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**THE IMPACT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION POLICY CHANGE ON
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ABSTRACT

Over the past five years significant restructuring has been undertaken in New Zealand aimed at changing resourcing systems in special education. This resourcing change is part of the introduction of the first policy in special education for all New Zealand schools. One of the objectives of the new policy was greater equity and distribution of resources, for all learners with special educational needs, regardless of where they are educated. The government's intention in 1996 was that the policy (introduced as Special Education 2000), would help create a world class inclusive education system. The policy has yet to achieve this. It has, however, influenced the way in which "inclusive education" is viewed. Under the Special Education 2000 policy, resourcing attempted to move away from a system that categorized learners, but instead has created clear chasms between learners who receive support because they have been verified as having 'high-very high' needs and those who do not.

This policy has had resourcing implications for all schools in New Zealand. Alongside the changes for students with high needs, the policy introduced a Special Education Grant (SEG) to all schools regardless of whether there were students with special educational needs enrolled in the school.

A research team from Massey University was commissioned by the Ministry of Education to provide an independent evaluation and monitoring of the new policy over a three-year period (1999-2001). The Massey University based research team used a multi-method approach including, where possible, participatory research methods. The evaluation included extensive national surveys to primary and secondary schools, early childhood centres, service providers, residential special schools and Maori immersion schools. This paper outlines the framework for the multi-method participatory research evaluation and specifically examines the results from the SEG component of the policy. The following papers in this symposium will look at the impact on early childhood services (Carroll-Lind & Cullen), educational support for Maori learners (Bevan-Brown & Bcvan-Brown) and professional development for teachers (Kearney & Poskitt).

Introduction

It was not until 1990 that New Zealand schools were legally bound to accept learners with disabilities into the local schools. It took until 1989 for legislation to be introduced (Education Act, 1989) which provided learners with disabilities the same right to attend their local school as those without disabilities. Despite the Act, there was no policy or guiding principles in place to facilitate inclusion. A set of guidelines for "including all learners" was provided in 1995, followed a year later by a new policy.

The Special Education Policy Guidelines (MoE, 1995) outlined seven principles which reflected a number of ideological assumptions regarding the most appropriate ways to meet the learning needs and entitlement to inclusion of students. These included: highlighting

learners' rights and freedoms; equity and access to resources; respect for culture; and partnership between parents and education providers. The principles outlined in the guidelines foreshadowed a move towards equity in the distribution of special education resources and ensuring access to educational provision for all learners with special educational needs. One-year later significant changes to the actual delivery and resourcing of special education in New Zealand were introduced through the *Special Education 2000* policy.

At the time of the introduction of the policy, the MoE (1996) wrote that, "For a child with special education needs, a school that is open and welcoming is the best possible assurance of a quality education. The certainty of resourcing provided through Special Education 2000 will extend every school's ability to achieve this ideal". This "certainty" of resourcing signalled two key changes to the way students received funding or support. First, from 1997 an annual Special Education Grant (SEG) was disbursed to all schools using a funding formula based on the school's roll number and the decile ranking identified for the school. Second, from 1998 students verified as having high or very high needs received funding and support from the Ongoing Resourcing and Reviewable Schemes (ORRS). One of the implications of the introduction of individual entitlements for students with high-very high needs (through ORRS) was that schools and parents were no longer required to make twice-yearly applications on behalf of students. The clear message from the Government at that time was that there was to be a significant injection of new funds for special education and that equity of distribution of resources was a priority. As stated in a MoE Update (newsletters published by the MoE to disseminate information to schools and, later, to parents), Special Education 2000 provided "substantially more funding for children with special education needs", with the aim of providing learners with "better learning opportunities, wherever they may be" (MoE, 1998a).

When the New Zealand government introduced the special education policy in 1996, with an injection of \$55 million to support the changes and a further \$220 million of additional money from 1997 to be phased in over three years, there was little doubt the policy would have a major impact on schools and service providers. There were many reasons for this: first, the mechanism for resourcing learners with high needs significantly changed under Special Education 2000. This meant that some learners would receive more support than previously, while others would not access the same level of resourcing as under the former funding scheme. Second, all schools received a Special Education Grant (SEG) to use as they saw fit to support learners with moderate needs. This required schools to identify learners requiring support, prioritise those students who would receive additional support, and make decisions on the type of programmes the additional money would fund. Third, the main specialist support provider (the Specialist Education Services [SES]), changed its organisational and operational structures to accommodate the new policy. While schools were given more control over some aspects of their funding (i.e., through SEG, and, to a lesser extent, the school cluster-based Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour), the changes in resourcing and service provision brought disorientation and confusion for schools as they attempted to locate support or resources for their students with high needs within new and unfamiliar systems.

Within two years of the introduction of the policy, a research team based at Massey University was commissioned by the Ministry of Education to undertake a three-year evaluation of the policy. The scope and complexity of the policy was such that a multi-method approach was incorporated to ensure as many schools and early childhood centers could be surveyed over three years. Interviews were also undertaken with principals, teachers and teacher-aides.

The framework for the Special Education 2000 evaluation

The three-year evaluation used mixed methodology, employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A questionnaire was developed for schools and structured interview schedules were used in fieldwork across all strands. In addition, case studies were conducted in the Severe Behaviour Initiatives, Support Services, Residential Special Schools and Regional Health/Hospital schools. Over eight thousand respondents participated in the research over the three-year period of the evaluation. These included school based personnel (principals, teachers and teacher-aides), support service personnel (SES, major disability organisations such as IHC and CCS, early childhood providers), parents, MoE personnel. Some strands included data from learners who were recipients of funding or support from SE2000 initiatives.

A team of 16 researchers with expertise in a range of fields including special education, inclusive education, school management, policy, assessment, evaluation of learning, early childhood, disability issues, research methods and Maori and bicultural issues was established. Kharbanda and Stalwartly (1990) identified the importance of a diverse research team when they stated, "the more diverse the group, the better the team and hence the greater its chance of success. When there is a variety of talent, there is the ability to tackle a host of problems, such as are normally encountered in any project" (p. 132).

The impact of providing a special education grant to all schools

The Special Education Grant (SEG), developed as part of the Special Education 2000 policy, is an allocation of funding distributed to all state and state integrated schools. Schools received SEG from the beginning of 1997 based on a formula of decile ranking (socio-economic status of the school's community) and total school roll number. The grant was specifically introduced to support learners with moderate special education needs which was estimated to include 4–6% of the school population (MoE Update, July 1996). It was reasoned that schools themselves could most effectively meet the needs of learners with learning and behavioural difficulties, as schools could respond quickly and utilise the resources of their own school community. The funds were devolved directly to schools because "it is believed that schools and parents/caregivers are best able to make resourcing decisions about their students" (MoE Update, February 1998).

All schools receive a base grant (\$1,054.54) plus a per-pupil grant based on the decile rank of the school and the total roll number. As shown in Table 1 the funding per pupil for a student in a decile 1 school has increased from \$34.50 in 1997 to \$53.80 in 2001, while funding per pupil for a student in a decile 10 school has increased from \$5.00 in 1997 to \$25.32 in 2001. The proportion of the increment over a five-year period (1997–2001) has been greater for a high decile school (5 times over the 5 year period) than a low decile school (less than doubled over the 5 year period). However, there has been a constant disparity between funding for a high decile school and a low decile school. For example, the difference in funding per student for a decile 10 school and a decile 1 school was \$29.50 in 1997 and \$28.48 in 2001. (Much of the change is attributable to the decision after 1997 to incorporate in the grant a minimum, base funding element for each school.)

School Decile Ranking	\$NZ per student funding rate	\$NZ per student funding rate	\$NZ per student funding rate
	1997	1999/2000	1999/2001
1	34.50	51	53.80
2	31.10	48	50.64
3	27.70	45	47.47
4	25.30	42	44.31
5	21.90	39	41.15
6	18.50	36	37.98
7	15.10	33	34.82
8	11.70	30	31.65
9	8.40	27	28.38
10	5.00	24	25.32

Table 1 Special Education Grant funding rate per decile and student

Source: MoE Update, July, 1996; MoE Update, November, 1997; MoE communication, June 2000; MoE Operational Funding document, September, 2000.

Throughout the three-year period of the evaluation, responses from schools consistently showed that they used SEG mainly to purchase additional teacher-aid support. The data across three years showed teacher-aides were employed to work with individual students or small groups of students. From 1999–2001, schools indicated that teacher-aides were seldom used for large groups of students or with school-wide programmes.

The three years of the evaluation have highlighted concerns schools have with the SEG funding formula. These include: decile ranking, magnet schools, rural schools, students with high needs missing out and SEG being used to support students verified as having high needs (both ORRS and SBI). For example, some principals noted:

The level of SEG funding is being eroded seriously because our ORRS funding is insufficient to provide the level of care we believe is necessary. Three of our ORRS children require six hours per day support but are funded for 4-5 hours only. The difference has to be made up from our SEG funding. The next layer of children is therefore missing out. (School questionnaire, 2001).

While I state that the SEG initiative has been successful in our school this is mainly due to the fact that we treble the amount of the grant. We have a child that has ongoing needs through being cerebral palsy and despite four applications for ORRS still unsuccessful. He uses 50% of our received SEG. He will need support the entire time at school. Currently a year 6 operating at year 1-2 level. (School questionnaire, 2001).

The decile weighting of SEG funding is totally inappropriate. We have huge needs for learner support in a decile 10 school and can only make a token gesture towards meeting these from the SEG. (School questionnaire, 2001).

The special education policy affirmed the rights of parents to choose the school in which to have their child educated. This has meant that some parents choose schools outside their local catchment areas if they believe their child will access a "better" education in another school. However, in some cases, parents send their child to areas outside their catchment because local schools have not always been welcoming to learners with disabilities or who require high levels of resourcing.

The notion of *magnet schools* has become a catch phrase for schools that are recognized as having effective inclusionary programmes and positive attitudes towards students with special educational needs. In other words, these schools have developed a reputation for their ability to cater for a diverse range of students. As a result, parents are enrolling their children with special needs in these schools, and these schools have a greater proportion of students with high and moderate needs. However, these magnet schools have come about because other schools are actively or passively deflecting the enrolment of students with special educational needs and therefore the opposite of a magnet school, in effect a *shield school*, is also becoming apparent. In some schools (and it is unclear how widespread the practice is) the view is that students with special educational needs are a strain on resources given the pressure schools believe these students place on their SEG resourcing component, and the consequent inability of the school to provide a range of programmes to meet these students needs.

While these schools do not openly flout the law, they do make it clear to parents or service providers that they would rather not have the child. School A might explain, for example, that School B has better or more appropriate resources, programmes or facilities and that School A cannot adequately meet the child's needs. Or, they might give the general impression that the resourcing must be secured before the child enters the school gates. Such an unwelcome response is often enough for many parents to opt for an alternative choice of school. Although there is nothing illegal in what these schools are doing, because such advice falls short of actually declining a student enrolment, the intent is clear. Principals have made a number of comments that illustrate this trend. For example, "*We turn them away if this is not their local school, or if they are wanting to enrol in the special class if they come from outside the cluster*" (secondary school principal, 2000, decile 9); "*We don't want to be seen as a school which attract special needs students because parents won't send their bright kids here*" (secondary school principal, 2000, decile 9); and "*Doesn't pay to do a good job as we don't get equitable funds*" (primary school principal, 2000, decile 5).

While the MoE (1996) gave to believe that every student with special needs would be able to access a "school that is open and welcoming", this has not been the case in practice. As has happened in some LEAs in Britain, schools who have developed exceptional inclusive practices have become disadvantaged by some policies and funding formula (Rouse & Florian, 2001), where "the poor and disenfranchised have been left behind and the gap between them and the rest has widened" (Rouse & Florian, 2001, p.24).

The special education policy created change in New Zealand schools, partly because the procedures for accessing resourcing for learners with special educational needs changed, but also because the policy devolved more responsibility for special education to school level through the introduction of SEG. This additional, finite funding pool for each state school enabled schools to make decisions about the students who would access the support, the way in which the support would be delivered and the process for prioritizing students with special needs.

When schools are struggling to meet the needs of all students with limited resources, there are various options they consider. Firstly, schools identify whether they want to be known for their ability to meet the needs of *all* students including students with special educational needs. Having decided whether the school will maintain a high level of commitment for all students, teaching staff make the second major decision of *how best* to cater for these learners. One implication arising from the funding difficulties that schools associate with SEG is the trend for schools to refuse to enrol students because it is believed that the school would be "disadvantaged".

Principals and teachers of rural schools, high decile schools and magnet schools reported inequities with SEG on the basis that there were specific factors associated with their schools which required more funding than other schools. For example, it cost more for a rural school to bring in a specialist to work in the school because of the travel costs, and schools that attracted learners with special needs believed there needed to be a targeted aspect to the formula. Schools with a high decile ranking believed that the SEG funding formula was weighted in favour of low decile schools, even though there was not necessarily the data to show that there were more students with special needs in low decile schools, or that parents in high decile schools had, or wanted to provide, more disposable income to support the school.

Refusal of student access to school is an issue in other countries, although policies vary widely. In the United States, for example "neither financial grounds nor potential harm to the education of other pupils would be deemed acceptable reasons for refusing a child a place in a mainstream school" (Lange & Riddell, 2000, p. 133), yet in Scotland education authorities have the right to decline students on both grounds (Lange & Riddell, 2000).

The evaluation results across the three years of this study indicated that not all students with high special educational needs are accessing the targeted funding through ORRS or SBI. This has created pressure on schools to utilise SEG to meet these students' needs. The inclusion of learners with special educational needs still remains a priority in most schools but the level of funding to support this through the policy resourcing mechanisms falls short in many cases. This has the unintended consequence of punishing successful schools (Rouse & Florian, 2001), and the policy resourcing mechanisms are therefore in danger of undermining schools' ability to sustain such commitment.

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