

**NZEI  
TE RIU ROA**

**KIA MAHI  
KOTAHĪ:  
WORKING  
TOGETHER**

**Learning Support Workforce Plan 2025-2029**

*April 2025*

## Introduction

The purpose of this plan is simple. It identifies areas for investment and intervention over a five-year period to build the workforce to embed and expand an inclusive education system in Aotearoa New Zealand that is child-centred, rights-based, strengths-based, and respects the mana of our tamariki.

In creating this plan, we have drawn on the many government reviews and evaluations that have been conducted over recent years, alongside the intergenerational wisdom of NZEI Te Riu Roa members and that of our friends in the disability sector. It is our strong view that the issues have been well traversed. Now is the time for action and investment.

The last major review for our learning support system, the Highest Needs Review, conducted between 2021 and 2023 by the previous government, identified that for every seven students receiving such support, another three may have unmet needs. Moreover, there were issues even for those getting some support. Everything stakeholders who contributed to the Review spoke of remains relevant today.<sup>1</sup>

No amount of 'rearranging of the deck chairs' by reallocating existing staffing and resourcing is going to fix deep seated issues in the capacity and capability of our system. Significant new investment is needed to transform into a fully inclusive system. Building on what already works is a critical first step.

The Minister will only meet her target of 80% of Year 8 students at or above the expected curriculum level for their age in reading, writing and maths by December 2030 if the learning needs of these children are met. A fully inclusive system means putting these children at the centre of decisions; it means:

- Prioritising early intervention so that support is offered as soon as possible.
- Enabling seamless support for ākonga through their education journey by eliminating barriers and funding cliffs between learning settings.
- Creating a genuinely inclusive system where the principle of tamariki being supported to attend their local school or centre is a reality, at the same time as leveraging some of the expertise that sits in fundholder schools and specialist schools.
- A government dedicated to quality public provision and not contracting services out and taking no responsibility.
- Giving effect to te Tiriti o Waitangi in practice and design including Māori led learning support design for kaupapa Māori education.
- A system that is equitable and consistent nationwide.

The title 'Kia mahi kotahi: Working together' reflects what is needed at the various levels of the system:

- The need identified strongly by whānau for a 'team' to be built around a child that operates collaboratively and with a shared understanding and language around the needs of mokopuna.

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<sup>1</sup> Cathy Wylie, *Highest Needs Review: What matters to stakeholders*. Wellington: NZCER, 2022. Accessed 24 March, 2025: <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/sites/default/files/downloads/Highest%20Needs%20Review%20-%20What%20matters%20to%20stakeholders.pdf>

- The need for various government agencies and organisations to work together productively and proactively to ensure and protect the flow of information and resources.<sup>2</sup>
- The critical importance of resourcing for inclusive education and the profound benefits that come from ākonga working together in our classrooms.

*Kia mahi kotahi: Working together* first outlines an ambitious five-year workforce investment plan that aims to support an inclusive system where ākonga get the support they need, when and where they need it, without having to lose precious learning time on a waiting list. It is a significant investment –\$2.5b over five years. But it’s one our country needs to make to ensure all our tamariki learn well.

Next, *Kia mahi kotahi: Working together* suggests five foundational design principles to measure government decisions on learning support:

- Put the child at the centre
- Invest early, invest now
- Give effect to te Tiriti o Waitangi
- Publicly funded, publicly provided
- Equity and consistency of quality and access nationally

We identify recommendations for system change that are designed to ensure that we get the best out of the investment. These recommendations build on the many system reviews conducted over the past few decades that investigate how our education system supports students with high learning needs. References to these reviews are included in the Appendix.

We must rise to the challenge and work together to ensure that the needs of all tamariki mokopuna are met. The time for action is now.

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<sup>2</sup> Though outside the scope of the present report, it is critical that other agencies such as Oranga Tamariki, Te Whatu Ora and Whaikaha are adequately funded to perform their role supporting tamariki. Additionally, we recognise the important role that private organisations such as Riding for the Disabled and music and play therapy have in supplementing the public system. As we elaborate in the design principles section below, however, we hold that tamariki should have their learning needs met fully through the public schooling system, and that a fully funded health and education system would not require whānau to pay for private services.

## Part one: Workforce investment plan

The capacity of the education system – the Ministry of Education, the specialist workforce, kura, schools, kōhanga reo and centres – to design and deliver change is finite. A bi-partisan political approach, such as is emerging to tackle the country's infrastructure needs, is critical to ensuring both immediate and longer-term investment in funding systems, the workforce and system capability.

In this section we outline five years of investments that would transform the capacity of our learning support workforce. The exciting thing about this plan is that it is one that can be executed immediately because it builds on the roles and strengths already existing within our system.

This is the surest way to meet student need without having to wait for the slow process of system reform.

This means transitioning away from inconsistent and unpredictable funding for teacher aides. That kind of funding results in less effective teaching, and less student learning. 54% of teacher aides are employed on insecure, fixed-term contracts. A more secure and predictable model can leverage the experience and skill held by this workforce to provide more effective learning, as recommended in a recent review.<sup>3</sup>

Key to achieving this is abolishing the inequitable practice of requiring schools to 'top up' teacher aide funding from other sources. Currently, NZEI Te Riu Roa estimates this 'top up' funding to be costing schools across Aotearoa more than \$115m per annum. Moving toward fully funded teacher aides will also free up flexible funding held by schools, such as from the operations grant, to redirect according to their students' needs.

Our plan also outlines steps for doubling the workforce of key specialist roles – early intervention teachers, education support workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, special education advisers, and speech language therapists over five years. In addition, it includes planning for the full rollout of the stalled learning support coordinator (LSC) role to the intended ratio of one LSC per 500 students, as well as increasing the resource teacher learning and behaviour (RTLb) workforce to match the intended entitlement of LSCs. This will ensure that tamariki receive quality and timely support and drive down wait times. Data obtained by NZEI Te Riu Roa in 2024 revealed children waiting more than six months to access the Early Intervention Service in some regions; this is simply too long at such a critical stage of their education journey. RTLbs tell us they have tamariki on their waitlists for as long as 18 months.

Upskilling and building the capability of our workforce is also critical to ensure we are making the most of what we already have. Our plan includes professional learning and development (PLD) funding that allows for 10,000 tumuaki, kaiako, kaiāwhina and kaimahi to participate every year.

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Education, *The review of how schools are resourced for teacher aides*. Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2023. Accessed 24 March, 2025: [https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-10/Final-report-The-sector-groups-preferred-option-for-how-schools-are-resourced-for-teacher-aides.pdf?VersionId=MAJpXeSn\\_ZZFqu7MK9s8qrSz5CWXBkIO](https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-10/Final-report-The-sector-groups-preferred-option-for-how-schools-are-resourced-for-teacher-aides.pdf?VersionId=MAJpXeSn_ZZFqu7MK9s8qrSz5CWXBkIO)

## Budget 2025-2026:

### *Specialist staffing*

- Commit \$2.4m for one year for a recruitment drive to fill all current Ministry of Education specialist vacancies as soon as possible.
- Retain the existing investment of \$13.8m p.a. in staffing and consistency of practice for resource teachers literacy (RT Lit) and resource teachers Māori (RT Māori).
- Begin the incremental doubling of early intervention teachers, education support workers,<sup>4</sup> psychologists, occupational therapists, special education advisers, and speech language therapists, by 2029.
- Begin tranche two of the rollout of LSCs, by introducing a further 400 LSCs based on a tamariki Māori first, needs-based approach. Where appropriate, (for example in smaller, rural schools) this could be cashed-up at the school level to allow for the employment of a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) to ensure the most effective use of resourcing.
- Begin to increase RTLB staffing to match LSC ratio of 1:500 by adding an additional 72 RTLBs each budget year to a total of 358.
- Establish a reference group of LSCs and senior leaders to review 'A guide to the role',<sup>5</sup> published in 2020. Update accordingly alongside a review of the LSC role so it is fit for purpose and aligns with the totality of the learning support system.

### *Teacher aides*

- Increase dedicated teacher aide funding toward a fully funded service by 2029 with the first stage consisting of \$30.2m invested to close 20% of the funding gap currently being paid for by schools.
- Begin to move incrementally toward a teacher aide in every classroom, at a ratio of 1:24 for all levels by 2029. This sees an additional 2222 teacher aides introduced annually, at a cost of \$63m.
- All teacher aide funding to be implemented through a new mixed resourcing model, as recommended by the Sector Reference Group (SRG) review of how schools are resourced for teacher aides. This includes the teacher aide funding component of ORS funding. Resourcing for teacher aides through the SRG model will ensure that funding is equitable and follows need as the same time as providing for a secure workforce.
- Introduce non-contact time of 10 hours per term (pro rata) for teacher aides to engage in planning, evaluation, reporting, personal professional development, and research. Funded for five years at a total cost of \$84.5m.

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<sup>4</sup> Education Support Workers can be either embedded in, and employed directly by, an early childhood centre, or employed by the Ministry of Education and deployed to centres, as is current practice.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Education, *Learning Support Coordinator: A Guide to the Role*. Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2020. Accessed 1 April 2025: [https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2025-03/LSC-Guide-FINAL.pdf?VersionId=nWqH3tAepYmZ3f7IHxi7fHnniDUX\\_eY4](https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2025-03/LSC-Guide-FINAL.pdf?VersionId=nWqH3tAepYmZ3f7IHxi7fHnniDUX_eY4)



### *Professional learning and development (PLD)*

- Establish a dedicated PLD fund of \$75m over five years. This would upskill kaiako, school-based specialist teachers and kaiāwhina working with mokopuna in areas such as dyslexia, autism and ADHD, child development, mana whenua relationships, trauma informed pedagogies, play based learning, mental health and wellbeing and culturally sustaining teaching practices. The fund needs to be flexible and responsive to actual need at school and kaupapa Māori approaches (i.e., no ‘one size fits all’), as well as being supportive of collaboration for best practice, school-wide PLD, and combined learning opportunities with whānau. Funding should be secured through the budget process for five years to support provider viability and timely training. This funding would be in addition to PLD already provided by all resource teachers (RTLb, RT Lit, RT Māori, RT Hearing, RT Vision) and the Ministry learning support workforce.

### Budget 2026-2027

#### *Specialist staffing*

- Continue to grow workforce of early intervention teachers, education support workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, special education advisers, and speech language therapists.
- Begin to grow the RT Lit and RT Māori workforce toward doubling by 2029, by adding an additional 30 RT Lit and 13 RT Māori.
- Continue tranche two of the LSC rollout by introducing a further 200 positions based on a tamariki Māori first, needs-based approach.
- Continue to grow the RTLb workforce.

#### *Teacher aides*

- Further increase funding toward fully funded teacher aides to close 40% of the funding shortfall.
- Second tranche of new teacher aide deployment with an additional 2223 teacher aides.

### Budget 2027-2028

#### *Specialist staffing*

- Continue to grow workforce of early intervention teachers, education support workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, special education advisers, and speech language therapists.
- Continue to grow the RT Lit and RT Māori workforce toward doubling by 2029, by adding an additional 31 RT Lit and 14 RT Māori.
- Continue tranche two of the LSC (and SENCO) rollout by introducing a further 200 positions based on a tamariki Māori first, needs-based approach.
- Continue to grow the RTLb workforce.

#### *Teacher aides*

- Further increase funding toward fully funded teacher aides, funding to close 60% of the funding shortfall.
- Second tranche of new teacher aide deployment of an additional 2222 teacher aides.

#### Budget 2028-2029

##### *Specialist staffing*

- Continue to grow workforce of early intervention teachers, education support workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, special education advisers, and speech language therapists.
- Continue to grow the RT Lit and RT Māori workforce toward doubling by 2029, by adding an additional 30 RT lit and 13 RT Māori.
- Continue tranche two of the LSC (and SENCO) rollout by introducing a further 200 positions based on a tamariki Māori first, needs-based approach.
- Continue to grow the RTLB workforce.

#### *Teacher aides*

- Further increase funding toward fully funded teacher aides, funding to close 80% of the funding shortfall.
- Second tranche of new teacher aide deployment of an additional 2222 teacher aides.

#### Budget 2029-2030

##### *Specialist staffing*

- Continue to grow workforce of early intervention teachers, education support workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, special education advisers, and speech language therapists.
- Continue to grow the RT Lit and RT Māori workforce toward doubling by 2029, by adding an additional 30 RT lit and 13 RT Māori.
- Continue tranche two of the LSC (and SENCO) rollout by introducing a further 200 positions based on a tamariki Māori first, needs-based approach.
- Continue to grow the RTLB workforce.

#### *Teacher aides*

- Further increase funding toward fully funded teacher aides, funding to fully close the funding shortfall.
- Second tranche of new teacher aide deployment of an additional 2222 teacher aides.

## Workforce Investment Plan 2025 – 2029

Our education system’s capacity to support all learners has failed to keep up with increased levels of need. This has created a ‘learning support deficit’, much like the national infrastructure deficit currently receiving bi-partisan attention from parliament. Like the infrastructure deficit, the learning support deficit will only be addressed through bi-partisan commitment to investment. The following five-year plan offers a basis upon which such commitment can be formed. The total cost over five years to 2029 comes to just over \$2.5b, with an ongoing annual cost of \$788m.

Five-year budget	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	Total 5 years
<b>Teacher aides fully funded</b>	\$ 30,181,887	\$ 60,363,774	\$ 90,545,662	\$ 120,727,549	\$ 150,909,436	\$ 452,728,308
% of funding gap closed	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%	
<b>Teacher aide in every classroom (1:24 ratio) by 2029</b>	\$ 63,005,610	\$ 126,011,221	\$ 189,016,831	\$ 252,022,442	\$ 315,028,052	\$ 945,084,157
New teacher aides (headcount, average hours)	2222	4445	6667	8889	11111	
<b>Teacher aide release time (10hrs per term)</b>	\$ 14,486,410	\$ 15,698,056	\$ 16,909,703	\$ 18,121,349	\$ 19,332,995	\$ 84,548,513
Total TAs	26569	28792	31014	33236	35458	
<b>Funding for approx 1100 learning support coordinators to meet intended 1:500 ratio</b>	\$ 40,000,000	\$ 60,000,000	\$ 80,000,000	\$ 100,000,000	\$ 110,000,000	\$ 390,000,000
Additional FTE cumulative	400	600	800	1000	1100	
<b>Dedicated PLD funding</b>	\$ 15,000,000	\$ 15,000,000	\$ 15,000,000	\$ 15,000,000	\$ 15,000,000	\$ 75,000,000



<b>Specialist recruitment drive to fill 170 learning support specialist vacancies</b>	\$ 2,440,758	-	-	-	-	\$ 2,440,758
<b>Double early intervention teacher workforce by 2029</b>	\$ 4,131,330	\$ 8,262,660	\$ 12,393,990	\$ 16,525,320	\$ 20,656,650	\$ 61,969,950
Additional FTTE cumulative	38	76	115	153	191	
<b>Double education support worker workforce by 2029</b>	\$ 2,989,651	\$ 5,979,302	\$ 8,968,954	\$ 11,958,605	\$ 14,948,256	\$ 44,844,768
Additional FTTE cumulative	28	56	85	113	141	
<b>Double speech language therapist workforce by 2029</b>	\$ 7,224,420	\$ 14,448,840	\$ 21,673,260	\$ 28,897,680	\$ 36,122,100	\$ 108,366,300
Additional FTTE cumulative	67	134	200	267	334	
<b>Double psychologists working in education by 2029</b>	\$ 4,326,000	\$ 8,652,000	\$ 12,978,000	\$ 17,304,000	\$ 21,630,000	\$ 64,890,000
Additional FTTE cumulative	40	80	120	160	200	
<b>Double occupational therapists working in education by 2029</b>	\$ 1,060,160	\$ 2,120,320	\$ 3,180,480	\$ 4,240,640	\$ 5,300,800	\$ 15,902,400
Additional FTTE cumulative	10	20	30	40	50	
<b>Double special education advisers by 2029</b>	\$ 3,180,480	\$ 6,360,960	\$ 9,541,440	\$ 12,721,920	\$ 15,902,400	\$ 47,707,200
Additional FTTE cumulative	30	60	90	120	150	

<b>Retain RT Lit and RT Māori</b>	\$ 13,750,000	\$ 13,750,000	\$ 13,750,000	\$ 13,750,000	\$ 13,750,000	\$ 68,750,000
<b>Double RT Māori and RT Lit workforce by 2029</b>		\$ 3,437,500	\$ 6,875,000	\$ 10,312,500	\$ 13,750,000	\$ 34,375,000
Additional cumulative: RT Lit	0	30	61	91	121	
Additional cumulative: RTM	0	13	27	40	53	
<b>Increase RTLb ratio to match LSC ratio (from 1:633 to 1:500)</b>	\$ 7,152,156	\$ 14,304,312	\$ 21,456,468	\$ 28,608,624	\$ 35,760,779	\$ 107,282,338
Additional FTTE cumulative	72	143	215	286	358	
<b>TOTAL</b>	\$ 208,928,863	\$ 354,388,946	\$ 502,289,787	\$ 650,190,628	\$ 788,091,469	\$ <b>2,503,889,692</b>

## Part two: System change design principles

In this section we consider five system change design principles which government decisions on learning support must be measured against. Under each we identify recommendations for system change that are designed to ensure that we get the best out of our investment. These recommendations are built on the many system reviews conducted over the past few decades that investigate how our education system supports learning needs. At the end of this document, we include an appendix of references to these former reviews.

- Putting the child at the centre
- Invest early, invest now
- Give effect to te Tiriti o Waitangi
- Publicly funded, publicly provided
- Equity and consistency of quality and access nationally

### 1. Putting the child at the centre

In education it is common to hear references to ‘putting the child at the centre’, yet we still have a system that throws up barriers every step of the way for too many. A truly child-centric system is one with barrier free access to learning and seamless transitions between learning environments. While this is the first value we outline in this report, it permeates all of them.

A child-centred approach prioritises, enables, and resources inclusive education; what some refer to as a ‘mainstream first’ approach, reflecting the fact that often the best place for mokopuna to learn is their local school. All education settings, – from early childhood education, through primary, secondary, and beyond, need to be designed to support the learning of all students.

Early intervention is critical to putting the child at the centre, enabling the identification of need early on and for a plan to be put in place and followed through. It is well established that early intervention leads to greatly improved outcomes in the longer term.

An education system that puts the child at the centre is one in which the right supports are available at the right time, regardless of the need or the age of the child. The supports needed range from an extension of the Ongoing Resource Scheme (ORS) programme through to expanding successful programmes that offer counselling for primary and intermediate age children.

#### Recommendations:

- Overhaul the ORS process and criteria to be more flexible, responsive, and mana-enhancing for mokopuna. This means greater investment and no more deficit-based assessment. Support should be available from as early as possible, including under-one-year-olds, applicable to any learning context, and should be set up to follow the child through their education journey. Increasing the workforce of special education advisers is a critical component of this as they perform the role of lead workers for ORS students.
- Establish a lead person or single contact across agencies for families. Where appropriate, this could be the LSC, SENCO, RTLB or Ministry of Education (MoE) specialist staff.

- Promote best practice for building a team around the child through excellent partnerships/kotahitanga between whānau, schools, and specialists. Teams will work together using shared knowledge, information, and understandings of what is needed, and how to support children within and through various education settings. A component of this, expanded on in the following section, is resourcing PLD that supports the development of such teams. This is included in our budgeted five year workforce plan.
- Whaikaha | Ministry for Disabled People to develop guidance on language that will form the basis for shared language and understanding, supported through appropriate training.
- Government commitment to the goal of providing access to a counsellor for every primary and intermediate student that needs one. This could be achieved by extending and expanding Awhi Mai, Awhi Atu counsellors in schools programme, launched in 2020, while incorporating lessons learned from the pilot evaluation.<sup>6</sup> This could also be combined with an extension of the Mana Ake programme, considering the needs of communities and provider capacity.<sup>7</sup>
- Establish a dedicated PLD fund of \$75m over five years for upskilling adults working with mokopuna. The fund needs to be flexible and responsive to actual need at school (i.e., no 'one size fits all'), as well as being supportive of collaboration on best practice and combined learning opportunities with whānau. Funding needs to be secured through the budget process for a minimum of four years to support provider viability and timely training.

Quotes:

*There is clear and consistent evidence that inclusive educational settings can confer substantial short- and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities.<sup>8</sup>*

*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, Highest Needs Review.)*

*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, Highest Needs Review.)*

## 2. Invest early, invest now

Talk to any educator working at the 'chalkface' and they are likely to identify early intervention as the single most important factor that will make a difference for children. Currently, early intervention

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<sup>6</sup> Education Review Office, *Someone to talk to: Evaluation of Counselling in Schools*. Wellington: Education Review Office, September 2024. Accessed 1 April 2025: <https://evidence.ero.govt.nz/media/tbhlon4l/ero-counselling-series-findings-report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Malatest International, *Final Evaluation Report: Mana Ake – Stronger for Tomorrow*. Wellington: Ministry of Health, March 2021. Accessed 1 April 2025: <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2022-07/mana-ake-final-report-jul22-v2.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hehir et al. *A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education*. Instituto Alana, 2016, p.2.

services are stretched, and children can wait up to six-months in some regions before even first contact is made; potentially much longer before supports are in place.

The evidence is clear that investing in ākonga early pays dividends for children's learning. This investment flows on through primary and secondary school. Ideally, learning needs would be identified as early as possible, allowing for immediate supports to be put in place and for a plan to be developed between whānau, kaiako and specialists. Knowledge of the child, and planning for their learning, would move with them seamlessly through various settings.

#### Recommendations:

- Double the number of specialists including early intervention teachers, education support workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, special education advisers, and speech language therapists so that wait times are drastically reduced.
- Resource the conditions for seamless transitions as the child moves between different educational settings, including systems for safely sharing information, facilitating communication. Key to this is the doubling of the education support worker workforce outlined in the above workforce plan as this role supports ECE-school transitions.
- Ensure that 'funding cliffs' between education settings are eliminated.
- Work towards the full integration of early childhood education services into the public system, allowing them access to the full arsenal of public education support services, and ensuring education system coherence.

#### Quotes:

*The cost-effectiveness of prevention and early intervention is undoubted.<sup>9</sup>*

*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, Highest Needs Review.)*

*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, Highest Needs Review.)*

*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. (Stakeholder, Highest Needs Review.)*

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<sup>9</sup> Ian Lambie, *What were they thinking? A discussion paper on brain and behaviour in relation to the justice system in New Zealand*. Wellington: Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor. January 2020, p.7.

### 3. Give effect to te Tiriti o Waitangi

Ākonga Māori are disproportionately impacted by the underfunding of learning support. According to the social investment agency (formerly the Social Wellbeing Agency) more than one-third of learners with potentially unmet need are Māori.<sup>10</sup>

Support therefore needs to be mana-enhancing, culturally responsive and inclusive. Currently, assessment and supports are not sufficiently grounded in te ao Māori. There is a lack of resources in te reo Māori for schools and whānau, and there are not enough te reo speaking teachers or specialists such as RT Māori. Recent proposals to disestablish RT Māori are a step precisely in the wrong direction.

The current system tries to fit Māori into it. There should be flexibility in how kaupapa Māori and Māori medium use funding, and autonomy for them to create learning support models that reflect kaupapa Māori ways of working.

Once an ākonga leaves te kōhanga reo, a bilingual or immersion unit or kura kaupapa for learning support reasons, it is hard to return. Ākonga need consistent exposure to te reo Māori to learn in the language. Tamariki Māori whose parents are learning te reo alongside them, should not have access to te reo lowered or removed on account of their learning support needs. There are already too many barriers to accessing education in te reo.

Academic streaming and ability grouping is a major barrier to inclusive education and has disproportionate impacts on ākonga Māori. The government needs to get behind the impressive efforts of the 'Kōkirihiā' collective of organisations and agencies who are committed to ending these harmful practices by 2030.

#### Recommendations:

- Enable Māori to determine what learning support looks like for kaupapa Māori settings.
- Dedicated funding for staffing specialists who speak te reo Māori – whānau shouldn't be forced out of Māori medium for the simple reason that there are not enough specialists who speak te reo.
- Expand the RT Māori role to ensure equitable distribution across regions and schools, toward a doubling of the workforce by 2029. This is included in the above 5-year plan.
- Ensure all resources are available in te reo Māori and culturally appropriate.
- Invest in growing the Māori medium workforce, following the former government's plan led by Hon Kelvin Davis.
- Agencies are upskilled and equipped for culturally responsive interactions with whānau and mokopuna.
- Support Kōkirihiā: the plan for removing streaming from our schools with dedicated and ongoing funding, including PLD in inclusive and mana-enhancing mixed-ability teaching.

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<sup>10</sup> Social Wellbeing Agency, *Highest Needs Review: What do we know about learners with the highest needs?*  
<https://www.sia.govt.nz/assets/Document-Library/Highest-Needs-Review.pdf>



#### Quotes:

*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, Highest Needs Review.)*

*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. (Highest Needs Review, Stakeholder Feedback report, p.15.)*

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

#### **4. Publicly funded, publicly provided**

A system that works together cannot be one that is subject to market competition and market failure. Neither can it rest upon the shoulders of an insecure workforce. Rather, the system needs to be joined up, collaborative and secure. Only then can it operate as the seamless whole that students need.

A secure public service is also vital for the safe and efficient sharing of information, and consistent and equitable quality and access to specialist services. Only through a public system can we create a system that works together, rather than one that operates competitively or at cross-purposes.

The government needs to commit to building a fully funded public education specialist support system, to take responsibility for the learning of all students and rule out privatisation as a solution.

#### Recommendations:

- Commit to a fully funded public specialist support system.
- Workforce planning should be developed for the specialist workforce that operates on short-, medium- and long-term horizons, in addition to the increases in specialist workforces included in part one. This will ensure the right balance is struck between addressing immediate workforce shortages, as well as planning for medium and longer-term supply and demand factors. Workforce planning will ensure that student needs are met and that we are training the right specialists at the right time.
- Learning support roles should be integrated into specialist career pathways that support the upskilling and development of our workforce overtime.
- Plan for a gradual transition away from precarious, timebound, and cash-based resourcing toward more secure forms of entitlement staffing for specialist learning support roles that are based on student numbers and need. This will help to secure the supply of specialists and the effectiveness of their work, ensuring that public investments are well spent.

#### Quotes:

*To promote the overall growth of a better trained and fairly paid workforce, Health NZ's commissioning rules throughout the health and disability system should specify that the workforce should be predominantly on secure salaried contracts. (New Zealand Health Health and Disability System Review, Final Report.)<sup>11</sup>*

*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, Highest Needs Review).*

*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, Highest Needs Review.)*

#### 5. Equity and consistency of quality and access

The quality and accessibility of support in our system is inconsistent across regions. In part this is due to a failure to grow in response to increasing populations, student need, and caseloads. It is also due to the inconsistent roll out of resources, such as LSCs. The result is generally high wait times for various supports that can vary greatly between regions.

Early childhood education needs to be included from the beginning and consistently staffed. Regulations need to work toward 100% qualified kaiako. The mixed provision model we currently have that is dominated by the private sector also drives this inequity as centres operating on a profit-motive are disincentivised from operating on a fully inclusive basis.

Specialist schools and fundholder schools have an important role to play as centres of expertise and local hubs, providing local/regional networks of specialist support to tamariki and kaiako in both in-class and satellite contexts. Network planning needs to be introduced for specialist support to ensure consistency and quality of access nationwide.

#### Recommendations:

- Complete the roll out of LSCs or SENCOs, as described in the workforce plan above.
- Increase the number of specialists to meet student need, as described in the workforce plan above.
- More permanent teacher aides in the compulsory sector, resourced through a staffing entitlement model, as noted above. Working toward a teacher aide in every classroom, or role-based entitlement of 1 teacher aide to every 24 students, as recommended by the Pūaotanga independent review of staffing in primary schools.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> New Zealand Health and Disability System Review, *Final Report: Pūrongo whakamutunga*, pp.143-144. 2020, <https://www.health.govt.nz/publications/health-and-disability-system-review-final-report>

<sup>12</sup> Pūaotanga Independent Review Panel, *Pūaotanga: Realising the potential of every child: An independent review of staffing in primary schools*, Wellington: NZEI Te Riu Roa, June 2021. <https://www.nzeiteriuroa.org.nz/assets/downloads/NZEI-Pu%CC%84aotanga.pdf>

- Establishment of non-contact time for teacher aides to support planning and professional development, included in above investment plan.
- 'Hard to staff' specialist roles need to be made more attractive through investing in recruitment (accounted for in above investment plan) and through the recognition of the value they bring.
- Property needs to be designed for inclusion as a rule so that all schools are ready for all children, always.
- Improve the alignment of health, social services and education systems for disability and learning support.
- Introduce network planning for specialist support to ensure consistency and quality of access nationwide.

Quotes:

*Staffing has not increased in line with population. Our team's area has had significant population growth in the last five years with new suburbs and new schools popping up, but no extra [learning support] staff in response. We simply cannot achieve targets in this situation. (NZEI Te Riu Roa member survey.)*

*There are simply not enough field staff specialists to meet the demand. The MoE can dance around that demand and supply fact with action plans and short-term interventions but until the learning support teams are more adequately staffed and resourced long wait times will continue to be the norm. (Service manager, NZEI Te Riu Roa member survey.)*

*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, Highest Needs Review.)*

*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, Highest Needs Review.)*

## Appendix: Sample reference list of former reviews and research into learning support issues (chronological)

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