



## The New Zealand Psychological Society

*Tē Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa*

18 October, 2016

### Seclusion in Education- Letter to the Editor-Dominion Post

Dear Editor

A recent editorial (Seclusion highlights special education failure, *The Press*, 17 October) correctly identifies the importance of the Ministry of Education in protecting those who are different and vulnerable in our schools, but what can the Ministry of Education do when it controls only a third of the Special Needs budget?

What do we do when school staff at Miramar Central School lock an autistic boy in a small dark room? The school staff may have had the best of intentions for the wellbeing of this child and the other children but where were the trained professionals who are able to advise on a better way to deal with challenging behaviours?

Educational psychologists are one of the professional groups employed by the Ministry of Education. They are experts in helping people solve complex, persistent problems that interfere with a young person's learning. Educational psychologists have a minimum of six years' university education and most have additional qualifications and experience.

The Ministry's limited budget means they are only able to employ 182 psychologists nationally for just under a million pre-school and school children. The result is that educational psychologists are often only able to work with those children with the greatest need in crisis situations. Furthermore, some schools choose to retain the specialist funding and not use the Ministry's educational psychologists.

Schools have had to make stark choices with limited funding. Many opt to buy in cheaper, untrained support. This has placed a huge responsibility on school staff and Boards of Trustees with the risk of uneven education and support for children in our country.

Minister Hekia Parata and her government have a unique opportunity to reconsider the current funding mechanisms with the Special Education Update and ensure that schools can access the educational psychologist assistance they need.

Quentin Abraham  
President of the New Zealand Psychological Society