers had teacher-aide support in the classroom [1 MoE funded and 2 funded from the school's SEG grant.] Two teachers had "excellent" support from the speech language therapist and 1 teacher had "fantastic" support from a SE worker and the school SENCO. Two teachers received written reports only eg medical reports, IEPs etc.

None of the schools stated that the support they received was adequate. They would like specialist expertise such as the outreach service provided for ORS students from some special schools and more timely support from SE psychologists and behaviour workers for ORS and behaviour students. One school stated that they had a 5 year old enrol with severe behaviour needs and were contacted a term and a half after she started school by the ECE worker who said she was known to self-harm. More support is needed from EI personnel before and after the child begins school [2 months, which was the maximum, was not enough time] and the support needs to be regular, not intermittent. Schools also commented that their SEG grant is not enough to meet the demand for personnel and

resources to support those children who receive no funding. One to one or small group time with an adult is often paramount for successful transitions and progress in learning.

The second group of children I requested information about were those 5 year olds who were identified with learning /behaviour needs after they had begun school ie there had been no intervention prior to their school entry. Schools identified a further 135 students over the past 3 years who had needs identified by teachers and/or SENCOS after they had started school. The resources these children have received include: RTLB [16], SLS [3], ABT [6], counselling [1], SLT [10], SEG funded teacher-aide time [45], reading recovery [24], moderates support [2], behaviour funding MoE SE [5], PHN [2], RTLit [3]. One child was funded an FM system for auditory processing difficulties, 1 child worked with an advisor for the deaf and 3 families paid for their children to have educational psych assessments. At least 4 schools had accessed MoE interim support funding particularly for children with behaviour needs [1 school had used the funding 5 times for 1 child.] Some of these resources had taken a considerable amount of time to access due to demand on the service to which they were referred.

With the exception of 2 schools who have no school based support programmes in place, all other schools have programmes which support special needs children with their learning/behaviour. These programmes include literacy support programmes such as Talk to Learn, Reading Eggs, Early Words, VAMP, phonics groups, Reading Recovery, alphabet groups, reading and writing booster groups, Lexia, Word Detective, Spellbound and buddy/peer reading groups. Numeracy support programmes include mathletics, COSDBRICS, and numicon maths. A PMP [perceptual motor programme] is also run in many schools for all Year 1/2 pupils and many of the children are on IEPs or IBPs.

Schools use a variety of ways of funding these programmes. All schools use their SEG grants but find it is not sufficient to meet the demands and most top this up further from their operations funding. The programmes are run mostly by teacher-aides but in some cases teachers are able to do it, especially where schools have DPs/APs who are released from fulltime classroom teaching. Reading Recovery teachers are partly funded by the MoE and partly funded through school staffing entitlement. Two schools use some of their ESOL funding and 2 more use banked staffing built up over the early part of the year. One school employs a .2 special needs teacher from their SEG grant. Others also use RTLB learning support funding and interim response funding but both of these sources are for short periods of time and for specific amounts and children. One school is reviewing their use of teacher-aide time with an educational psych intern who is doing it as their research project.

Finland

A major factor in Finland's educational success over the last decade seems to be the thoughtful, skilled, tenacious help delivered to struggling students at every stage of their school careers. "Whatever it takes" is the mantra. If one method of support fails, teachers consult with colleagues to try something else. Almost 30% of students receive some kind of special help during the K-8 years. Contrary to the common stereotype of Finland being a homogeneous Caucasian nation, it has immigrants from Somalia, Iraq, Russia, Bangladesh, Estonia, Ethiopia and many other countries. Educators tilt toward students with economic

and learning challenges. “We try to catch the weak students. It’s deep in our thinking”, said one Principal.

A new study published by the European Commission shows that one in five 15 year olds and many adults in Europe cannot read properly. Only five countries, Finland among them, have already achieved the target set by the EU Education Ministers to reduce the share of poor readers from 20% to less than 10% by 2020. It shows that the reading skills of Finnish pupils are very good in comparison to the other countries. In 2009, the share of weak readers among 15 year olds was less than 10%. Finland is one of the few countries where reading specialists, who support teachers in the classroom, are on hand to support the struggling reader, as soon as a problem is identified. In addition, reading instruction is a compulsory part of special needs teacher training.

Finland has systematic methods for addressing problems in the lives of students, and targeted professional help for those who are in need. Every school has a teacher trained in special education who works with teachers and the children who have learning difficulties. Every school has a doctor, nurse and councillor. Every pupil receives a 3 course hot lunch at school each day. The focus is on individualised student instruction and guidance, underpinned by a strong philosophy that all children can learn. Teachers spend fewer hours with children than in most other OECD countries but they spend more time working together discussing issues related to teaching and learning, and collaborating on finding solutions to meet the needs of the students and the schools.

England

The English system for meeting the needs of children with learning difficulties is similar to the NZ system although it does seem to be more wieldy and take more time to put in place. They have a policy of inclusion and also have special needs schools. The system includes what is commonly referred to as Wave 2 or Wave 3 intervention. Wave 2 intervention consists of time limited support for a child focussing on a particular area of difficulty. This support is provided, within the classroom, with the view to accelerating progress and addressing misconceptions that may have developed. Wave 3 intervention consists of more individualised support designed specifically for an individual child, again, with the view to accelerating progress.

If a child has not made progress despite such differentiated teaching he or she would be supported by a staged method of support beginning with a meeting between key school staff, the parents and the child. Key learning objectives would be agreed and a plan made for the provision necessary to achieve these [IEP]. That level of support is known as School Action and usually results in additional support being made available for the child, such as a few hours working with an adult each week [TA support]. If a child’s needs are greater or [s]he has not made sufficient progress in response to the School Action level of support then a School Action Plus level may be appropriate. This is similar to School Action but includes a greater level of resourcing and additional advice from appropriate professionals from outside the school such as an educational psychologist or speech language therapist.

If a child’s parents or educational setting believe that his or her needs cannot be met by the school’s resources they can apply to their local authority to carry out a Statutory

Assessment of Special Educational Needs. If this is agreed the assessment can lead to a Statement of Educational Needs which can take up to 6 months to be finalised. This is a document which summarises the child's needs, what learning objectives need to be addressed and what provision is necessary to achieve this. The local authority is responsible for the provision of the Statement and will provide funding and advice to the school to ensure this happens.

One area in which England is ahead of NZ is in the resourcing for children with dyslexia. While the NZ MoE has acknowledged that dyslexia is a learning disability there is little or no school resourcing put into meeting the children's needs. In England they now have qualified specialist teachers in dyslexia and some SLTs are also trained to work with dyslexic children. One SLT I spoke to is employed by several schools to work with their dyslexic students.

In March 2012 of this year the government in England published a green paper in which it is seeking to undertake major reforms to special education needs. This paper proposes sweeping changes to Statements and to School Action and School Action Plus plans. Statements will be replaced with a coordinated Education, Health and Social Care Plan [EHCP]. This will provide statutory protection for children and young people. Proposals include integrating the many services and sectors that work to meet the child's needs. The integrated plan should enable services to work together. It will be interesting to see what changes come about as a result of the green paper and how effective they will be in meeting the needs of special needs students in England.

Implications

The schools which were surveyed are using all the areas of funding and resourcing that are available to them albeit to varying degrees. However all the schools struggle to meet the needs of their special needs children because of the numbers of children coming in with identified needs and those who are identified with learning /behaviour needs shortly after starting school. Middle and higher decile ranked schools do not receive adequate SEG funding to meet their needs and while the Ministry acknowledge this is an issue, it is not on the priority list to be sorted out any time soon. Another area of concern is the lack of knowledge classroom teachers have about identified needs and the dearth of PD available to rectify the situation.

There are some initiatives on the horizon which may be helpful to schools but it is doubtful these will go far enough in solving the issues.

- The Teachers' Council has published an expectation that SE needs be a core competency of all teacher training programmes [as it is in Finland.]
- Autism NZ has been given an \$800,000 contract to develop a tool for schools to support them in managing autistic students.
- There are 2 new specialist education papers people can apply to study but the criteria are aimed mainly for people already working in the field rather than for classroom teachers. This initiative could be strengthened by offering opportunities for mainstream teachers to train as special needs teachers either through funded PD [similar to TESSOL] or with fulltime study awards.

- MoE SE are looking at ways they can create more flexibility with resources between schools and agencies eg itinerating specialist education resource teachers [such as those in special schools] around all schools, similar to the way we use hearing/vision teachers and RTLB.

Along with the above initiatives the surveyed schools had their own ideas for improvement of the current resources available for special education needs.

- Skilled support which is easier to access with forms/processes which are not constantly changing.
- Support for SN students must be needs based and not reliant on a decile based SEG grant.
- EVERY cluster of schools has a counsellor, a social worker in schools and a public health nurse to support children's needs.
- Staffing should include provision for releasing SENCOs and the employment of a special education teacher either part time or full time depending on need [this could be at a cluster level for some areas.]
- Co-ordinated support for 6 months to fully transition NE SN children into school eg speech therapist/OT/PT/educational psychologist, pre-school TA. This support could either be reduced or maintained depending on the on-going needs of the child.
- TAs in every class until the end of Year 2 [paid from central funding, not from operations funding.]

Conclusion

Special education funding is not a bottomless pit and resources can only stretch so far. However it would seem NZ is falling behind other countries in meeting the needs of our special education children. While the Ministry is looking at some initiatives to improve SN resourcing these will not go far enough in meeting the ever increasing pressure being placed on schools seeing an increase in the number of children entering school at 5 with identified needs. It may be timely for educators and the Ministry to investigate whether we are making the best use of the resources we currently have and if not to find more efficient ways of using them. Some of the ideas above would not be too difficult to introduce and would not demand too much extra from the budget.

References

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- "What Americans Keep Ignoring About Finland's School Success" by Anu Partanen in *The Atlantic*, March 2012
- "Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?" by Pasi Sahlberg, with a foreword by Andy Hargreaves, Teachers College Press
- "Education policies for raising student learning: the Finnish approach" by Pasi Sahlberg *Journal of Education Policy* Vol. 22 No.2, March 2007, pp147-171
- The School of Opportunities – towards every learner's full potential by Pasi Sahlberg 2011

European Commission Press Release: “European countries need to step up efforts to boost reading skills, study says”

Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices

The New Zealand Ministry of Education website www.minedu.govt.nz

The Finnish National Board of Education [FNBE] www.minedu.fi/OPM/?lang=en

The UK Ministry of Education www.education.gov.UK

Appendix 1

Sabbatical Questionnaire

To Investigate Ways To Better Meet the Needs of the Increased Number of NE Children with Diagnosed Learning/Behaviour Issues.

What is your school decile rating?

What is your junior school roll?

How many NE children entered school with identified learning/behaviour needs?

2010

2011

2012

Please list the diagnoses these children came with. eg autism, aspergers, ODD, speech difficulties, ADHD, auditory processing etc

Of these children how many came with funding?

What was the nature of the funding? Eg ORS, GSE behaviour funding, ACC etc

How many children came with resource support? eg speech therapy, OT, PT

What was the nature of the support?

What support did the classroom teacher receive for the transition of these children to school?

Was this support adequate? If not, what would you have liked?

How many NEs since 2010 have had special needs identified as a result of classroom teacher/SENCo intervention [ie children's needs identified after starting school]?

Have any of these children since received funding or resource support and if so what? RTLB, T-A, Attention Behaviour Team etc

Do you run any special programmes for these children eg PMP, Talk to Learn, alphabet programmes etc

If so how are these programmes staffed and funded?

In an ideal world what resources would you like to have to meet the needs of NE SN children?

Thank you so much for completing this questionnaire. My paper will be on the MoE website by the end of term 3 2012.

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Principal

