



# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

By

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*"When someone is truly included, no one will question their presence- only their absence."- Renee Laporte*

## INTRODUCTION

As a primary school principal and the father of a child with special education needs, Inclusive Education is very important to me. As a result I want to investigate areas where good practice is happening and areas where development is needed.

My initial proposal stated that I was going to contact schools and investigate what constitutes good practice regarding Inclusive Education. However with the recent release of documentation from the Ministry of Education on TKI, The Education Review Office and NZCER this approach was redundant. Therefore, I have decided to collect information about what is happening on the ground then compare it with the aforementioned documentation. I will critique the documentation against what people who are in the trenches are saying is good practice.

In addition, I attended a seminar being held by Mel Ainscow a Professor from the University of Manchester.

Mel Ainscow is Professor of Education and co-director of the Centre for Equity in Education. He is also Adjunct Professor at Queensland University of Technology. Between 2007 and 2011 he was the Government's Chief Adviser for the Greater Manchester Challenge, a 50 million pound initiative to improve educational outcomes for all young people in the region. Mel was director of a UNESCO Teacher Education project on inclusive education which involved research and development in over 80 countries, and has been a consultant to UNESCO, UNICEF and Save the Children. In the 2012 New Year honours list he was awarded a CBE for services to education.

## METHODOLOGY

Using Survey Monkey I designed a survey on Inclusive Education. For the purposes of this report it will be known as 'the survey'. Then I used social media to distribute the survey.

A link to the survey was sent out to the Mid Canterbury and Canterbury Principals. Also the link was sent to the New Zealand Down Syndrome Association and Autism New Zealand. From here the link was sent to Upside Downs Education Trust, The IHC, IDEA Services, WDSA and Parent2Parent.

I had 142 responses to the survey however only 82 of these surveys were complete. These 82 responses download on to 200 pages of information.

The survey was made up of the following questions.

1. Information about yourself
2. Do you think your school is inclusive?
  - a. Yes or No?
  - b. What are the areas of strength regarding inclusive education?
  - c. What are the areas of development needed regarding inclusive education?
3. How have you found access to support services?
  - a. Ministry of Education?
  - b. Ministry of Health?
  - c. Ministry of Social Development?
  - d. Private organisations?
4. What is the key to success for your child/ who or what has made the most difference?
5. How you found access to education support services?
6. When accessing support services, how have you found their response?
7. Who or what has been the most difficult?
8. How you found inclusive practices around the following?
  - a. Sports
  - b. School Camps
  - c. Toileting
  - d. Reporting of learning progress
  - e. School Culture and Attitude
  - f. Community Attitude
  - g. Break and Lunchtimes
  - h. Information Sharing
9. Is parent input welcomed and valued?

## 10. Is there anything you would change?

The data was then analysed and grouped together to show what good practice looks like and what the challenges are.

Once the data gathered in the survey was analysed I compared it to recent literature published by the Ministry of Education New Zealand, The Education Review Office Te Tari Arotake Matauranga and research from overseas.

### FEEDBACK FROM THE SURVEY

The survey provided very clear indications about what constitutes good practice around Inclusive Education and what people, parents and educators, are finding difficult when it comes to enabling children with special needs to effectively access the New Zealand Curriculum.

#### Q1 Is your school inclusive?

	All Responses	Parent Responses
Yes	65%	61%
No	22%	29%
Partly	13%	10%

The Education Review Office (2015) state, "Over three quarters in the sample (78 percent) were "mostly inclusive" and "only 2 of 152 schools were rated as having few inclusive practices", (page 9).

The major difference between the Education review office's findings and mine are that the majority of responses I received are from parents, whereas the Education review Office received their information from schools.

When asked:

- i. What are the areas of strength regarding inclusive education?
- ii. What are the areas of development needed regarding inclusive education?

the survey clearly highlighted that the keys to successful inclusion are very much centered around:

- Relationships with the family that involves listening with understanding
- Knowing the child
- The child coming first and not the disability
- High expectations
- Empathy about the journey the family are on
- Acceptance
- Being flexible
- Expectations of children with special needs are high
- Staff who persist, care and who are passionate

Furthermore a dominant feature of the survey was that the attitude from the top down was pivotal in developing a school-wide acceptance of all differences; gender, race, religion and ability.

The New Zealand Curriculum: applies to all English-medium ... students ... irrespective of their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, belief, ability or disability, social or cultural background, or geographical location. The New Zealand Curriculum, 2007, (page 6).

With the right attitude schools were prepared to fully utilize the funding allocated to resource support. Schools were flexible and adaptive in order to meet the needs of all students by creating learning programmes.

With the right attitude the home school partnership flourished, parents were involved in decision making and were informed regularly about progress and changes.

From the onset collaboration with families is crucial not just for children with special needs but every child. As professionals we do not possess the detailed information that can only be acquired through day to day interactions. For most families of a

child with special needs life has been a long journey on a roller coaster. It is usually a life filled with many specialist interventions some of which can be quite harrowing. Therefore parents are the experts as they have been the advocates for their child for many years. Parents, who usually have had to fight tooth and nail to get to where they are now, have a lot of advice and information to share.

Frequent ongoing communication is paramount as the following comments from the survey highlight.

*"Non-neuro-typical children face many challenges on a daily basis therefore it paramount that the assessment is regular, relevant and feedback to parents is continuous, as it is far too easy for progress to go off track".*

*"My daughter would come home upset and not wanting to go to school and the hardest thing to deal with was the fact she couldn't tell me, because of her disability, why."*

Time must be taken get to know all students and the strengths and interests they bring to the classroom. For children with special needs the parents and whanau are invaluable because not only could there be communication challenges associated with the disability, but also because the needs of children with special needs are often more complex.

The Education Review Office (2015) state, "Effective inclusive practices included developing constructive partnerships with parents and whanau by:

- talking with parents about strengths and interests of their child and their aspirations for their child
- working together to improve students' wellbeing and learning
- communicating frequently and responding effectively to any concerns raised", (page11)

Further, with the right attitude the communication across all the staff becomes the norm and everyone supports each other to help meet the needs of all students. And thus our attitudes shift to 'our children, instead of those children'. This way we begin to develop an inclusive community. To be effective, time needs to be set aside for the communication across the school flourish.

Right here it would be easy to say the parent should be contacting the school. However many parents don't want be seen as annoying, bothersome or known as

'that parent'. As leaders we need to open the communication lines up. A simple email or text message regularly goes a long way.

Chris Smeaton a Superintendent from the South West Alberta School District said, if we continue to think as inclusion as a place, we will never reach our full potential. Inclusion is an attitude.

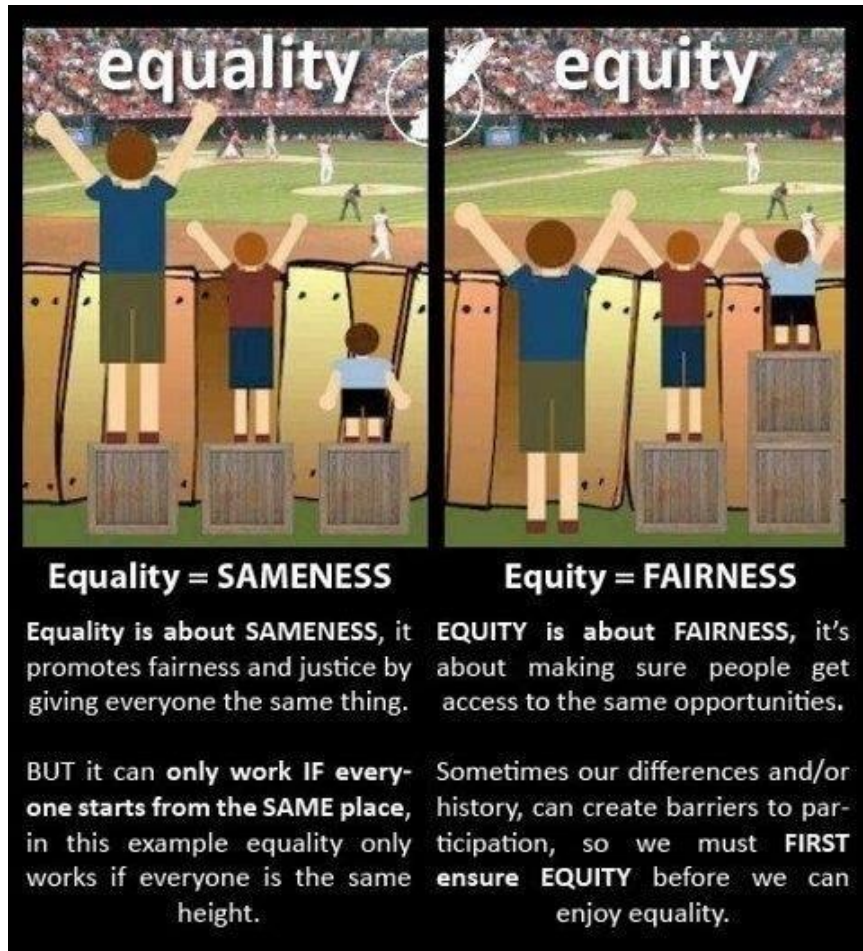
When our attitude shifts we will recognise:

- The beauty of diversity
- The belief of uniqueness
- That every child brings strengths
- That every child deserves our best... all the time.

The right attitude manifests into the approach that is taken. It is then that the term inclusion starts to have real meaning in that progress through the 3 steps of inclusion are made. The 3 steps as described by Mel Ainscow are:

1. Present but largely overlooked
2. Present and participating
3. Present, participating and learning (learning things that are useful and needs based, challenging and moving the child towards their potential each time)

At a recent seminar held in Wellington at Victoria University Mel Ainscow (June 2015) stated the terminology Inclusive Education has had its time. He said that is it now time to think about Equity and what is fair for all learners.



This is about making sure everybody gets access to the same opportunities. The above image illustrates this very well especially when the box is thought of as support.

Every student requires some form of support and if we think of the ball game pictured above as the learning experience we can see the difference between 'sameness' and 'fairness'.

It is abundantly clear from the responses of the survey that the child comes first and not the disability. Also, that students need to be treated like others whilst having their needs met.



However, all too commonly assumptions were made about a child with a disability and thus the child was labelled. Textbook definitions are being used to prejudge. This is that the disability is the focus rather than seeing the child for who they are and what ability they have.

*From a parent. "I have just enrolled my son who has Down Syndrome on the bus. He had his first run as a trial. He was a model student and behaved impeccably. Next thing the bus company are asking me to fill out a School Transport Assistance Application. As if to justify the request they asked me if he threw gumboots at the bus driver like the last child with special needs did on the bus.*

*We hear all sorts things about our son who has Down Syndrome. Things like, "aren't they so loving" or "oh don't they all love music". After 7 years of this we generally laugh off these type of comments. However I meet a lot of principals throughout New Zealand and the hardest thing I find is continually having to correct them when they say, "I know a Down Syndrome". I explain that our son is Luke and he has Down Syndrome. Just like many people have Asthma. Luke is own person with the characteristics of Down Syndrome. It does not define him. He is more like my other two children than anyone else I know. He is Luke who happens to have Down Syndrome.*

"Disabilities are not something you misunderstand in this era. Get educated because bias is no different than racism." – Bill Drayton

Yes there is a lot of research that can help us understand the complexities especially when it comes to teaching and learning. Nevertheless, just like other children we cannot prejudge and we must take the time to get to know the child.

In the survey it was pointed out that a newer generation of teachers were coming into schools with an open mind and were better able to adjust programmes, listen and understand to others about the needs of the child and have high expectations for children with special needs.

The Education Review Office (2015) state that, "Inclusive schools included students with special education needs in age-appropriate regular classes. The most effective

schools used high quality teaching practices, developed high quality IEPs based on evidence and responded flexibly to individual needs”, (page 17).

Rating highly in the survey was the use of frequent and meaningful IEPs. These were seen as pivotal in assisting children with special needs to achieve. Meaningful IEPs were based on knowing the child, high expectations, a holistic view of the child with the inclusion of skills that the child can use throughout their lives such and problem solving, negotiation, decision-making and respect for others.

The following from the Ministry of Education (2011), page 6, provides guidelines as to what an IEP should look like.

An IEP is...	An IEP is not...
a plan that shows how the school programme will adapted	a document that shows how the to fit the student will fit the curriculum
a plan that brings together knowledge and contributions, from the student and those who best know them, about the student’s learning needs, aspirations, personality, and cultural background	a document prepared by professionals to be signed off by a student’s parents/caregivers
an individualised supplement to the full-class learning programme, which enriches the student’s classroom, school, and community experiences	a different, separate curriculum
a forward-looking plan that records student achievements, where they want to go, what supports are needed (including support for team members), and what success might look like	a document that lists barriers to learning with no solutions a document written specifically for funding or referral purposes
a succinct outline of a few priority learning goals and strategies to meet them within the classroom programme	an exhaustive list of learning goals, activities, teaching strategies, and resources covering all the key competencies and learning areas
a ‘living’ document that team members regularly update to reflect the student’s changing development and that the team refers to for guidance on their responsibilities and needs	a document that is completed at a meeting and then not looked at or used until the next meeting

The Ministry of Education document, Collaboration for Success: Individual Education Plans 2011, from which the above table is taken, provides very good guidelines about the IEP process.

When survey respondents were asked about school culture and attitude, overall the responses were positive. However there were still issues around the wider community accepting CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS, transportation and toileting of CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.

At break times the experiences were again mostly positive but there are still problems around:

- teacher aid funding at break times to the point where parents were being asked to collect CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
- health and safety concerns
- bullying
- lack of support with eating and toileting

Question 9 asked if parent input was welcomed. Sadly this was not positive as several felt parent's input was welcomed but not valued and often thought of as tokenistic. As professionals we have to bear in mind that parents have walked many a mile with their children and they do have a lot to offer. As with any case, there are varied amounts in which parents can offer and also want to offer. It really is a case by case basis. The Education Review Office (2015) state, "Effective inclusive practices included developing constructive partnerships with parents and whanau".

Conversely many parents often do not have the skills to advocate for their child and it is scary for parents. For some parents, school was not a pleasant place. Some parents are anxious about their child being a burden. And for some parents, life is very hard raising a child with special needs and they don't have the energy to fight any longer. Therefore professionals must facilitate and build the partnership in order to ensure the inclusive practice extends to advocacy for support services.

"Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry.

For every one thousand people who are creative and altruistic and energetic, there's probably only one who fits this criterion, or maybe even less than that. By this criterion...we do not mean someone who can get things done. There are millions of people who can get things done. There are very, very few people who

will change the pattern in the whole field.”

Bill Drayton, *Leading Social Entrepreneurs Changing the World*

Sadly there still seems to be a minority of professionals who view children with special needs as a problem and actively put up barriers to discourage children with special needs enrolments or subtly make things a little difficult. I have recently heard of:

- A parent being told their son would be better going to another school.
- Another parent was told that there was no funding to provide fencing when their child with special needs was a serious flight risk.
- A parent being asked to take their child home at lunchtime as there was no supervision

Manaakitanga, leading with moral purpose, underpins the commitment that leaders have to ensuring that the school’s culture, systems, policies and practices at every level are shaped by the best interests of all students.

<http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/leading-schools-that-include-all-learners/>

61% of parents said their school was inclusive however many said schools are not supported in providing equitable learning opportunities for all learners.

So to further understand the above, it is possible to analyse:

- Question 3 - How have you found access to support services?
  - Ministry of Education?
  - Ministry of Health?
  - Ministry of Social Development?
  - Private organisations?
- Question 7 - Who or what has been the most difficult?
- Question 8 - How you found access to education support services?
- Question 9 - Is parent input welcomed and valued?

Overwhelmingly the survey responses highlight a system that is failing with most describing the service as poor, depressing and difficult. From the responses many felt that the service from the Ministry of Education was underfunded. Also there just is not enough of everything to go around.

The survey stated that the responses from the Ministry of Education for support requests are slow, fraught with levels of bureaucracy, difficult to find out who is responsible for what and what entitlements are available and there was general lack of action and resources.

Educators and families experience high levels frustration, feel they have to go in battle to get any meaningful assistance, believe the Ministry of Education Special Education system has far too much paperwork, is very disjointed and were poor communicators.

Some respondents said once you were in the system it was okay. However noted that it really did depend on the person who was leading or implementing the service. It was noted that the majority of the time it came down to a single person who persevered and was determined to do their best no matter what barriers were in the way.

Furthermore respondents highlighted, the variation in quality of service they received from the specialist. Some said that the OT was great and the SLT poor and vice versa.

Directly related to funding is that respondents of the survey said that teachers needed much more support with teacher aides and professional development around teaching CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS. Schools are, in most cases, having to find additional funding to support teachers.

Perhaps this is why the IHC are taking the Ministry of Education to the Human Rights Tribunal.

IHC complaint under Part 1A of the Human Rights Act, 1993.

- IHC's complaint responds to the high numbers of complaints and concerns received about the difficulties disabled children and youth have with enrolling at their local school, participating in school life and accessing the curriculum.
- These difficulties are clear evidence of discrimination. IHC believes the problems are structural and discrimination occurs as a result of government policy and systemic failure.

Interestingly respondents said that because their child has special learning needs because of an accident, they had no issues at all (Accident Compensation Corporation

funded). They were fully resourced and had an abundance of specialists working together to assist in helping the child reach their potential.

Question 3 of the survey asked for information about access to services across a range of government departments. The above details the responses about the Ministry of Education. However, using information gathered from the survey, the Ministry of Health and Social Development are doing a great job. Respondents said at times the health system was back-logged but once things got underway it all ran smoothly. They also said the vast majority of interactions were positive and the staff were very empathetic.

Obviously this is an apple and orange comparison, however the survey highlighted how dismal access to Occupation Therapists and Speech Language Therapist were. Yet there is a connection between the services being provided by Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health, namely SLT and OT have the same or similar training. So maybe there is an avenue to explore a way to link these groups.

Many respondents in the survey stated they had been driven to use the private sector to obtain support for their child. Sadly this is born out of frustration and it is usually at great expense to the family. Parents who had chosen to go down the private route expressed complete satisfaction with the service and frequency of it.

Perhaps it is time to visit the concept of Individualized Funding and allow schools and or parents to access the support services desperately needed.

With regard to children with special needs participating in other activities, such as sports events and EOTC, most respondents found this to be a positive experience but too often for children with special needs to be involved the parent had to be present.

The Education Review Office (2015) state that, Inclusive schools fully involved students with special education needs in activities outside the classroom. Students participated in

regular cultural and sporting activities such as kapa haka, assembly, swimming, sports and camps. Some schools provided activities especially for students with special education needs, such as Riding for the Disabled and Special Olympics.

Schools carefully planned and modified programmes or provided additional support to enable students with special education needs to participate in activities outside the classroom. Risk analyses took account of individual student's needs, and plans and resources were put in place to help ensure the student could participate.

Respondents were relatively satisfied with the reporting of progress component of their child's education. Schools who used learning stories, personalised the report and reported largely on the key competencies, received positive responses. Unfortunately, some educators stuck with the stock standard school report with little adaptation. Furthermore respondents felt that some teachers fluffed things up and presented a report that wasn't completely honest.

The National Standards were a difficult part of the reporting process as many parents felt this was disheartening and just another reminder of how far behind their children were. From my experience, many teachers feel the same way when it comes to the legislated aspect of having to report National Standards. Teachers feel it serves no useful purpose to have to report progress against the National Standards for students who receive ORS funding.

Other aspects where things need improving are:

- Stopping teacher aides doing too much of the students work
- Not completing IEPs before the meetings
- Using plain language reports and not reports full of education gobble-de-gook and specialist jargon
- Giving teachers more support with writing reports

In terms of developments needed to improve inclusive education the survey highlighted that teachers needed better support.

Teachers need support with:

- Increased Teacher Aid hours

- More PLD around specific learning difficulties and different learning styles and differentiated learning
- Increased knowledge about disabilities so that people can see the abilities not just the disability
- More acknowledgement, in terms of support, of 'invisible' disabilities such as ASD, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia
- Better access to specialists and time given to work with them

Ultimately most of these improvements come down to funding for schools and specialists. Right throughout the survey it was evident that there is a major underfunding issue at the heart of most of the concerns.

Almost all schools identified at least one challenge they had experienced when trying to include students with special education needs. Two thirds of the schools considered an issue related to funding a major challenge. This included timely access to funding, the level of funding provided and difficulty accessing funding for students they believed needed additional support but did not qualify for any of the additional funding options currently available. Schools said they could do more for students if they had more funding and support, and many noted they funded additional teacher's aide hours from other funding. The Education Review Office (2015)

A key role in the inclusion of children with special needs was the SENCO. The SENCO is pivotal in coordinating support for students, monitoring achievement, guiding teachers and providing information to the board which can help resourcing.

There is no doubt the SENCO is a very important role in ensuring the needs of children who are identified as 'At Risk' are met. This includes children at both ends of the academic spectrum, those with social and emotional needs and behaviour challenges.



A quick survey of principals indicated that around 20% of students were at risk of not achieving their potential.

Therefore with a role as important as the SENCO it is paramount that the SENCO be given time to support teachers and students. This time is needed to ensure that all students who have been identified as 'At Risk' have the opportunity and support to achieve to their potential.

I believe it is about time the role of SENCO is to have 'roll based funding' included in each school's staffing entitlement to ensure that this role be given the support and recognition it deserves.

Teacher training is another area where improvements can be made. Perhaps teacher training should have compulsory university papers on teaching children with special needs. As the saying goes, 'what's best for some is good for all'. Also teacher training could benefit from more regular 'in class' work. I believe trainee teachers should be spending 1-2 days in a class each week for the year. This is in addition to the required 'teacher placement' components. This way they can be immersed in a learning environment whilst supporting the classroom teacher. Also trainee teachers would learn so much more about the students as they learn and grow throughout the year. Furthermore they would have time to build meaningful relationships and learn more about how to meet the needs of all the learners.

Also there are many geographical challenges as there are a lot of rural communities who are struggling for support. Several survey respondents in rural situations had little to no support from Special Education Services. Furthermore it is evident that far too much time is spent travelling to centres. For example in Mid Canterbury the majority of GSE services are based in Christchurch and therefore 3 hours of time is lost during the round trip. I believe as part of the Ministry of Education review thought needs to be given to this aspect. Perhaps specialists could work out of schools in 'towns' to service the surrounding district. Or go completely mobile especially as today's information communication technology is bridging the gap between office and personnel.

## CONCLUSION

With significant reviews underway in the Ministry of Education we hope the improvements are on the way.

With significant reviews underway we hope that all schools will embrace the full meaning of Inclusive Education for all learners.

After all as this survey highlights there is still a gap between rhetoric and reality.

Our service promise (Ministry of Education 2015)

Every child has the potential to learn and succeed. The adults around them must work well together for this to happen. Our Promise sets out our commitment to make things work well and to provide excellent service.

Our Promise

Every day, every child will learn and succeed because of the work we do. We will:

- value, respect and treat you fairly
- listen and understand you
- together, find what works
- make it easy for you to work with us
- do what we say we will do in a timely manner.

When our grandchildren ask us where we were when the voiceless and vulnerable of our era needed leaders of compassion and purpose, I hope we can say that we showed up, and that we showed up on time.

Gary Haugen - IJM President and CEO

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