

Briefing Note: Examples of learning support practice during COVID-19 alert level 4

To:	Hon Tracey Martin, Associate Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
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Purpose of Report

This paper provides examples of practice that have enabled continuity of learning support services to students and whānau during the COVID-19 alert level 4 lockdown period.

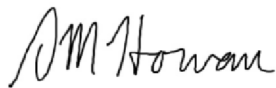
Agree that this Briefing will be proactively released.

Agree / Disagree

Summary

- Learning support practitioners have had to move at pace during these unusual times to provide support that is relevant to children and their families. Practitioners have been responsive and flexible and considerate of student and whānau wellbeing and learning support needs.
- Learning support practice has adapted:
 - Some parents, caregivers and whānau have increased involvement and agency.
 - Children are being assessed and supported in their natural home environment.
 - The use of online platforms has expanded.
 - Transdisciplinary practice is continuing.
 - Some examinations and fittings have been delayed.
 - Kaiako and teachers may have more time for professional learning and development with respect to learning support.

- A range of examples of adapted learning support practice is provided. Examples come from Speech Language Therapists, Advisors on Deaf Children, Psychologists, the Intensive Wraparound Service, Early Intervention Teachers, high and complex needs and specialist Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) teachers. There are also examples of collaborative practice where field staff have worked together to wrap support around a child and their family. We will look to provide you with further examples from Resource Teachers and Kaitakawaenga.



Susan Howan
Associate Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement and Support

17/04/2020



Hon Tracey Martin
Associate Minister of Education

28/05 2020

Background

1. Early learning services, schools and learning support field staff have always worked together to support children with additional learning needs. They are finding new ways to work together during the alert level four lockdown.

Schools, early learning services and learning support practitioners are adapting

2. Schools have been planning how they will support students with high levels of learning support needs. Plans involve adapting materials and methods to meet unique learning needs and considering how this will look in a distance learning setting.
3. Teachers and school teams are pivotal in the development of tailored distance learning programmes based on existing goals in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) – as well as in providing support to whānau to manage this at home.
4. Some schools will be using learning support registers to identify students' learning support needs and possible responses. In term 2, learning support service managers and practitioners, together with RTLB, are working with SENCOs or Learning Support Coordinators to check in with the needs of families and students. This will involve listening carefully and adapting support to meet current needs. Teacher aides/learning support assistants are also a critical part of the school teams supporting learners.
5. Learning support staff who are already involved with children and whānau will continue to check in with the child, whānau and their early learning kaiako and teacher to provide virtual guidance and support. Learning support specialists are doing virtual "home visits" and assessments, using video platforms to complete observations, undertaking telepractice sessions over the phone, and helping families to use what they have available in their homes to support the learning of their young people.
6. Like teachers and other school support staff, learning support specialists and Resource Teachers will be working differently, but their goal remains the same: to support teaching staff to connect students to the relevant curriculum by accommodating their learning needs.

Examples of adapted learning support practice

7. The following paragraphs and tables provide examples of practice that have enabled continuity of learning support services to students and whānau during the COVID-19 alert level 4 lockdown period.
8. Learning support practitioners have had to move at pace during these unusual times to provide support that is relevant to children and their families. We are all learning how to work in different ways. Practitioners have been responsive and flexible and considerate of student and whānau wellbeing and learning support needs.
9. During the lockdown period teachers and kaiako continue to be a central point of contact for students. They are finding out how students and families are doing, what their priorities are, and are tailoring a programme for learning from home, based on the existing goals in the student's IEP.

Some parents, caregivers and whānau have increased involvement and agency

10. Parents, caregivers and whānau have the flexibility to choose how they communicate with field staff, including through hardcopy correspondence, email, over the phone, by text or using video conferencing. Parents and caregivers are facilitating the collection and transfer of information about their child (including through video conferencing) with the practitioner. They are also involved with observing functions or behaviours and delivering interventions.
11. One challenge is that parents can feel overwhelmed by the responsibility to be involved in providing learning support for their child. Practitioners are aware of the need to pace support at a rate that the family can cope with.

Children are being assessed and supported in their natural home environment

12. Practitioners are now supporting children in their home environments, rather than being seen at a school, early learning service or Ministry office. Children are interacting with field staff using toys and resources that are familiar to them. Their parents or caregivers are present and engaged. There is an immediacy and 'real time' aspect to these at-home interactions that doesn't exist at a school or early learning service.
13. Children may also present differently at home and practitioners can work with parents to respond to this straight away.
14. Undertaking assessments during alert level 4 has demonstrated what can be done under restrained circumstances and what is "enough" information to develop a support plan for a child.

The use of online platforms has expanded

15. The use of online platforms to facilitate communication between practitioners, families, teachers, kaiako and other support services has expanded during the lockdown. Many practitioners and families have quickly learnt how to use new technology. Learning support practitioners have sometimes needed to coach families to download and use apps like Skype.
16. Video conferencing apps like Skype and Zoom are being used to undertake assessments and provide one-off and ongoing interventions.
17. Practitioners are sometimes needing to have shorter and more interactions with children and families, as online communication can hold a child's attention for a shorter period of time.
18. The Ministry has developed guidance for learning support practitioners about how to safely communicate and share information with parents and whānau using social media (such as Facebook, blogs, Twitter and instant messaging). The key message is that social media should be considered as a public forum – potentially anyone will be able to see posts even if settings have been adjusted to private mode. Using social media apps with a private, personal account contravenes the Ministry of Education Code of Conduct.

Transdisciplinary practice is continuing

19. Field staff have held large Zoom meetings with teachers, family, whānau and professionals providing other services (eg GP). Technology may be making these types of meetings more accessible and flexible for more people. Children and families will benefit from this wraparound planning and support.

Some examinations and fittings have been delayed

20. Physical examinations (e.g. an oral examination for speech) and fittings (e.g. for hearing aids) are not always possible. Video conferencing can help but the lighting can be inadequate and a computer camera awkward to manipulate.

Kaiako and teachers may have more time for professional learning and development

21. Some practitioners have held professional learning and development (PLD) Zoom sessions with multiple educators. In the distance learning environment, kaiako and teachers may have more time for PLD.

Examples of adapted practice

22. The examples in the following tables come from a range of learning support practitioners including:
- Speech Language Therapists
 - Advisors on Deaf Children
 - Psychologists
 - Intensive Wraparound Service staff
 - Early Intervention Teachers
 - High and complex needs specialists
 - Specialist ORS teachers.
23. There are also examples of collaborative practice where field staff have worked together to wrap support around a child and their family. We have requested further examples from Resource Teachers and Kaitakawaenga.
24. The examples are based on real cases provided by regional learning support field staff. So you can use the examples publicly, without the risk of exposing individual families, we have removed personal and identifying information.

Speech Language Therapists (SLTs)

Type of specialist	SLT
Location	Tararua
What was the adapted practice	Weekly telepractice sessions (enabling the use of features like screen sharing to bring up visual prompts for the child) to work one on one with the child, and provide feedback to mum about strategies to use between sessions.
Who was involved	SLT, child (4 ½ years), whānau
Outcome	Mum happier knowing that child is still receiving support and making progress. SLT thinks telepractice could effectively break down the barrier that travel had previously imposed on the child receiving an intensive block of speech therapy.

Type of specialist	SLT & team
Location	Bay of Plenty/Waiariki
What was the adapted practice	Setting up Zoom catch-ups to connect kaiako with families, sharing oral language and emergent literacy strategies through the centre's Facebook page, StoryPark, Educa, and email. Linking kaiako from previous Oral Language and Literacy Intervention (OLLI) training cohorts to the new OLLI Facebook page to be able to share ideas with their early childhood colleagues nationally.
Who was involved	SLT and kaiako who work with children ages 2-5 in early learning centres in the Bay Of Plenty/Waiariki region. 12 kaiako, across nine early learning services. 11 have subsequently joined the Facebook page and this is growing daily (41 members after the page being 'live' for two weeks).
Outcome	Strengthening of learning community connections and increased confidence to try new ways of working. Kaiako continuing to share innovative practice.

Type of specialist	SLT
Location	Palmerston North
What was the adapted practice	An initial home visit via Skype, rather than a physical home visit. At the beginning of the session the child came up close to the screen and started making faces. SLT engaged the child by pulling faces back to gain rapport, and then grew this into assessing his tongue and lip movements. SLT then attempted an oral examination, which was not possible due to inadequate lighting and difficulty getting the right angle. Voice quality was good enough to undertake a speech assessment, and some of a New Zealand Articulation Test. Assessment ended when child's attention wandered but it took about the usual amount of time.
Who was involved	Child (4 ½ years old), SLT and Mum
Outcome	The child's mother reported that she was happy with how the session went and with the plan to have a follow up Skype session in one week to start working on the first speech target.

Type of specialist	SLT
Location	Canterbury
What was the adapted practice	Meeting with early learning teachers and Ministry via Zoom to continue their learning about supporting oral language development.
Who was involved	SLT and 13 early learning teachers
Outcome	Positive session with the team keen to continue "meeting" and learning in this format over the next couple of weeks. Next time they will try video coaching, where teachers/parent demonstrate with a/the child the strategies suggested by the practitioner and then the practitioner uses this as a tool to reflect on this online with the whole team.

Type of specialist	SLT
Location	Central Otago Lakes District
What was the adapted practice	The SLT team are offering 'teletherapy' to families, many of whom are keen to have Zoom sessions and talk with therapists.
Who was involved	SLT, a range of children (aged 0-5) and their whānau
Outcome	The process of setting up the technology at home before the sessions seems to have led to more active participation in the sessions and involvement in the strategies used. Being a widely dispersed team used to working in isolation and remotely, the Central Lakes team has adapted to telepractice relatively easily. They are considering adding teletherapy to their suite of supports post-lockdown, to support consistency and a higher frequency of service delivery.

Advisers on Deaf Children (AoDC)

Type of specialist	AoDC
Location	North-West Auckland
What was the adapted practice	AoDC worked with family (via text) while they played with their son to gather language sample assessment data. Family texted through language samples. Later, his Mum recorded and sent through two samples.
Who was involved	AoDC, child (5 years old) and whānau
Outcome	Texting worked because the family were comfortable and excited to do this, and it created an immediacy of response, which was important to the data gathering process. Information received in a timely way and it connected the AoDC and family together in the moment.

Type of specialist	AoDC
Location	Greater Wellington
What was the adapted practice	AoDC has been working remotely with a Ministry of Health Audiologist to support a family whose child did not pass the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening test. The team has worked together with the family to fit the baby with a hearing aid, including problem solving solutions when the hearing aid did not initially fit.
Who was involved	AoDC, child (12 weeks old), family, Audiologist
Outcome	The mother reported that she felt supported to make the decision for her child to wear hearing aids. More recently, she reported that things were going a lot better, and she was very happy that her baby was wearing both hearing aids.

Psychologists

Type of specialist Location	Psychologist Waikato
What was the adapted practice	Completed a psychosocial assessment for enrolment in Te Kura. The assessment and planning was completed by three phone discussions with the family, a telephone meeting with the Child Mental Health Service counsellor and emails with the local GP. There was urgency in getting this actioned for the student so there had to be some flexibility in practice.
Who was involved	The family, young person, Child Mental Health Service counsellor and the local GP.
Outcome	The young person involved in this assessment, and their parents, have expressed their gratitude to the Psychologist at getting the work completed in a timely manner during difficult times. The young person will begin their enrolment at Te Kura in term 2.

Type of specialist Location	Psychologist Hamilton, Waikato
What was the adapted practice	Curated a list of free at home activities/tips that families can do with preschool aged children. These resources were curated with a developmental/behavioural lens. Also noted that many families do not have printers or WiFi, so included things that would only require normal household equipment or no resources at all, other than people.
Who was involved	Ministry Psychologist and colleagues targeted at preschool aged children.
Outcome	Resources have been shared with Ministry specialists so they can share with other families.

Type of specialist Location	LSC and Psychologist Napier
What was the adapted practice	Ministry Psychologist partnered with LSC to communicate with vulnerable students, other students and their families and emailed offers of support and encouragement to teachers.
Who was involved	Ministry Psychologist, LSC and a range of students/ families.
Outcome	Collaborating with the LSC on these wellbeing communications has meant that both the LSC and Ministry are aware of what feedback has been received and what support has been requested. This will enable partnering on delivery of support and ongoing responses. Teachers' report that they are feeling supported.

Type of specialist	Psychologist
Location	Botany, Auckland
What was the adapted practice	Providing phone coaching to a parent who was feeling overwhelmed with having to lead their child's learning. Usually coaching is face to face. Psychologist went through the information with the parent and identified the key concepts that each of the sessions were targeting. Together they made a plan about how the family could use daily activities such as emptying the dishwasher to target each of the concepts.
Who was involved	Psychologist and family
Outcome	Family were empowered to lead learning for their child.

Intensive Wraparound Service

Type of specialist	IWS facilitator, Psychologist
What was the adapted practice	10 people from different services participated in a Zoom meeting to look at what local natural supports were available to a family whose caregiver is immunocompromised. Having the meeting via Zoom meant more people in the whānau were able to participate than usually would be possible.
Who was involved	Whānau, IWS Facilitator, Psychologist, GP, family friends
Outcome	The wraparound team made a tighter plan which included extending mum's bubble with the GP's consent to ensure Mum and her son felt more supported with grocery shopping and some respite care. Immediate connection was made with other agencies to provide responsive, tailored and proactive support.

Early Intervention Teachers (EIT)

Type of specialist	Early Intervention Teacher
Location	Otago Southland
What was the adapted practice	EIT worked with whānau via email to set up a bike with training wheels on a platform that enables the child to peddle their heart out while remaining stationary. It was a response to a child being very active while in lockdown isolation. EIT and whānau problem solved together to come up with a solution based on what was available at home.
Who was involved	EIT and whānau
Outcome	This idea has now extended into a community of practice with a wider group of families together sharing ideas.



High and complex needs (HCN)

Type of specialist	Specialist involved HCN applications
Location	Auckland
What was the adapted practice	Ministry specialist worked with whānau, HCN coordinator and other agencies via Skype to complete a HCN application. Team decided that, due to the complexity of the questions, they would work on one question every third day, so it would not overwhelm the whānau. Questions were emailed to the caregiver and follow up was completed via phone and Skype.
Who was involved	Practitioner, whānau, HCN coordinator and other agencies
Outcome	HCN application was submitted.

Specialist ORS teachers

Type of specialist	Specialist ORS teacher, primary level school.
What was the adapted practice	When lockdown was confirmed, contact was made with all families (both ORS students and those the teacher felt could benefit from additional support) to offer assistance, provide resources and offer support. They provided a Social Story on CHANGES, signed all students up to GetEpic and filled each student's library with high interest books, arts and crafts and levelled maths books and videos. Signed all children up as VIPs to Study Ladder and assigned level 1 reading and maths tasks. The teacher is writing messages to students to encourage their progress and assign new tasks as needed. Also delivered resources and met with parents prior to lockdown when asked, including ICT and paper resources, seedlings to plant, hard copy reading books, arts and crafts.
Who was involved	Specialist ORS teacher, whānau and students
Outcome	Whānau, students and teacher remain connected and involved in home based activities and learning. Whānau is supported and the teacher takes guidance from whānau.

Other programmes

Programme	Triple P Facilitators
Location	Auckland
What was the adapted practice	Purchasing codes for online Triple P parenting programmes which can be completed by parents in their own time with check-in support from practitioners. It has been updated to include a module on COVID-19.
Who was involved	EIT and teachers in early childhood centres
Outcome	Parents can access learning online.

Programme Location	Mangere Refugee Centre Auckland
What was the practice	Distance learning preparation
What did they do	Teachers prepared hard copy materials for refugees new to New Zealand. They had barely met the students and didn't yet know their learning needs, so needed to provide a range of learning material.
Who was involved	148 residents at the Mangere refugee centre. All ages.
Outcome	Students and teachers connecting well via 'mailboxes'

Proactive Release

25. We recommend that this Briefing is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.