



The New Zealand Psychological Society

Te Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa



INSTITUTE
of
EDUCATIONAL *and* DEVELOPMENTAL
PSYCHOLOGY

**Submission
to the
Ministry of Education
for the
Review of Tomorrow's Schools:
Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together**

**Institute of Educational and Developmental Psychology
of the
New Zealand Psychological Society**

March 2019

The Institute of Educational and Developmental Psychology is an interest group within the New Zealand Psychological Society. Our membership comprises psychologists working in education across a range of educational and community-based agencies, and universities. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the vision of schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand through submission. We respond to the Review of Tomorrow's Schools through the Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1.** The Institute of Educational and Developmental Psychology (IEDP) is the professional organisation that supports psychologists concerned with the learning and wellbeing of children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. The IEDP is an Institute of the New Zealand Psychological Society (NZPS).
- 1.2.** Our members are at the forefront of professional practice, research and innovation in designing systems of support for young people, their families, educators and support agencies.
- 1.3.** A significant number of psychologists are employed by the Ministry of Education and work in early childhood centres, schools across the sector, kōhanga reo, Kura Kaupapa, regional health schools and refugee educational centres. Educational psychologists have a minimum of six years training to post-Masters level and typically complete their training through an Internship in their final year through one of two universities offering the Education Scope of Practice.
- 1.4.** Educational psychologists and psychologists who work in education are integral to the identification, assessment and ongoing support of children and young people with complex and additional needs, working across the education, social services and health sectors. Educational psychologists are trained to work at both individual and systems levels, and do so in diverse ways including school-wide preventative programmes and highly intensive work such as providing intensive wraparound services for children and young people identified with severe behaviour or significant learning difficulties. They contribute to or lead major Ministry initiatives at an organisational level, teacher training, parenting groups as well as individual, classroom and community interventions.

2. Identification of the Issues

- 2.1.** Within the Schooling Futures document, it is curious that only minimal reference is made to the role of educational psychologists. This omission in a review of the current system that aims to offer evidence-based solutions to educational underachievement suggests the role is either largely invisible or not fully understood. Registered educational psychologists, through their training and Education Scope of Practice are well positioned to support educators and young people needing to advance their teaching and learning. In addition, educational psychologists have research expertise, including evaluation of the evidence of interventions. Our view is that educational psychologists should be involved in the

development of many aspects of the proposed review, and would welcome further conversations around these possibilities.

- 2.2.** The lack of involvement of New Zealand trained educational psychologists in the general education system is increasingly of concern across the sector. Complex workforce capacity issues relate to opportunities for training, talent development, job satisfaction, retention, and remuneration. All of this would need to be addressed and prioritised before being able to successfully implement the many changes recommended by this review.

3. Recommendations

The focus of this submission is the fourth of the eight identified key issues: *Disability and Learning Support*. While we are concerned with, and interested in, the broader report, we have narrowed our submission to this key issue. Our comments are listed under each recommendation.

3.1 Recommendation 13

We recommend that the Ministry continue to lead national strategy and policy in Disability and Learning Support, and that the Ministry work with the Education Hubs to support their work and learn from effective practice. We recommend the Ministry:

- *Lead national networks of expertise, ensure useful research is done, and make resources and learnings from these nationally available.*

Research role for educational psychologists:

Educational psychologists have been trained in research methods and many are contributing to research both nationally and internationally (e.g., Dr Jo Bowler, Dr Jean Annan, Associate Professor Mandia Mentis, Professor Roseanna Burke, and Jeremy Monsen). Currently there is no recognition for, or support of, the potential research capabilities of practising educational psychologists employed by the Ministry of Education to engage in research. Educational psychologists have the expertise to engage in and lead research to inform education policy and ensure that interventions and programmes are culturally informed and relevant in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Examples of this are Associate Professor Sonja and Professor Angus Macfarlane's research examining Māori success in schools.

- *Work with Teaching Council so that in Initial Teacher Education students gain a good base understanding of what good inclusion in schools requires and looks like.*

The IEDP is supportive of this recommendation. We advocate for a universal curriculum design that accommodates a diverse range of learners and teachers. Currently it appears that there is minimal preservice training of teachers that focuses on inclusion and the understanding of supporting student behaviour. Furthermore, we are concerned that the crisis in teacher supply and the recruiting of overseas teachers and psychologists may minimise the effect of integrated initial teacher education programmes, and educational psychology training programmes. We recommend the use of effective evidence-based interventions which link with practices currently used in schools, such as Positive Behaviour for Learning and Universal Design for Learning. Educational psychologists are trained to support teacher training and to work with teachers to develop

evidence-based programmes that are relevant in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. We have experience designing and implementing preventative, ecological and systemic processes that address the barriers to creating inclusive environments for diverse learners.

- *Work to increase the supply and cultural diversity of Learner Support specialists throughout the system.*

The IEDP is supportive of this recommendation in principle, and would welcome opportunities to be an active part of the training within this programme. Educational psychologists have well established models of culturally responsive and inclusive practice, drawing from a wide evidence base. Currently, the prescribed role of educational psychologists within the Ministry of Education has narrowed, resulting in the primary focus of educational psychologists on severe behavioural needs of children and young people. Thus, we strongly argue that this Schooling Futures Report takes the opportunity to open up the full skill set of educational psychologists and utilise this specific workforce to provide a wider range of support to teaching and instruction throughout the education system.

- *Provide guidelines on identifying additional learning needs so there is national consistency.*

The IEDP committee raises serious concerns and cautions with regards this recommendation. It is not uncommon for special interest groups to lobby for further identification of difficulties such as dyslexia or dyspraxia. This results in an increase in testing that aims to diagnose difficulties unnecessarily and pathologise learners. Furthermore, the contribution to effective remediation is questionable. Historically, research has shown that the identification and allocation of specific categorical labels on children neither create sound intervention or teaching approaches, nor contribute to the wellbeing and identity of the child as a learner. Therefore, educational psychologists need to be part of a wider discussion around questions on which assessments would be used, who would administer the assessments, how the information would be shared and with whom, and what the intervention would eventually look like. The discussion should include educational professionals such as teachers, administrators, educational psychologists and researchers rather than in an emotive and politically charged forum in order to get outcomes that support at-risk children to progress with their learning. New Zealand researchers and practitioners have contributed significantly to the evidence base of what works for children who are experiencing difficulty. Thus, an evidenced-based approach to assessment and intervention should be integrated into solutions.

- *Allocate national funding pools for additional learning needs.*

While the IEDP acknowledges that the education system has funding constraints, allocation of new funding needs to be allocated with a clear understanding of the needs of schools and learners. Very often, parents are reassured that their child is getting '1:1 support' without it being made clear that such support is mostly provided by untrained paraprofessionals who are often only loosely trained and supervised. In addition, there are instances of politically-motivated funding for special interest groups that have secured funding during election cycles. We recommend that clearer priorities for

outcomes for the use of additional funding are created well prior to the actual allocation. Educational psychologists have expertise in data collection used to assess need and evaluate outcomes.

- *Hold a half-yearly national forum, drawing on the Education Hubs forums, so that practice knowledge, student and parent/whānau experience, and policy can come together to review progress and identify priorities for ongoing and future work to improve the learning and outcomes for students with additional learning needs.*

We are supportive of this recommendation. While the views and experiences of students and parent/whānau are important, planning opportunities for professionals to share research and practice is crucial for improving the learning and outcomes for students with additional learning needs. Collaboration is desirable but it requires additional resources and/or structural changes to release professionals to do so. Thus, time and resources should be attached to this initiative so that professionals have opportunities to collaborate and implement the innovative ideas shared at forums. Furthermore, it is necessary to establish mechanisms for disseminating information on effective instructional practices throughout the education system. Educational psychologists have the expertise and experience to lead, participate, and contribute to these forums to share applied research and up-skill teachers and other educators. In the UK for example (and in New Zealand prior to SE2000), educational psychologists are the traditional conduit for the dissemination of research knowledge to practising classroom teachers. Sharing skills and expertise will, we suggest, potentially reduce underachievement amongst learners who present with diverse needs.

3.2 Recommendation 14

We recommend that every school is supported to be inclusive through having a designated Learning Support Coordinator, working with the support of its local Education Hub and sharing good practice.

- *The allocation of this role would be linked to school roll and degree of student socio-economic disadvantage. Roles could be shared between small schools.*

This as a key recommendation that will help to ensure improved learning experiences, and associated learning outcomes for students. However, this will require a nuanced adapted curriculum for pupils experiencing learning difficulties. It is important, therefore, that there is specialist training for this role, that the role has a career pathway, and that the coordinator has access to the appropriate resources to so coordinate. In this regard, educational psychologists can provide the support and supervision in supporting the training and professional development of Learning Support Coordinators and classroom teachers.

3.3 Recommendation 15

We recommend that Education Hubs:

- *Are funded appropriately to employ specialist staff, RTLBs, Resource Teachers of Literacy, and a pool of teacher aides, and coordinates work with local agencies and other specialists to enable a seamless identification of student need and support.*

Education Hubs need designated educational psychologists working within each Hub for this to be a seamless model. While educational psychologists are omitted from the list of specialists in the current Schooling Futures document, we strongly advise they are identified and named as part of the specialist team. The IEDP questions the role of the Hubs in employing teacher aides, as experience shows that schools and their local community are best placed to locate and train suitable candidates for these roles.

- *Work closely with Learning Support Coordinators, parents, whānau and schools to provide professional learning and sharing of good practice for both Learning Support Co-ordinators and teacher aides.*

This is a key role for educational psychologists. As highly trained professionals, educational psychologists can provide a bridge between the world of research, policy and practice.

- *Make applications to national funding pools for students with additional learning needs. This will ensure consistency amongst applications and reduce the burdens on parents/whānau and schools.*

The IEDP recommends that school SENCo are adequately trained and supported to manage these applications. As psychologists, we have seen the variability in applications from schools and are aware of how time-consuming this process can be. This variability is often a result of the time allocated to the role and training that a SENCo has undergone. Furthermore, the proposed Hubs will not have the day-to-day information and knowledge about the needs of every individual student. An unintended outcome of this recommendation might lead to students missing out on ORS and other sources of funding or support and, consequently, placing enormous demands on individual schools. Consideration should be given to reviewing the complexity of the application process to ensure that it is fit for purpose. Identifying adequate pathways of support for students who do not have a successful application would remove the anxiety experienced by schools and families if an application is unsuccessful.

- *Ensure appropriate local provision of special schools and the use of their expertise for children and young people with very high needs.*

This model has been tried within New Zealand in the past. Sally Jackson, Ministry of Education, may be able to provide further information on this. Access to special schools or their teaching expertise is limited particularly outside of main centres such as Auckland. If additional expertise was required, we suggest you consider it within the domain of the Hubs, and with educational psychologists situated within these Hubs, such specialist support could be available across New Zealand.

- *Identify expertise within schools to share effective practice and try well-founded innovation, and share effective practice and through funding, secondment and grants.*
- *Work with a Disability and Additional Learning Needs Forum, bringing together principals/tumuaki, teachers/kaiako, specialists, parents and students, teacher aides, and disability groups to review the quality and kind of provision available and to tackle issues identified.*
- *Share its expertise nationally, through networks focused on additional learning needs, which would be supported by the Ministry.*

It is important that the forum includes not just the needs of formal disability interest groups, but acknowledges that a significant majority of children with special education needs or additional needs do not have an identifiable diagnosis. Additionally, the forum should consider the diverse needs of cultural and disadvantaged groups in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Educational psychologists have the expertise, interest and passion to be part of a solution for creating and maintaining equitable systems that support the learning and wellbeing of all young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. We welcome further dialogue on the issues raised in this submission.

Contact Details

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