

# **Highest Needs Review: What matters to stakeholders**

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# The Highest Needs Review

The Ministry of Education has been reviewing supports for children and young people with the highest level of learning support need and will report back to Cabinet in October 2022.

The purpose of the Highest Needs Review is to ensure that children and young people with the highest needs for learning support achieve their full potential through positive education outcomes and that they receive the right support, when they need it, and for as long as they need it.

The Highest Needs Review aims to give practical effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Ka Hikitia—Ka Hāpaitia (the Māori Education Strategy), alongside commitments to Pacific learners and families as outlined in the Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020–2030.

This Review is guided by the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Options and recommendations from the Review will work towards achieving the vision of the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016–2026 and upholding the principles within the Enabling Good Lives approach. These are:

- Beginning early
- Self-determination
- Person-centred
- Ordinary life outcomes
- Mainstream first
- Mana-enhancing.

## Objectives for the Highest Needs Review

Children and young people and their families/whānau are at the centre of this Review, which takes a rights-based, strengths-based, and mana-enhancing approach.

The objectives for the Review are to:

- Align cross-agency work so it is better connected and co-ordinated to ensure children and young people and their family and whānau have access to broader government supports.
- Identify how best to support children and their families and whānau including how support services are structured and delivered through the Learning Support Delivery Model.
- Develop a strategic, planned system response for specialist services. This strategic framework will identify what the network of provision should look like, the place of each support or service within the network, and how they integrate within the wider learning support context.
- Provide a proposed sequenced set of improvements within a short-term, medium-term and longer-term investment plan.
- Use the Learning Support Delivery Model as the mechanism for delivering possible options and solutions.
- Provide an easy-to-use model.
- Build relationships.

An Advisory Group of 16 people has worked with the Ministry during the Highest Needs Review work to share their expertise, subject-matter knowledge, lived experience and perspectives, and to test and challenge the Highest Needs Review team's work as it develops options and solutions.

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# Stakeholder views contributing to the Highest Needs Review

## Introduction

The Highest Needs Review team in the Ministry of Education asked stakeholders for their views on the supports for children and young people with the highest level of learning support need in two phases:

- an initial engagement period with stakeholders including parent and whānau representatives, disability groups, and education sector peak bodies, to codesign the scope and terms of reference (May to July 2021), resulting in 66 submissions including meeting notes, transcripts, and feedback, and
- a second phase including further meetings, email submissions and submissions through an online portal (September 2021 to March 2022), providing 1,027 submissions.

The Ministry asked stakeholders three questions about each of the Highest Needs Review six scope areas:

- The journey through the education system
- Access to supports
- Responsiveness of supports
- Fluid boundaries
- Support for adults across the network
- Alignment across agencies.

The three questions were:

- What is happening in your community that is working well?
- What do you want to see happening?
- How might barriers for learners with the highest support needs be removed?

Submissions came from a wide range of the stakeholders who want to see adequate support for children and young people with the highest needs, including 236 who had their own lived experience to draw from as students needing additional support. Organisations that took part in the consultation are listed in the Appendix.



TABLE 1 Stakeholders who took part in this consultation

Stakeholders	Number of submissions 1,093
Parents, caregivers, whānau	379
Teachers	298
Learning Support Practitioners (including Ministry of Education regional offices, RTLB, specialists)	223
Schools, school leaders, early learning services and managers	205
Lived experience of an unmet need for individualised support	105
Lived experience of inequitable access to individualised support	86
Support staff	85
Board members	65
Disability community/organisations	58
Lived experience of receiving individualised support	45
Health sector	12
Ministry of Education National Office	10
Post-secondary and tertiary	3

Note: Some stakeholders belong to more than one category. Those making online submissions used the categories above to identify themselves; other submissions from meetings and emails were categorised by Ministry staff.

The 869 individuals who made online submissions also gave their ethnic identification, with some identifying with more than one ethnicity. Most were European/Pākehā (85%). Māori submitters were 13% of the total, 3% of submitters were of Pacific ethnicities, and another 3% were of Asian ethnicities. Seven percent identified with other ethnicities.

## How stakeholder views were analysed

Each submission was carefully read by Ministry of Education staff to identify what mattered to stakeholders. Each theme in a submission—and many included a number of different themes—was then coded to build up a quantitative picture of experiences and views for each of the six Scope Areas of the Highest Needs Review. The Ministry of Education team also analysed which themes mattered most to the different stakeholder groups shown in the table above.

NZCER was asked to provide a report on stakeholder views, drawing on the work done by the Ministry of Education to show the key themes for these 1,093 stakeholders. The first section highlights the key themes across all the Scope Areas. Then the following sections summarise the main themes for each of the six Scope Areas. A table of the frequency of these codes is given for each Scope Area. As well, the key themes that were most important to the main stakeholder groups are noted.

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## Stakeholders' main concerns

More resourcing and support, professional learning related to students' particular needs, and review of ORS (Ongoing Resourcing Scheme) were the main concerns voiced by around half or more of those who contributed to this consultation.

Adults in the system have access to a wider range of PLD

Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources, and supports

Review ORS process, funding, and criteria

Between a third to close to a half had these concerns:

Tamariki and whānau centred approach—include whānau in decisionmaking and planning

Equitable and easier access to specialists

Adequate resources and seamless transition—timely, planned, as long as needed

Accessible and clear information about processes and available support

Timely, consistent, and ongoing support

Equitable and easier access to teacher aides and teacher aide funding

Communication and collaboration across groups

Positive relationships, coordination and effective school practices for seamless transitions

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## SCOPE AREA 1

# The journey through the education system

The learning journey needs to:

- begin with early identification of need, and early intervention in response, that provides the support needed to secure a sound start
- have adequate resourcing all the way through from early learning services, through primary and secondary school, ending with support and experiences to make a successful transition into adulthood
- be smooth and positive, with transitions from one learning setting to another that are well planned by a team that includes the child, parents and whānau, teachers from both settings, and relevant specialists, sharing and building on their knowledge
- actively support a student's progress, through sharing information through the journey, using effective teaching strategies that are related to a well-informed understanding of that student's needs and goals, including for friendship and belonging, and through positive relationships and good communication among all involved.

Many of the submissions relating to this Scope Area spoke of experiences of students' needs not being identified in time or not being met through lack of resources—particularly teacher, teacher aide and specialist time—lack of knowledge and understanding, or lack of relevant equipment and materials.

*It's hard for parents to hear when the conversation is all about "the resources they need in order to get support" rather than about identifying the child's needs and goals. This is a deficit framing, and it tells the parents from day one that support will be hard. (MoE National Office)*

*A coherent and consistent approach to support services across ECE and schools. Schools should not have to reapply for support and funding when a child moves from ECE to school. (School or early learning service)*

*A smoother transition process needs to happen, so that the right information is being passed onto the next school to support the learner. (School or early learning service)*

Parents also found the lack of shared information trying, leading to duplication and lost time for their child's learning, and more work for them. They gave examples of gaps between health specialists and education providers, as well as gaps between different educational roles. They were interested in having Individual Learning Plans for their child that were well-based, and well-used to support their child's progress. They valued professionals who worked with them as partners, and schools that accepted their child rather than saying they lacked the resources to enrol them, or could only take them for part of the day.

TABLE 2 Key themes for Scope Area 1 The journey through the education system—the numbers

Theme	% of submissions
Adequate resources for seamless transition—timely, planned early, and taking as long as needed	38
Positive relationships, coordination, and effective school practices for seamless transitions	32
Early intervention	20
Non-inclusive practices and attitudes affecting attendance and engagement	19
Support at secondary, post-secondary and post-school, including training and employment	17
Fluid curriculum provision, including different learning approaches	16
Early needs identification or assessment and time-sensitive diagnosis	15
Lack of awareness of student condition, and stigma	14
Supportive learning environment	12
Life skills and work experience focus	11
Accountability in schools and other settings	10

## Top themes for each stakeholder group

Stakeholder group views are broadly similar, with a few different emphases.

Those with lived experience, parents and whānau, and the disability community described more their experience of non-inclusive practices and attitudes and encountering lack of understanding and stigma. The disability community were also concerned to have more organisational accountability around meeting student needs, and less use of punitive measures such as suspension. Board chairs noted the role of community support for schools to be inclusive.

**Lived experience**—these four themes mattered most to those with lived experience

Adequate resources for seamless transition  
Support for young people in secondary and post-school  
Issues with non-inclusive practice and attitudes  
Positive relationships, coordination and effective practices for seamless transition

**Disability community and organisations**

Issues with non-inclusive  
practice and attitudes  
Lack of awareness of student  
needs, and stigma  
Need accountability in schools  
and other settings

**Parents and whānau**

Issues with non-inclusive practice  
and attitudes  
Adequate resources for seamless  
transition  
Supportive learning environment  
Lack of awareness of student needs,  
and stigma

**Teachers**

Positive relationships, coordination  
and effective practices that support  
seamless transition  
Adequate resources for seamless  
transition  
Support for young people in secondary  
and post-school  
Focus on life skills and work experience

**Schools and early learning services**

Adequate resources for seamless  
transition  
Positive relationships, coordination  
and effective practices that support  
seamless transition  
Early needs identification  
Early intervention  
Fluid curriculum provision

### Support staff

Positive relationships, coordination and effective practices that support seamless transition

Adequate resources for seamless transition

Supportive learning environment

### School board members

Adequate resources for seamless transition

Positive relationships, coordination and effective practices that support seamless transition

Early intervention

### Learning Support Practitioners

Adequate resources for seamless transition

Positive relationships, coordination and effective practices that support seamless transition

Early intervention

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## SCOPE AREA 2

### Access to supports

Many stakeholders voiced the difficulties they had experienced in trying to get support for high and very high needs students in early learning services and schools. They told of the negative effects for students, parents, teachers, teacher aides, and early learning services and schools when the additional support and knowledge that would make a real difference for these students remained out of reach or took too long to achieve. Submissions described students falling through the cracks of what seemed like too rigid criteria for ORS, High Health Needs, In-Class Support, and Te Kau Tōi—Intensive Wraparound Service.

Equity was a strong theme in the submissions made around access to supports. People perceived that access to support was complex, and too dependent on the knowledge and willingness of individual school staff and professionals, and availability of particular evidence to make successful applications, especially for ORS. This added to the sense that the support was too rationed: that the current suite of individual supports was not designed to ensure that every child with high or very high needs would have their needs met.

*Don't try to get the exact pigeonhole—so much time is wasted testing and re-testing, applying, and reapplying for financial assistance, and waiting and waiting and reapplying.*  
(Lived experience of an unmet need for individualised support)

*The form filling required to get ORS funding is so complex and takes SENCO hours of work only to have it declined. One year with support from the local MoE office I submitted an ORS application 3 times only to have it declined every time. At this point, I asked if someone could come and observe this child in class. They flew 2 people up from Wellington, they spent less than half a day with and categorised him as very high ORS and he was to be classified as this for the rest of his schooling. If the battles for funding could be reduced and the support provided, we could really make a difference to these students.* (School)

Parents told of schools turning them away because their child was not ORS-funded, and the school felt it could not afford the teacher aide time and other supports that would be needed to include their child. Others spoke of schools reluctant to take their child when they read their ORS application, because they focused so much on what a child could not do. If ORS applications succeeded, they did not guarantee the support needed in each situation, because the formula did not work well for every student, or every schooling situation, and depended also on the availability of specialist support or equipment. Students who needed both High Health Needs support and ORS-funded support could only access one of these funding pools. There was a marked call for the ORS process, funding, and criteria to be reviewed.

*Remove the ORS barrier, allow all children with learning difficulties to get the right resources and support, gain access to the right school* (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)

*The criteria for ORS are too rigid and miss a lot of students who have high needs, but do not fall into the set categories.* (Learning Support Practitioner)

*Remove the 'in or out' system of funding approval. Provide some flexibility. Consider short-mid-term funding for ORS—used to have a reviewable scheme.* (Teacher and parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)

Insufficient and inequitable access to specialist support was another strong theme here. Examples were given of long wait times, months, or years, to be seen by a specialist who was a gatekeeper to accessing support that would make a real difference for a child's learning. Only some families could afford to access specialists themselves. Specialists such as speech language therapists, occupational therapists, and educational psychologists were in too short supply—particularly those employed by the Ministry of Education—and inequitably distributed. School staff wanted more of these specialists working with the child and them in schools, rather than just periodic advice.

*Many parents end up having to seek private help. For example, speech therapy, learning assessments, occupational therapy, as the resource is limited, difficult to obtain, not timely. (Teacher)*

*It was unbelievable to us that the Ed Psych was going to give us suggestions on how to work with this particular student without ever observing him in class, spending time with his family or even being on our school site. This has to change. (School)*

*Access for specialist supports should be easily available in a timely manner and should be based within schools or clusters of schools, rather than the current consultative model. Perhaps this could be similar to how LSCs work from within the schools they support, as it will give teachers hands on access to the therapists and specialists quickly when necessary. (Disability community/organisations)*

Students' mental health needs were also seen as going unaddressed, with calls for counsellors in schools. Particular programmes and approaches beyond schools were also mentioned here.

Teacher aides were also seen as essential to the effective inclusion of children with high or very high support needs. Submissions sought a change in the way they were funded—towards central funding based on school roll—rather than tied as they are now to particular funding pools and limited to often inadequate number of hours. It was hard to meet a child's needs if the hours were insufficient, the government funding received was less than teacher aide costs, and if schools could not offer ongoing employment with sufficient hours to make the role viable for experienced teacher aides. Parents spoke of the difficulties of having their child only able to attend school for a limited number of hours.

*When my child had just started school, the school told me that they were not allowed to ask me to pay for the teacher aide and that the school would go under if they had to top up the teacher aide hours. I felt like that they were expecting me to offer to, even though we are not in a financial position to do so. I felt that I had to keep my child at home more than other families because my child was costing too much to the school. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

*Centralised funding for support staff, including an allocation of teacher aides for schools based on roll size to ensure schools have a consistent and ongoing resource (as schools do for teachers). (Lived experience of inequitable access to individualised support and teacher)*

*Every class to have a permanent, full-time teacher aide, so that there is consistency and knowledge of kids and their needs even with relieving teachers. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

Early learning services also experienced difficulties with providing and accessing sufficient support for children with high or very high needs, compounding their needs when they reached school age.

*Many Kaiako in early childhood education find it difficult to articulate a child's learning needs in a way that will clearly meet the criteria of ORS—because of this limited knowledge and experience writing this application. (No category given)*

*Children with learning needs are not receiving the supports and expert knowledge they need soon enough. Waiting lists do not work in early childhood—when parents have just learnt that their child is struggling with learning they feel in limbo as they are needing to wait 9 months for some support. When*



*they do receive this support, it is minimal. We need to recognize that when families are engaged with the processes of intervention it makes an incredible difference to the child's learning outcomes.*

(No category given)

Because people were finding the new Learning Support Co-ordinator role useful, submissions found it inequitable that they were yet to be funded for all schools. Submissions also sought SENCOs in every school.

**TABLE 3 Key themes for Scope Area 2 Access to supports—the numbers**

Theme	% of submissions
Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources, and supports	65
Review ORS process, funding, and criteria	46
Equitable and easier access to specialists	42
Accessible and clear information about processes and available support	37
Equitable and easier access to teacher aides and teacher aide funding	34
Improving application processes and assessments, less wait time	25
Equitable provision of Learning Support Coordinators and SENCOs	21
Adequate resources and equitable access to specialists and support workers in mainstream schools	19
Access to support for mental health and wellbeing	15
Equitable access for rural areas	13
Widen criteria for individualised support	13
Greater clarity, transparency, and simplicity in applications	12
More support for children in early learning services	12
Access to supports for teachers	10

## Top themes for each stakeholder group

Adequate and equitable access to supports was the most important theme for nine of the 10 stakeholder groups, followed closely for most of these by equitable and easier access to specialists or accessible and clear information about processes and support.

### **Lived experience, Unmet needs**

Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources and supports  
Accessible and clear information about processes and available support  
Equitable and easier access to specialists

### **Lived experience, Inequitable access to individualised support**

Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources and supports  
Equitable and easier access to specialists  
Accessible and clear information about processes and available support

### **Lived experience, received individualised support**

Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources and supports  
Accessible and clear information about processes and available support  
Equitable and easier access to teacher aides

## **Disability community and organisations**

### **Review ORS**

Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources and supports  
Accessible and clear information about processes and available support

## **Parents and whānau**

Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources and supports  
Accessible and clear information about processes and available support

### Teachers

Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources and supports

Equitable and easier access to specialists

Equitable and easier access to teacher aides

### Schools and early learning services

Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources and supports

Equitable and easier access to specialists

Review ORS

### Support staff

Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources and supports

Equitable and easier access to teacher aides

Accessible and clear information about processes and available support

### School board members

Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources and supports

Accessible and clear information about processes and available support

Equitable and easier access to specialists

### Learning Support Practitioners

Equitable and easier access to specialists

Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources and supports

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## SCOPE AREA 3

### Responsiveness of supports

A key theme here was the importance of support that was tailored to the individual student. To achieve this, many parents and whānau, and professionals, stressed the importance of involving the child and their parents and whānau in deciding what supports were needed. Some parents noted that their knowledge was disregarded rather than used where it could have been useful for the child, teacher, and others.

People wanted the individual education planning process to be a reality that brought together the 'team' of child, family, educationalists, and specialists to review progress and decide next steps. Some parents and whānau were sufficiently disenchanted with their experiences and the frustrations encountered in getting timely and appropriate support for their child that they wanted to be given funding whose use they would determine.

*Focus on the child needs and get their input to possible solutions. Feeling safe and valued is so important in learning. (Paediatrician)*

*It was easier for me to talk to my parents about what I wanted and why. I could explain to them what was going on. What my mindset was. They could then talk to my teacher about what I wanted and needed. My parents really helped me in not having a teacher aide all the time like the school wanted. Good needs to reflect what the child and parents want in the matter. (Lived experience of an unmet need for individualised support)*

*Listen to the parents. Learn from their experiences. Hear their needs. Some SENCOs/principals could do this a lot better. More respect and collaboration. (Teacher and parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

*Engage with whānau and have them seen as equal experts and central in the team. (Learning Support Practitioner)*

Having support that could be relied on was also important. It was difficult when applications had to be made at different stages of the learning journey, there was a loss of good relationships and knowledge when children moved between learning stages, such as from an early learning service to primary school and had to access new specialists or support, or progress meant loss of the support that was needed to continue the gains. Long waiting times for specialist diagnoses and support were a particular issue. Some of the problems encountered were in the health system, as well as within education.

*A support pathway that is established early and that doesn't disengage or close because of a calendar date. (Learning Support Practitioner)*

*Shorter wait times, 2 years' wait to see an educational psychologist, 2 years' wait for behaviour support, 12 to 18 month waits for occupational therapists, and that's only to address one or two areas of concern. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

*A faster response when the unmet learning need is tipping over into extreme behaviour at school, that not only affects the student concerned, but the other students in class. (Lived experience of unmet need, Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga, teacher)*

*We need ways to minimise delay in access to services and recognition that there will be acute situations where an urgent response is required. (Disability community/organisation)*

*A system of support that is not compartmentalised and fragmented is needed. There also needs to be ready access to specialists and expertise across agencies for parents, whānau and schools and more consistent outcomes when students with highest needs are accessing these supports. (Disability community/organisation)*

Strengths-based approaches were recommended because they were more effective and respected the child and their whānau. Submissions contrasted this approach with the deficit orientation they experienced in, for example, ORS criteria, or with school staff, that impedes student growth, and adds to parents' emotional stress.

*A positive start to school for my child where the focus is not on everything that is negative about my child. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

*An Amazing Teacher who sees my child for what they are, not what they cannot do. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

*My experience—for children with FASD—is that improving learning outcomes, achieving potential, and facilitating passions, strengths, aspirations, engagement by an order of magnitude, concurs with the literature i.e. that Learning Stories, and personal Learning portfolios, iteratively reviewed, are a critical element for setting up children with FASD for lifelong success. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

*The support staff that work with our daughter in the fields of OT, SLT and the SEA are all incredibly passionate and skilled in their area of expertise. We benefit greatly from their contribution as does the school and the staff working with our daughter. When these support staff work with us we are talking in a abilities sense—the OT/SLT/SEA is talking about what our daughter CAN do and therefore how we can stretch her or support her to explore and learn more. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

Current assessment and support were seen as insufficiently grounded in te ao Māori. Shortages of te reo speaking teachers and specialists, and resources in te reo Māori for schools and whānau, were noted. This was particularly evident for kura kaupapa Māori and other immersion settings. Other cultures were also not sufficiently catered for; the deaf sign-language community also sought more use of sign language by teacher aides and teachers working with their students.

*We should not have to compromise on our cultural values in order to access education that will support our daughter's learning needs. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

There was support for family and whānau choice of school, whether within mainstream, or specialist. This was largely based on perceptions that not every local school would provide their child what they needed. Some wanted easier access to specialist schools; some wanted to be able to move schools if the closest school was not supportive of their child and family. Some wanted schools not to be able to decline students.

*Students be able to enrol at their school of choice and have advice available to them to make the best decisions about choice of school. (Learning Support Practitioner)*

*Increase access to specialist schools. Families deserve choice. If the Specialist Schools are all full and families are being turned away. We must look at what is not working in mainstream provision and correct that before reducing capacity of specialist schools. (Teacher)*

*A family should have the genuine choice to go to mainstream or a specialist school. The decision should not be forced to go to a specialist school because at a mainstream school their child can only attend part time, they don't receive adequate support (such as teacher aides and/or specialist support), or they have to take too many days of work because the mainstream school can't manage.*

(Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)

*Schools should not have the right to decline a student's enrolment based on the fact they will 'cost too much to have them enrolled'. Equally MoE funding should not be so far off the actual costs associated with supporting a student's access to education to enable this deficit to be a real concern for a school.*

(Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)

There were positive comments about RTLB support for teachers and schools, particularly around greater responsiveness, support for transitions from early learning services to schools and between schools, and their provision of professional learning and development. Submissions also noted that the RTLB service could be stretched.

*RTLB liaison person for our school is outstanding. Soooo approachable and willing to help us. (SENCO)*

*RTLB are actively listening and seeking input of what PLD is required. We have direct, open and regular access to our RTLB Cluster Manager. (School leader)*

*RTLB aren't closing cases and doing transition work is much more effective recently. (Lived experience of an unmet need for individualised support, teacher and Learning Support Practitioner)*

Difficulties were noted for Te Kura because while it has a substantial share of students with the highest needs, it falls outside the current Learning Support Delivery Model, meaning it cannot access support such as RTLBs, Learning Support Co-ordinators, and IWS.

**TABLE 4 Key themes for Scope Area 3 Responsiveness of supports—the numbers**

Theme	% of submissions
Tamariki and whānau centred approach, including whānau in decision-making and planning	43
Timely, consistent, and ongoing support	37
Equitable and more funding	31
Tailored learning and individualised support	23
Holistic, needs-driven approach	23
Strengths-based/trauma-informed approach	19
Too long a time taken to respond to need	15
No alternative funding for support if a student does not meet criteria	13
Māori and Pasifika students need culturally appropriate teaching and support	11
Family and whānau choice of school	11
RTLB providing positive support	10

## Top themes for each stakeholder group

Having a tamariki- and whānau-centred approach was important for all the stakeholder groups, with timely, consistent, and ongoing support, and equitable and more funding also found in most of their top themes. Strengths-based approaches were particularly important to those with lived experience, to disability groups, and to school boards.

### **Lived experience, Unmet needs**

Tamariki- and whānau-centred approach  
Timely, consistent and ongoing support  
Strengths-based approach

### **Lived experience, Inequitable access to individualised support**

Tamariki- and whānau-centred approach  
Timely, consistent and ongoing support  
Equitable and more funding  
Strengths-based approach

### **Lived experience, received individualised support**

Tamariki and whānau centred approach  
Timely, consistent and ongoing support  
Strengths-based approach

### **Disability community and organisations**

Tamariki- and whānau-centred approach  
Strengths-based approach

### **Parents and whānau**

Tamariki- and whānau-centred approach  
Timely, consistent and ongoing support  
Equitable and more funding

### Teachers

Equitable and more funding  
Tamariki- and whānau-centred  
approach  
Timely, consistent and ongoing  
support

### Schools and early learning services

Equitable and more funding  
Tamariki- and whānau-centred  
approach  
Timely, consistent and ongoing  
support

### Support staff

Equitable and more funding  
Tamariki- and whānau-centred  
approach  
Timely, consistent and ongoing  
support

### School board members

Equitable and more funding  
Tamariki- and whānau-  
centred approach  
Timely, consistent and  
ongoing support  
Strength-based

### Learning Support Practitioners

Timely, consistent and ongoing  
support  
Tamariki -and whānau-centred  
approach  
Equitable and more funding



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## SCOPE AREA 4

### Fluid boundaries

Sharing information about an individual child to better support their learning journey was a key theme here. People regretted time lost without information from a child's previous school or early learning service, or from agencies and specialists who had worked with the child. Time that educators and parents and whānau spent chasing up information was time that could have been better spent working with the child. There was definite interest in having a single information and data-sharing system like the national health records, allowing access to the child, parents and whānau, and those working with the child, while preserving their privacy. Some also spoke of standardised transition forms to ensure that information was passed between schools and RTLB clusters when students changed schools or areas.

*We always had issues with the absence of transference of information from year to year, and from support person to support person. Every year felt like a reinventing the wheel situation.*  
(Disability community/organisation)

*A nationwide tracking scheme to be available. You need to be able to find out information about many of these kids now, not a month after they arrive. RTLB should be able to access the files of other RTLB clusters to see what was put in place for these children in their last school. Agencies should have the right to pass on relevant information about a child without fear of breaching privacy.*  
(Teacher and Learning Support Practitioners)

*All schools should be required to share information with parents about their child and for it to be required to be supplied to the child's new school.* (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)

*Having information transferred and given to people involved with the young person so that the whānau does not have to keep retraining teachers/teacher aides.* (Disability community/organisation)

Students struggling with non-inclusive school environments was another key theme. Innovative learning environments, a lack of sensory breakout spaces, accessible toilets and bathrooms, and fencing that allowed students access to the whole school grounds rather than isolating them were mentioned as barriers. Property modifications and equipment should be ready for a student, rather than taking months or years, or happening too late for the student to use. They should not be reliant on a particular school's funds. New schools should be designed for inclusion.

*Wheelchair access and modifications to the school environment took place but unfortunately only four years after planning.* (Board member and Support Staff)

*Make adding ramps etc easy and mandatory. Have things ready in all schools so when a child with a disability comes in, no matter what it is, the school is all ready to go! Stop making everything a fight.*  
(Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)

*There was never a quiet place to go where I could feel comfortable and complete my work with less noise and pressure.* (Lived experience of an unmet need for individualised support)

*Many students with sensory issues do not cope in modern learning environments, so the environment itself becomes the problem.* (Disability community/organisation)

*Safer school environments will reduce risks and improve the opportunities for the focus to go on learning and social skills.* (Learning Support Early Intervention)

Strengthening the inclusion of students within mainstream schools was also a key theme here, with comments on the importance of supportive peers, and, for parents of a student with high or very high support needs, being welcomed and accepted as part of a community. People noted here that inclusion needs sufficient resourcing, support, and capability, as well as attitude, to succeed.

*I would like to see parents, the school and the MOE working together to support my child's education. I want my child to have the support, including adequate teacher aide support, to go to their local mainstream school with their siblings. I would like my child to have a life where they are included in their local school and community and not segregated from society.* (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)

*Mainstream schools to be upskilled and resourced better so that students don't fail, don't get bullied, don't fall further behind, don't get segregated, don't get into bad habits that are hard to break (e.g., behaviours).* (Specialist school)

*Inclusion should be the aim for all children—but only if it is supported. The barrier that exists is that there is not enough support, knowledge, or skills in college to allow for this within the wider teaching staff.* (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)

Other key themes here showed general support for more fluidity to meet the needs of individual students.

Some wanted greater parental choice of school, citing difficulties if the local school whose zone a child lived in could not or would not meet their needs. Others sought more flexible enrolment, across several schools, or flexible attendance.

Some stakeholders wanted to see schools working together more, so that individual children's needs are well met, and that specialist support is not dependent on their attending a specialist school. Positive comments were made about using specialist school outreach teachers for ORS students in mainstream schools, but more wanted this support, or to work with organisations that had expertise with particular needs. Positive comments were also made about Kāhui Ako supporting better transitions and response to individual student need.

TABLE 5 Key themes for Scope Area 4 Fluid boundaries—the numbers

Theme	% of submissions
Need to share information	22
Supporting through appropriate property environment	20
Strengthen inclusion and belonging in mainstream settings	17
Share resources and expertise across settings	9
Accommodating local school	9
Flexible enrolment and attendance	9
Zoning and placement in particular school	8
More fluidity in the system	8
Kāhui Ako supporting more collaboration and support for transition	7
Supports and resources stay with student in different learning settings	7
More outreach from specialist schools and organisations	6

## Top themes for each stakeholder group

Those with lived experience, disability groups, and parents spoke more about strengthening inclusion here.

### **Lived experience, Unmet needs**

Strengthen inclusion in mainstream settings  
Need to share information  
Share resources and expertise across settings

### **Lived experience, Inequitable access to individualised support**

Strengthen inclusion in mainstream settings  
Share resources and expertise across settings  
Need to share information

### **Lived experience, received individualised support**

Strengthen inclusion in mainstream settings  
Share resources and expertise across settings  
Need to share information

### **Disability community and organisations**

Strengthen inclusion in  
mainstream settings

### **Parents and whānau**

Strengthen inclusion in mainstream  
settings  
Support through appropriate  
property environment

### Teachers

Support through appropriate  
property environment  
Need to share information  
Strengthen inclusion in mainstream  
settings

### Schools and early learning services

Need to share information  
Support through appropriate  
property environment

### Support staff

Need to share information  
Positive experiences in local school

### School board members

Need to share information  
Support through appropriate  
property environment

### Learning Support Practitioners

Need to share information  
Support through appropriate  
property environment  
Share resources and expertise  
across settings

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## SCOPE AREA 5

# Support for adults across the system

The strongest theme in the submissions was the importance of the professionals responsible for students with high or very high needs having sufficient understanding of inclusive practice and universal design for learning, and the knowledge needed to support the learning of these students well. People wanted the ground to be well laid in initial teacher education, followed through at schools and early learning services for teachers and teacher aides at a general level, and customised for the different needs of individual students, with up-to-date knowledge of effective strategies.

*Teacher training—making sure initial teacher education courses have compulsory papers around supporting diverse learners and learning about specific learning disabilities.*

(Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga and Resource Teacher: Literacy)

*Teacher Training needs an upheaval. Our beginning teachers are unprepared for the needs of the students in their classes.* (Teacher)

*Greater access to PLD supporting curriculum adaption and strategies for all learners to be successful is critically needed. We would like to see greater tailor-made opportunities also for parents to be supported with their own growth and knowledge.* (Board member)

*Teachers need to be better trained and equipped to teach students with high needs and have the skills to identify the ones that need more support. Teachers need to be equipped with skills to differentiate instruction for their students.* (Learning Support Practitioner)

*Appropriate training for those charged with responsibility for learning and care plans. Current research guiding best approaches and what matters for those with high needs as they live their life through each phase.* (School leader and SENCO)

*We have organised several Professional Development Learning opportunities that became evident out of the Learning Needs Register across the Kāhui Ako. Teachers, teacher aides and leadership teams were given practical strategies to take away and try. So far this has included Anxiety, Behaviour Management and Specific Learning Disabilities (dyslexia, dysgraphia etc). The professional development is also offered to our parents within our community, so we are working with the same language and information.* (Teacher)

*If teachers and families have effective relationships and open communication, it is the first step. Then support teachers with effective PLD. Some of the PLD should be compulsory. Who provides the PLD to support these teachers should also be evaluated. It needs to be people with practical experience in working with children with specific needs, for example, let the Down Syndrome Association people provide the PLD on supporting students with Down Syndrome.* (Disability community/organisation)

Early learning teachers sought more understanding of the signs of different conditions so that they could seek specialist support early. Professional learning was also emphasised for SENCOs and Learning Support Co-ordinators.

People also mentioned the importance of not adding to high workloads, and therefore the value of having release time for professional learning and working together. Smaller class sizes were also sought.

Good communication and collaboration were particularly emphasised as important, between and with early learning services, schools, parents and whānau, and different agencies involved.

*A fundamental principle of Te Tiriti is partnership and the development of relationships. If there is a way more could be done in this space, it would make it easier for us as parents. As parents of a child with special needs, it would make things more mauri tau knowing that there is a joint, collaborative effort towards a common goal for our youth. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

*More support than someone ringing you once a year to see if you are doing ok and let's just tick over the funding. Teacher aide get hired, no-one gets in touch with me to come meet them and "have a chat". Nobody knows their child as well as their parents. They don't see what goes on outside of school, school gets the best of these children, and we get the grumpy stuff at the end, oh and wait till they start playing you against the teacher aide, and the teacher aide starts sending notes home that your daughter isn't happy. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga and teacher)*

*Communication between teacher aide and parents should happen at least once a week. I think schools need to listen to parents a bit more. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

*An understanding that meetings are just one aspect of the process, and these need to be followed up with practical support and resources for teachers and children to achieve goals, rather than a meet and walk away, and expect things to happen approach. (Principal and SENCO)*

*Collaboration, connectedness, and cohesion are happening when we resource it ourselves (at the expense of other budgets) AND when the agencies are resourced.*

*(Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga, Teacher, Board member and School leader)*

*Praise for teachers, teacher aides, and other roles – school leaders, specialist support, and roles such as SENCO and RTLB that are all important for these students' learning and wellbeing.*

*(Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga and teacher)*

*Our daughter's teachers have been extremely willing to learn new things and go outside their comfort zones to support her. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

*Experienced and passionate teacher aides and teachers. A principal who is respectful and places family at the heart of everything. Great inclusiveness of High Needs students in the mainstream setting.*

*(Lived experience of inequitable access to individualised support, SENCO, Learning Support Practitioner, and board member)*

*Great, enthusiastic, kind and empathetic teacher aides and teachers. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

*Our current ORS support lady from the Ministry of Education is amazing, taking time she probably can't afford to support our new teacher aides. (School)*

Sharing between professionals and parents and whānau of effective strategies that engage individual students and support their learning and development was seen as important. Submissions described the arduous work for parents if they were left alone to make sense of their child's needs, and of the supports available, and put together evidence to access support. There were costs for parents' employment and wellbeing if they were left alone to navigate a complex system for getting support, or their child's needs were only partially met, with parents expected to be available in situations where a child responded negatively to what parents saw as provision that was not well-informed. Some parents who had seen home schooling as their only recourse after poor experiences of schools spoke of their unmet needs for support.

*Having someone alongside families to tautoko/support them is also important. Whānau/families are often intimidated by schools and teachers etc., so having someone they trust with them is ideal.*

*(School or early learning service)*

*I want more support for families—because I am doing this all alone and it is a lot. I am in a room with 8 specialists having to be heard while they negotiate who will/can do what—and for my son often the answer was not a lot because he didn't meet the threshold. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

*We want to see more help with respite care so parents can get a rest and recharge so then they can have the energy to act on the suggestions given by the support agencies involved. (Parent/caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

TABLE 6 Key themes for Scope Area 5 Support for adults across the system—the numbers

Theme	% of submissions
Need for professional learning and development (PLD)	75
Communication and collaboration are important	32
Dedication and hard work of school staff and professionals	21
Value of having established relationships and clear roles	20
Initial teacher education needs improvement	17
Release time is important	16
Importance of whānau support from professionals	14
Smaller class sizes and teacher: student ratios	13
Negative impacts for parents of having no support	11

## Top themes for each stakeholder group

All the stakeholder groups' top themes put professional learning and development at the top. Those with lived experience and parents and whānau included initial teacher education, as well as the dedication and hard work of school staff and professionals. Professionals included established relationships and clear roles.

### Lived experience, Unmet needs

Need for professional learning and development  
Initial teacher education needs improvement  
Dedication and hard work of school staff and professionals

### Lived experience, Inequitable access to individualised support

Need for professional learning and development  
Initial teacher education needs improvement  
Communication and collaboration are important  
Dedication and hard work of school staff and professionals

**Lived experience, received individualised support**

Need for professional learning and development

Initial teacher education needs improvement

Communication and collaboration are important

Dedication and hard work of school staff and professionals

**Disability community and organisations**

Need for professional learning  
and development

**Parents and whānau**

Need for professional learning and  
development

Negative impacts for parents of no  
support

Initial teacher education needs  
improvement

Dedication and hard work of school  
staff and professionals

**Teachers**

Need for professional learning and  
development

Release time

Value of established relationships  
and clear roles

Dedication and hard work of school  
staff and professionals

**Schools and early learning services**

Need for professional learning and  
development

Value of established relationships  
and clear roles



### Support staff

Need for professional learning  
and development

Importance of whānau support

Communication and collaboration  
are important

### School board members

Need for professional  
learning and development

Value of established  
relationships and clear roles

### Learning Support Practitioners

Need for professional learning  
and development

Value of established  
relationships and clear roles

Communication and  
collaboration are important

Release time

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## SCOPE AREA 6

### Alignment across agencies

Submissions noted that supporting the learning of a student with high or very high needs depended on different teams and agencies working together, sharing information about need, identifying and supplying relevant resourcing, and giving the early childhood learning and school staff working with a student hands-on knowledge and advice. They lamented siloed approaches that could lead to a student missing out on support, and the complexity for parents and schools in accessing support.

*It is an avalanche of information and things get lost in all the many appointments and things to stay on top of. (Disability community/organisation)*

*Another challenge is the complexity of labyrinthine government systems. Learning how the health, the education, and the social sector work are each big tasks in and of themselves. Not only that, but each school, hospital, and territorial area have different systems, services, and processes. It is a lot to keep on top of! Sometimes it is not that supports aren't there, it's that the parent doesn't know where to find them or what questions to ask. (Disability community/organisation)*

*Better alignment between Oranga Tamariki and the MoE. I feel that we are being told by one group that it is the other party we should be approaching and vice versa, especially with regards to accessing funding. (Teacher)*

*We want to see all agencies knowing about all other agencies involved in this area. We want to be told yes I know the answer or I know someone who will. Not I don't know. There is nothing more stressful than a 'I don't know' by a specialist agency. (Parent, caregiver, whānau, aiga)*

Some sourced the siloed approaches to different knowledge and approaches; some to insufficient funding and staffing of teams, within the Ministry of Education and beyond, in (what were) district health boards, Oranga Tamariki.

*There is often a clash in terms of the language used by different groups who are stakeholders who might come from different philosophical positions (medical vs social model of disability, individual vs whole class models of support, direct vs consultative models of support), and this can cause confusion, disputes, and a lack of action for the child. Effective working together across agencies will be critical and in particular, Health, Education, Oranga Tamariki, MSD, will need to work more effectively together. (Learning Support Practitioner)*

*Very little support available from external agencies. The agencies we have are overwhelmed and do not communicate with each other. We need to make multiple referrals to multiple agencies which then overwhelms whānau. (Teacher and school leader)*

*Agencies do not or cannot work together effectively because of outdated policies and procedures or funding restrictions that prevent them from doing so. (Learning Support Practitioner)*

*Budget sits behind so many of the tensions and contributes to so many of the gaps and double ups. (Parent, caregiver/whānau/aiga)*

Many would like more hands-on support.

*MOE staff are fabulous and so thinly stretched it is impossible for them to be where they are needed. We don't need more service managers; we need more field staff. (Teacher)*

*I couldn't agree more that there needs to be connection and alignment across agencies. However, we need to make sure that this doesn't just increase meetings and/ or paperwork, there needs to be hands on practical support for teachers. (School or early learning service)*

*More fluid allocation of resources and more transdisciplinary approaches to working with high needs students. All too often I've been to meetings with a student that will have 2-3 different specialists from the same discipline (e.g., OT/SLT/PT etc) because each of them works for a different organisation involved with the child. It's ridiculous. (Learning Support Practitioner)*

Some noted different boundaries for services that made it hard for collaboration; for example, between Ministry learning support roles and RTLB regions.

Examples were given, however, of good local collaboration within education, such as between Ministry of Education Learning Support roles and RTLBs, and in rural areas and towns between education, health and social agencies, made easier when there was more holistic funding such as Strengthening Families. There was support for wrap-around approaches that formed around an individual student and their whānau, and gave them a lead person to coordinate.

*Our meetings where we have LSC/SENCO/PHN/RTLB liaison person present to discuss caseloads work well. One stop shop for sharing of info. Love having the support of Health in the Education sector as it's so often needed!! (Teacher)*

*Good co-working between RTLB and Learning Support also enables schools to get the most appropriate agencies in to support and when involved the agencies work to create an open, culturally sensitive relationship with the whānau to understand what they want and what is important to them. (School)*

*Cross-sharing between schools and agencies has enabled us to learn more on the fly. We are continually building our practice through inter-professional learning. (Learning Support Practitioner)*

Inclusive education frameworks and legislation, such as the New Zealand Disability Strategy, the provisions within the Education and Training Act 2020, the Enabling Good Lives principles, and the United Nations were also mentioned here as needing to be actively used by the agencies with responsibility for high and very high needs students.

**TABLE 7 Key themes for Scope Area 6 Alignment across agencies—the numbers**

Theme	% of
Agencies, services, and teams need to be engaged and collaborate	43
Holistic, wraparound approach needed	23
Better communication and collaboration within and across Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health	18
Have a lead person or single contact across agencies for families	16
Overlap, inconsistencies, and lack of coordination between agencies	15
Need more staff on the ground	15
Base service delivery and support on key inclusive education frameworks and legislation	8

## Top themes for each stakeholder group

The top themes were common across nine of the stakeholder groups. Those with lived experience with unmet need or inequitable access to individualised support, and those who were Learning Support Practitioners also emphasised a lead person or single contact across the agencies for families. The disability community emphasised the central role inclusive education frameworks and legislation should play in service delivery and support.

### **Lived experience, Unmet needs**

Agencies, services and teams need to be engaged and collaborate  
 Holistic, wraparound approach needed  
 Lead person or single contact across agencies for families

### **Lived experience, Inequitable access to individualised support**

Agencies, services and teams need to be engaged and collaborate  
 Holistic, wraparound approach needed  
 Lead person or single contact across agencies for families

### **Lived experience, received individualised support**

Agencies, services and teams need to be engaged and collaborate  
 Holistic, wraparound approach needed

### **Disability community and organisations**

Base service delivery and support  
 on key inclusive education  
 frameworks and legislation

### **Parents and whānau**

Agencies, services and teams need to  
 be engaged and collaborate  
 Holistic, wraparound approach  
 needed

### Teachers

Agencies, services and teams need to be engaged and collaborate  
Holistic, wraparound approach needed

### Schools and early learning services

Agencies, services and teams need to be engaged and collaborate  
Holistic, wraparound approach needed

### Support staff

Agencies, services and teams need to be engaged and collaborate  
Holistic, wraparound approach needed

### School board members

Agencies, services and teams need to be engaged and collaborate  
Holistic, wraparound approach needed

### Learning Support Practitioners

Agencies, services and teams need to be engaged and collaborate  
Holistic, wraparound approach needed  
Lead person or single contact across agencies for families

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## APPENDIX

# Organisations that took part in the Highest Needs Review consultation

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|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ADD Information Service</li><li>• Altogether Autism</li><li>• Autism NZ</li><li>• Barnardo's</li><li>• Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ)</li><li>• Blind Low Vision NZ</li><li>• CCS Disability Action Northern Region</li><li>• Champion Centre Agency</li><li>• Children's Autism Foundation</li><li>• Deaf Action NZ</li><li>• Disability Connect</li><li>• Disabled Persons Assembly NZ</li><li>• Disability Rights Commissioner</li><li>• DPO Coalition</li><li>• Dyslexia Foundation</li><li>• Dyslexia New Zealand Evidence Based Support Group</li><li>• Enabling Good Lives (EGL) Christchurch</li><li>• Education Review Office (ERO)</li><li>• Family Network</li><li>• Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Care Action Network (FASD-CAN)</li><li>• Foetal Anti-Convulsant Syndrome New Zealand (FACSNZ)</li><li>• Fragile X New Zealand Trust</li><li>• IHC</li><li>• Inclusive Education Action Group (IEAG)</li><li>• Inclusive Greens</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Institute of Educational and Developmental Psychology (IEDP)</li><li>• Ko Taku Reo Deaf Education New Zealand</li><li>• Learning Differences Aotearoa Trust</li><li>• Māori Ora at VUW</li><li>• Mana Ake Pacific</li><li>• McKenzie Centre</li><li>• Ministry of Education Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC)</li><li>• Ministry of Education Youth Advisory Group</li><li>• New Zealand Association of Intermediate Middle Schooling</li><li>• New Zealand Down Syndrome Association (NZDSA)</li><li>• New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI)</li><li>• New Zealand Foundation for Conductive Education (NZFCE)</li><li>• New Zealand Principal's Federation (NZPF)</li><li>• New Zealand Qualifications Agency (NZQA)</li><li>• New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA)</li><li>• NOT Limited Occupational Therapy</li><li>• Occupational Therapy New Zealand</li><li>• Office for Disability Issues (ODI) Parent Group</li><li>• Oranga Tamariki</li><li>• Otago Youth Wellness Trust</li><li>• Pasifika Autism Support Group</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parent to Parent New Zealand</li><li>• Parents of Vision Impaired New Zealand</li><li>• PPTA Secondary Principals Council</li><li>• PPTA Te Wehengarua</li><li>• Prader-Willi Syndrome Association New Zealand (PWS)</li><li>• Rare Disorders New Zealand</li><li>• REACH Education</li><li>• Southern Cochlear Implant Programme (SCIP)</li><li>• Special Education Principals' Association NZ (SEPANZ)</li><li>• Special Education National Reference Group (SENRG)</li><li>• Taranaki Gifted Community Trust / The Head Office</li><li>• Te Akatea Principals' Association</li><li>• Te Kahu Tōi (IWS)</li><li>• Te Pou</li><li>• Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)</li><li>• The Pudey Hub Hawke's Bay Early Intervention Trust</li><li>• UpsideDowns Education Trust</li><li>• VIPS Equality in Education</li><li>• VOYCE Whakarongo Mai</li><li>• Whānau Manaaki Kindergarten Association</li><li>• Workbridge</li><li>• YES Disability Resource Centre</li><li>• Vaka Tautua</li></ul> |
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