



Performance audit report

Ministry of Education: Managing support for students with high special educational needs





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Education:
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high special
educational needs

This is an independent assurance
report about a performance audit
we carried out under section 16 of
the Public Audit Act 2001.

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Overview

My staff carried out a performance audit to assess how well the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) manages four initiatives set up to support school-age students that it assesses as having the highest level of intellectual, sensory, or physical disabilities, speech language difficulties, or behavioural needs. There are up to 20,500 students receiving support through these four initiatives.

The four initiatives are the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS), the School High Health Needs Fund, the Severe Behaviour Initiative, and the Speech Language Initiative. Through these initiatives, the Ministry provides extra help, adapted programmes, specialist advice, equipment or materials, and access to therapists. The Ministry spends about \$176 million on these four initiatives each year. They are part of a larger framework of support for all children and young people who need special help to participate in education, in line with the Special Education 2000 policy.

The Ministry has a challenging task in ensuring, within the resources available, that it has identified students who need its support, and that this support is provided fairly, appropriately to needs and circumstances, and in a timely manner. Every day, Ministry staff need to exercise professional judgement and respond appropriately to students who can have a complex range of needs that change over time.

Overall, the Ministry's management of the four initiatives was reasonable, but there were still areas that need to improve. The basic systems and resources were in place to enable the Ministry to deliver its support. More recently, the Ministry has started to focus on improving those systems and improving the quality of service it provides. The Ministry also needs to improve how it identifies all those students with high special educational needs to ensure that those students eligible for support receive it in a consistent and timely manner, and that the support they receive and progress they make is appropriately monitored.

We are not certain that the Ministry has a clear measure of the level of need for its support for students with high special educational needs. The Ministry considers that, for three of the initiatives, there is a very low risk that some students in need of support have not already been identified by the Ministry. However, for the Severe Behaviour Initiative, the Ministry is aware of a higher risk that some students eligible for its support have not been identified by the Ministry and are not receiving support.

The Ministry could be more systematic and vigilant in its efforts to identify children who have high special educational needs but are not receiving Ministry support. The Ministry expects that the work it has done in strengthening its collaboration with schools and resource teachers will help it to gather better information more systematically about all levels of need. The Ministry's

involvement in cross-agency monitoring of young children is also expected to help it to gain a more comprehensive picture of the level of need. In our view, more regular and systematic analysis of trends in the community, and of internal application and referral data, will also help the Ministry to better assess this overall picture.

My staff expected to find that students with similar levels of need and in similar circumstances received similar levels of support, delivered in a timely manner. However, some districts have a greater need for Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative support, and in some districts this support was not timely enough. In the districts we visited, the assessment and allocation practices varied. This risks variation in the level of support provided to students with similar levels of need and in similar circumstances. The Ministry's model for distributing funding to districts, which is based on the number of school students in each district, may contribute to the variation in practices and timeliness.

The Ministry has appropriate processes in place for checking the quality of its specialist services, gathering client feedback, and tracking individual students' progress at a district level. At the time of our audit, the Ministry did not have information systems that could adequately or reliably collate data at a national level about the support that students were receiving or the progress they were making. After we completed our fieldwork, the Ministry improved the reliability and use of the information held in its outputs database, and gained funding approval for a new data management system. The Ministry has also implemented better systems for collecting, collating, and regularly reporting information, so it can evaluate and plan its support more effectively.

The Ministry is aware of the need for greater national consistency and co-ordination in some of the areas we have identified. The Ministry told us that improved practices and systems are being developed or implemented in 2009/10, including nationally consistent processes for accessing support and allocating funding, a complaints register, and a plan to work with other agencies to address students' behaviour issues. Recent funding decisions reflect some of the work the Ministry has done to address the increasing demand for services, such as provision in the 2009 Budget for increased funding for ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund. The Government Review of Special Education has also started, which focuses on many of the issues identified in our audit.

We have made 10 recommendations in this report. They encourage the Ministry to:

- continue to improve its information about the level of need for support;
- provide students who have similar needs and circumstances, with similar support – regardless of where they live;

- better assist and explain the initiatives to educators and parents/caregivers; and
- put in place more effective systems for collating information about the Ministry's support for students.

This report includes the profiles of four students who receive support from the initiatives we examined as part of the audit. To protect their identity we have not used their real names, but the profiles are included to show some of the complex needs and challenges these students have, and how they are being supported by the Ministry. I thank these resilient young people, and their parents, for giving us permission to include their stories.

I would also like to thank the dedicated Ministry staff and stakeholders we interviewed for their help and co-operation during our audit.



Phillippa Smith
Deputy Controller and Auditor-General

22 October 2009

Our recommendations

Our recommendations are listed in the order that they appear in the text of this report. They encourage the Ministry to continue to implement and monitor changes that it has told us it is making. The changes seek to address issues of consistency in allocation of resources, monitoring the support the Ministry provides to students, and monitoring students' progress.

Determining the level of need

We recommend that the Ministry of Education:

1. further improve the quality of, routinely analyse, and report information about the overall level of need for support, to inform policy decisions about resourcing its four initiatives for students with high special educational needs.

Providing guidance, and assessing applications and referrals for support

We recommend that the Ministry of Education:

2. provide clearer information about the intensity and type of need required for a student to be eligible for the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes;
3. ensure that its staff consistently provide applicants to the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes with enough advice to ensure that applications are completed properly;
4. ensure that all district offices follow consistent protocols for reviewing Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative assessment decisions when applications have been declined; and
5. ensure that district staff provide consistent information and advice about the other support options available to students who are not eligible for the four initiatives.

Allocating resources for supporting students

We recommend that the Ministry of Education:

6. ensure, through its National Moderation Plan, the consistency and appropriateness of its approach to moderating teacher aide hours for students supported through the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes and the School High Health Needs Fund;
7. implement and monitor its standard timeframes for allocating funding and resources for all four initiatives, to ensure that all students receive support in a timely manner;
8. further improve and regularly check the integrity of the data held in its national reporting and work outputs database; and
9. actively review and manage districts where staff capacity to provide support services is not meeting the demand for services.

Monitoring the support for, and progress of, students

We recommend that the Ministry of Education:

10. improve its systems to gather and aggregate information about the effectiveness of its support for students.

Student profiles

Joy

Supported through the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme

Joy is 15 years old and severely physically disabled. When she is at school, she needs to use a wheelchair for most of the day. She cannot use a pen easily or effectively, but she can move her arms and hands enough to use a touch-screen laptop. Joy cannot talk but can make some sounds, and she understands what is said to her. She can use a walker for short periods of times, but has to be accompanied by a minder whenever she is out of her wheelchair.

Joy needs regular physiotherapy and occupational therapy sessions. She has to be fed through a tube that goes into her stomach, and needs a teacher aide to toilet her and change her diaper. She is behind her peers academically because of her disability and long periods of ill health, but she is making steady gains with more regular attendance at school and with proper support.

Joy received support from the Ministry while she was at kindergarten, and has been eligible for ongoing support since she started school. She has a large team of people supporting her, including a psychologist, an occupational therapist, physiotherapists, a speech-language therapist, a teacher aide, a specialist teacher and the classroom teacher, and also hospital therapists. The team meets regularly to discuss Joy's needs and progress and to arrange her therapy sessions with specialists. She has a teacher aide for 25 hours a week. The Ministry pays for 22 of these hours, and Joy's school pays for the remaining three hours. A specialist teacher trains Joy's teachers and teacher aide in supporting Joy and adapting the classroom programme to her needs.

At interval and lunchtimes, Joy is looked after by "buddies" who are rostered from a list of 40 student volunteers. She has recently started going into the playground without assistance and without a buddy for one lunchtime a week, and everyone looks out for her.

Joy has recently been given a communication aid, which has helped her progress significantly and enabled others to understand her as a person. The principal and teachers at Joy's school believe she brings great value to the life of the school, and describe her as a joyful person with a great sense of humour.

Ellie

Supported through the School High Health Needs Fund

Ellie is seven years old and has Type 1 diabetes. She lives in an isolated area and goes to a small country school with fewer than 20 students.

Ellie has an insulin pump that needs adjusting constantly, and she must control very carefully how much she eats and how much energy she uses throughout the day. The insulin pump, which she wears around her waist, keeps insulin flowing into Ellie's body. She needs an adult with her all the time, to watch for signs that Ellie's blood sugar levels are low, monitor her blood sugar levels, and adjust the insulin pump. When Ellie says "I feel low", the teacher or teacher aide has to test her blood sugar levels and give her a snack or a quick dose of insulin. In an emergency, Ellie would need a helicopter to take her to the nearest hospital.

Ellie is never without an adult. She has a teacher aide, who is funded by the Ministry, for part of the week. The teacher aide works in the school office for the other part of the week. The Ministry's Special Education Advisor and a diabetes educator work with the teachers at the school, Ellie's parents, and the other students to make sure that everyone understands Ellie's condition.

Ellie's teachers describe her as a very active, bright girl who lives life to the full. She can test her own blood sugar levels and is learning to interpret those levels. The Ministry's Special Education Advisor is now working on Ellie's Individual Care Plan to phase in self-monitoring gradually, so that she can become more independent by the time she goes to high school.

Len

Supported through the Severe Behaviour Initiative

Len is eight years old and had a difficult start in life. As a tiny baby, he had trouble with sleeping and feeding. He had several medical tests before he was one, and began having extreme temper tantrums in his second year. Len also had language difficulties and received support from the Ministry before entering school.

Len started school in May 2006, and seemed to settle in well so the Ministry's support ceased in October 2006 and his file was closed. However, Len's file did not stay closed for long. He started hitting and scratching other children, and poking their eyes. He has also been assessed for a range of issues, including health issues and for further speech language support.

Len's work in class is about average for his age and he is capable of being very charming and focused. However, he can become violent without any warning if he does not like what is happening or what he is asked to do. He can be very demanding and jealous, and his friendships do not usually last. When his behaviour becomes too difficult in class, he is removed to work with the teacher aide.

Although the school principal and board of trustees have worked hard to keep him in school, the decision was made recently to move Len from his school to an alternative education school for boys with behavioural issues.

Len receives support from a behaviour teacher aide, a Ministry psychologist, and a speech-language therapist. Len also has support from his mother's workplace family support scheme, and the local hospital's Child and Family Mental Health Service. The team that supports Len meets about once a term. Len's mother feels well supported by both the school and the Ministry psychologist who has been working with Len and the family. It has been a struggle to understand and adapt to Len's needs, for her and for the whole family. The Ministry psychologist has worked hard to ensure that Len gets the help he needs as early as possible.

Michael

Supported through the Speech Language Initiative

Michael is a bright, active seven-year-old who attends a small school in a rural town. When Michael was very little, he had recurring ear infections while he was learning to talk. The ear infections prevented him from learning the beginnings and endings of words, and Michael has had difficulty identifying and reproducing these sounds.

When Michael started kindergarten, he could not express what he wanted to say, and others had difficulty understanding him. This made it difficult for him to make friends with the other children in his kindergarten, and they sometimes teased him. Michael was frustrated and unhappy, and he would often run away and hide. When he started school, Michael also had trouble with learning to read, and had extra help with this.

Michael has had support from Child and Adolescent Health Services and the Ministry since starting kindergarten, but had not made very much progress with his speech before his current speech-language therapist started working with him. Michael has had ongoing support in the classroom for two terms from the Ministry's speech-language therapist and a communication support worker.

Michael's current speech-language therapist has been working intensively with him for two years, seeing Michael one-on-one fortnightly. Michael can now say most of his consonants correctly, and has made good friends at school. He talks freely and has given a speech in front of his school assembly. He reads well, and gained the "Diligence" prize last year.

Part 1

Introduction

- 1.1 In this Part, we discuss:
- the purpose of our audit;
 - how we carried out the audit; and
 - what we did not audit.

The purpose of our audit

- 1.2 We carried out a performance audit to examine how effectively the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) manages its support for those school-age students¹ whom it assesses as having the highest level of intellectual or physical disabilities, speech language difficulties, or behavioural problems. The Ministry provides much of its support through its Group Special Education.
- 1.3 Group Special Education provides resources – such as funding, aides, specially trained teachers, adapted programmes, modified learning environments, or specialised equipment or materials – to children and young people based on their level of need, and to schools. Group Special Education staff are based in the Ministry’s 16 district offices (with one or more service centres), four regional offices, and the national office in Wellington.
- 1.4 The arrangements for supporting children and young people with intellectual or physical disabilities, speech language difficulties, or behavioural problems, have been in place since the late 1990s. They arose from a policy – Special Education 2000 – to teach such children within the mainstream education system.
- 1.5 For the students who need the most help, the Ministry provides most of its support through four initiatives. These are the:
- Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS);
 - School High Health Needs Fund;
 - Severe Behaviour Initiative; and
 - Speech Language Initiative.
- 1.6 There are between 16,600–20,500 students receiving support through these four initiatives. Students supported through ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund generally receive more support for longer periods than students supported through the Severe Behaviour and Speech Language Initiatives.
- 1.7 Staff in the Ministry’s national office assess a student’s eligibility for ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund. Staff in the district offices assess a students’ eligibility for the Severe Behaviour Initiative and the Speech Language Initiative. Figure 1 provides more information about each of the four initiatives.

¹ In this report, students are school-age children. Under the four initiatives, school-age means children from school-entry age (5–6 years) to school-leaving age (17 years, or 21 years for the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme).

Figure 1
The Ministry of Education's four initiatives to support students with high special educational needs

Description	Age range	Target number of students for 2009/10	Funding (budget for 2009/10)
Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS)			
Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS), for students who will need the highest level of support for the duration of their schooling	5–21 years (ORS)	6550–6950	\$140m* Based (together) on 1.1% of total student population
Reviewable Resourcing Scheme (RRS), for students whose needs may change over time These schemes support students with the most severe physical and intellectual disabilities. The Ministry funds extra teacher aide time, and provides specialist support and therapists	5–17 years (RRS)		
School High Health Needs Fund			
This fund provides teacher aide time for students who, for health reasons, need care and supervision at school for more than six weeks (for example, to preserve their life, prevent severe health problems or injury, or control infection)	5–17 years	550	\$3.1m
Severe Behaviour Initiative			
The Ministry's behaviour specialists work with students (and their families and educators) who display severe and challenging behaviour that may endanger themselves or others, or adversely affect their learning	5–14 years	4000–6000	\$24m Based on 1% of total student population
Speech Language Initiative			
The Ministry's speech-language therapists work with students who have trouble making themselves understood or understanding others, or have social communication difficulties	5–8 years	5500–7000 (as at February 2009)	\$9m Based on 1% of total student population
Total	5–21 years	16,600–20,500	\$176.1m

* This comprises \$64m in teacher aide funding provided to schools (allocated through district offices), \$14m for service delivery by district offices, and \$62m paid directly to schools for a proportion of dedicated teacher time.

How we carried out the audit

- 1.8 To assess how effectively the Ministry manages its support for students with the highest needs, we focused on how the Ministry:
- determined the level of need for its support;
 - provided guidance about the four initiatives, and assessed applications and referrals for support;
 - allocated resources to support students; and
 - monitored and reviewed the effectiveness of its support for students.
- 1.9 We conducted our fieldwork from October 2008 to April 2009.
- 1.10 We examined relevant Ministry documents and data. We also spoke to the Ministry's Group Special Education staff in the national office, and staff in six of the Ministry's 16 district offices. The six district offices were in three of the Ministry's four regions. The districts and regions we visited were:
- Northwest and Manukau districts in the Northern Region;
 - Taranaki and Greater Wellington districts in the Central South Region; and
 - Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast and Canterbury districts in the Southern Region.
- 1.11 We also spoke to representatives of national educator² and stakeholder organisations, including:
- the New Zealand Principals' Federation, the Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand, and the New Zealand Secondary Principals' Council;
 - the Post-Primary Teachers' Association, and the New Zealand Educational Institute;
 - the New Zealand Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour Association (including their Māori Caucus); and
 - the Inclusive Education Action Group.

What we did not audit

- 1.12 We did not audit:
- the effectiveness of the Ministry's support for students with high special educational needs;
 - the performance of schools in supporting students with special educational needs;
 - how the Ministry provides support through:

² In this report, we use the term "educator" to describe professionals in the education sector such as teachers, principals, Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour, and providers of professional development services for teachers.

- assistive technology and equipment;
- special education school transport assistance; or
- The Correspondence School;
- support provided by Accredited Special Education Service Providers (special or “fund holder” schools);
- the Ministry’s policy decisions about residential schools for students with special educational needs;
- how the Ministry formulates policy around its funding models for the four initiatives;
- how the Ministry provides support allocated through the High and Complex Needs Interagency Strategy; and
- how the Ministry provides support for school-age students with other levels of need, or for children before entering school.

Part 2

Determining the level of need

- 2.1 In this Part, we describe:
- the Ministry’s framework for supporting students with special needs; and
 - how the Ministry determines how many students need the highest level of support.

Summary of our findings

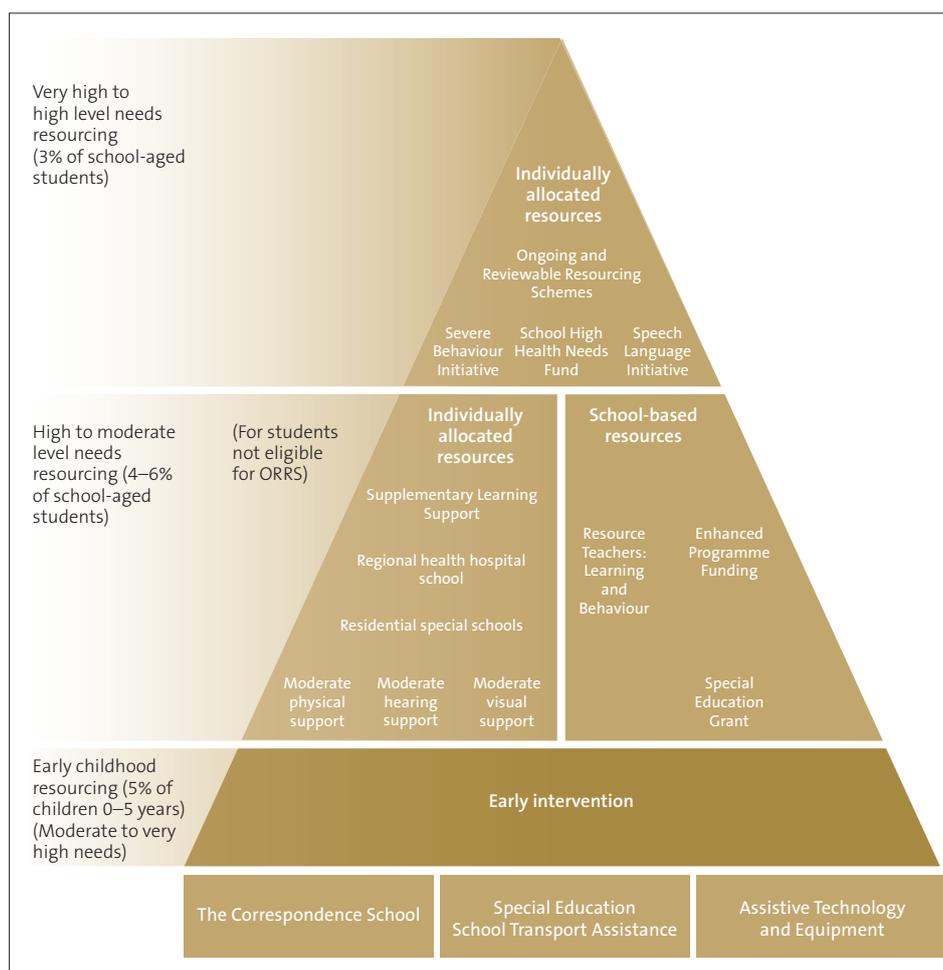
- 2.2 The Ministry considers its support for students with high special educational needs to be part of a continuum of support. The Ministry set its level of support for students with high special educational needs in 1997. Since then, the Ministry has used different sources to monitor whether this proportion is still appropriate to use. The Ministry was aware of increases in the level of need for the Severe Behaviour and Speech Language Initiatives.
- 2.3 The Ministry’s referral data for the Severe Behaviour and Speech Language Initiatives was not reliable at the time of our audit, so the Ministry may not have an accurate and complete picture of the overall level of need. The Ministry is working to improve the integrity of its referral data.
- 2.4 We have made one recommendation in this Part, for the Ministry to further improve, analyse, and report information about the overall level of need for its support. The Ministry needs to use its monitoring information to help identify all students with high special educational needs who are eligible for support.

Framework for supporting students with special needs

- 2.5 The level and type of support the Ministry provides to students is based on an assessment of their needs. The Ministry provides support to:
- children up to school-entry age³ whose needs are assessed as moderate to very high (referred to within the Ministry as “early intervention” support);
 - students whose needs are assessed as moderate to high (referred to as “moderate needs”); and
 - students whose needs are assessed as high to very high (referred to as “high needs”).
- 2.6 Figure 2 sets out the different types of support that the Ministry provides, and how they fit into its framework for supporting students with special needs.

³ Children are not legally required to attend school until they turn six years old, so they can receive Early Intervention support up until the age of six. Children who start school at the age of five can continue to receive Early Intervention support for up to six months after they start.

Figure 2
The Ministry of Education's framework for supporting students with special educational needs



- 2.7 The Ministry's early intervention support is provided to about 12,000 children whom it assesses as having moderate to very high needs. These children are generally under the age of five, and the support is provided either at their home or in an early childhood education centre.
- 2.8 For students whose needs are assessed as moderate (about 50,000 to 70,000 students), the Ministry provides individually allocated and school-based resources that include:
- Supplementary Learning Support, which includes similar services to those provided through ORRS;

- regional health hospital schools, for students who are in hospital or at home because of a long-term illness or to recover from an injury;
- day and residential special schools, for students with moderate and high physical, sensory, behavioural, and learning needs;
- specialist support for students with moderate sensory and physical disabilities;
- Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs), who are school-based teachers who work with students and provide advice to classroom teachers;
- the Enhanced Programme Fund, for selected schools to provide particular programmes for students with special needs; and
- the Special Education Grant, provided to all schools as part of their operational funding, to provide extra assistance for students with all levels of special educational needs.

2.9 Through the four initiatives, the Ministry supports up to about 20,500 students whose needs are assessed as high. It also provides:

- assistive technology, for students who need equipment such as wheelchairs, communication aids, or modified computers;
- property modifications (for example, ramps to allow wheelchair access, lifts, rails, or modified bathrooms); and
- transport assistance, a travel subsidy, or a travel allowance for students who need this assistance for safety or mobility reasons.

Determining how many students need the highest level of support

The Ministry has reviewed and monitored the level of need for the four main initiatives, but there is a risk that some students with high special educational needs are not identified by the Ministry.

All four initiatives

- 2.10 The Ministry generally relies on application and referral data to assess the level of need for support. It also relies on information gathered from its staff working with schools and RTLBs. The Ministry told us that the needs of students eligible for support through ORRS, the School High Health Needs Fund, and the Speech Language Initiative are usually very apparent. The Ministry considers it unlikely that such students would not have already come to its attention or be accessing Ministry support.
- 2.11 The Ministry is gathering data from the Ministry of Health's programme to test the hearing of newborn babies and its B4 School Check programme (which checks

for any health, behavioural, social, or developmental concerns before a child starts school). The Ministry believes that information from these programmes will help identify students who will need support (including those with high special educational needs), and provide useful data with which to forecast demand.

- 2.12 We agree that these programmes could be useful ways of collecting this information but note that, at the time of our audit, the Ministry of Health was reviewing the B4 School Check programme. If the outcome of the review shows the programme has patchy or poor coverage, or leads to the programme being discontinued, the Ministry will need to find other mechanisms to supplement or gather the information it needs. The Ministry intended to develop a screening tool for behaviour that does not rely on these programmes as part of its action plan for 2008/09.⁴

Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes

- 2.13 The ORRS were established in 1998, after the Ministry trialled an Ongoing Resourcing Scheme in 1997. After the trial, the Ministry provided advice (which informed a recommendation to Cabinet) that the scheme include enough funding for up to 1% of the national student population.
- 2.14 A survey in 2008 – the 2008 resourcing survey⁵ – indicated that 1.1% of the national student population would be eligible for ORRS support. Budget 2009 increased the ORRS funding to support this many students.
- 2.15 The Ministry told us that it knows how many students are likely to be eligible for support through ORRS, because most children with high needs are identified at a young age through health professionals and early childhood centres. Our analysis of application data provided by the Ministry shows that ORRS support is being provided to about 1% of the national student population.

School High Health Needs Fund

- 2.16 The Ministry set up the School High Health Needs Fund in 2001, in response to a recommendation in the Wylie report.⁶ The Wylie report reviewed the implementation of the Special Education 2000 policy, and noted that there were about 300 students with high health-related needs who could not safely attend school without additional support. The School High Health Needs Fund was funded to provide support to this many students.

4 Ministry of Education (2008), *Setting Boundaries – a plan of action for addressing behaviour issues in schools and early childhood centres*, Version Two, Wellington.

5 Cognition Consulting Ltd (2008), *Survey of Special Education Resourcing*, Ministry of Education, Wellington.

6 Wylie, C (2000), *Picking up the Pieces: Review of Special Education 2000*, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington. Referred to as the “Wylie report”, this analysis of Special Education 2000 was commissioned by the Ministry for the High Court judicial review of the policy in 2000.

- 2.17 The Ministry has noted a marked increase in the number of applications from students with severe allergies and Type 1 diabetes. The Ministry told us that, in the past, it has responded to the higher demand by seeking additional funds through the Budget process or drawing funds from other sources. Budget 2008 increased the number of students able to access the School High Health Needs Fund by about 250 students, to a total of 550 students. Budget 2009 maintained this level of funding.

Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative

- 2.18 The Ministry set up the Severe Behaviour Initiative in 1999 after having set up the Speech Language Initiative in 1998. A 1997 Cabinet paper proposing the two initiatives referred to research suggesting that the numbers of students with behavioural difficulties was increasing, and national and international studies estimating that 2–6% of students had behavioural difficulties.
- 2.19 The Cabinet paper proposed three levels of support, with the most intensive support (the Severe Behaviour Initiative) being available to a maximum of up to 1% of the national student population. For the Severe Behaviour Initiative, the Ministry told us that the shorter-term interventions proposed in the 1997 Cabinet paper, and a subsequent Cabinet paper, were not effective enough if spread across the full target number of students. The Ministry told us that it now uses the Severe Behaviour Initiative to greater effect by providing longer-term support to fewer students (about 0.7% of the population of students at school).
- 2.20 The 1997 Cabinet paper proposed that the level of support through the Speech Language Initiative be increased for each student each year, especially for those students in their early school years. This increase was proposed for the number of students receiving support for speech language difficulties at that time. The Ministry's figures show that Speech Language Initiative support is provided to about 1% of the national student population.
- 2.21 The Ministry has reviewed and monitored the Severe Behaviour and Speech Language Initiatives since it set them up. The reviews and monitoring have indicated that the level of need for support from these initiatives is higher than 1% of the national student population. During our audit, Ministry staff and educators noted an increasing number of referrals and requests for support for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and students with severe behavioural difficulties. Ministry staff and educators also noted an increase in the intensity, complexity, and numbers of severe and complex behaviour cases. The Ministry is aware that there are students who could be eligible for Severe Behaviour Initiative support who have not come to its attention.

- 2.22 After we finished our audit fieldwork, the Ministry worked with national educator organisations to prepare a behaviour and learning plan (called Positive Behaviour and Learning). Through this plan, the Ministry and other agencies will seek to address issues of challenging and disruptive behaviour in schools and early childhood education centres.
- 2.23 Educators also told us that many students the Ministry assessed as having moderate needs were displaying needs that were increasingly severe at school, particularly those with behavioural difficulties. Educators told us that this placed significantly more pressure on teaching staff and school communities, and on staff and services providing support for those students. This had the flow-on effect that resources such as RTLBs and the Special Education Grant were used to support students with high needs, leaving some students with more moderate needs (such as those with delayed reading ability) with less or no support.
- 2.24 The Ministry told us that it unsuccessfully sought increased funding on several occasions for both the Severe Behaviour Initiative and the Speech Language Initiative, based on evidence gathered from the work the Ministry has commissioned and from other sources.⁷
- 2.25 After we finished our audit fieldwork, the Ministry implemented monthly monitoring and reporting of application and referral data for the Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative. This reporting includes fortnightly updates to the Minister of Education: Special Education, which should help inform policy decisions about planning and prioritising support.

Further work to do in monitoring, reviewing, and reporting

- 2.26 In our view, for ORRS, the School High Health Needs Fund, and the Speech Language Initiative, there is still a risk that some students who would be eligible for support do not apply, or are not referred for Ministry support. This risk arises because the Ministry relies mainly on applications and referrals for its high-level support as the main indicator of the level of need for all four initiatives. However, at the time of our audit, referral data for the Severe Behaviour and Speech Language Initiatives was unreliable (see paragraphs 4.36–4.42 where we discuss this further, and paragraphs 5.22-5.23 describing work that has been done in 2009 to improve the reliability of referral data). Also, several Ministry staff we spoke to expressed a concern that, in areas with high numbers of Māori and Pasifika students, potentially eligible students were not accessing services.

7 These sources include the “Church Report” – Church, J (2003), *The definition, diagnosis and treatment of children and youth with severe behaviour difficulties*, Ministry of Education, Wellington – and Gillon, G, Moriarty, B, and Schwarz, I (2006), *An International Literature Review of Best Practices in Speech and Language Therapy: Assessment and Intervention Practices*, University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

- 2.27 While acknowledging the work that the Ministry is doing to monitor the level of need for ORRS, School High Health Needs Fund, Severe Behaviour Initiative, and Speech Language Initiative support, we encourage the Ministry to be vigilant and review the overall level of need in a systematic, focused, and ongoing manner. We also encourage the Ministry to routinely analyse and report the information it has to inform policy decisions about the resourcing need for the four initiatives. Unless this information is used routinely, there is a risk that policy decisions about resourcing are not based on rigorous information on the overall level of need. This could mean that students with high special educational needs may not all have access to appropriate support.
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Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Ministry of Education further improve the quality of, routinely analyse, and report information about the overall level of need for support, to inform policy decisions about resourcing its four initiatives for students with high special educational needs.

Part 3

Providing guidance and assessing applications and referrals for support

- 3.1 In this Part, we set out our findings about how the Ministry:
- provides guidance material for applicants and those making referrals for support;
 - provides assistance for applicants and those making referrals for support;
 - assesses applications and referrals for support;
 - reviews assessment decisions; and
 - provides assistance for students assessed as not eligible for high special educational support.

Summary of our findings

- 3.2 The Ministry provides varying amounts of guidance to those applying for support or referring students for support from each of the four initiatives. It has formal national assessment and review processes for ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund, which reflect a higher level of risk (given the greater intensity, duration, and type of support) to the Ministry and to the students. The Ministry is implementing collaborative procedures with schools and RTLBs for processes to carry out eligibility assessments and reviews for the Severe Behaviour and Speech Language Initiatives. It is also implementing consistent access criteria for both these initiatives.
- 3.3 However, the Ministry's guidance for ORRS applicants could be clearer about the level of need required for eligibility. Also, processes for carrying out eligibility assessments and reviews for the Severe Behaviour and Speech Language Initiatives vary from district to district.
- 3.4 We have made four recommendations in this Part, for the Ministry to improve:
- its guidance and advice for ORRS applicants;
 - the consistency of its processes for reviewing eligibility for the Severe Behaviour and Speech Language Initiatives; and
 - the availability of information about other forms of support for students who are not eligible for support from the four initiatives.

Providing guidance material for applicants and those making referrals for support

The Ministry has prepared and distributed guidance material about all four initiatives. The educators and parents/caregivers we spoke with were generally supportive of that material. However, the information that is supposed to explain whether a student might be eligible for ORRS support could be clearer still.

- 3.5 For ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund, educators complete application forms and send them to the Ministry's national office. A verification team assesses the applications and makes the eligibility decisions (see Appendices 1 and 2 for more information).
- 3.6 For the Severe Behaviour Initiative and the Speech Language Initiative, educators make referrals to the Ministry's district offices. Specialists in the district offices decide on the eligibility of each student referred to them (see Appendices 3 and 4 for more information).

Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes and the School High Health Needs Fund

- 3.7 The Ministry has produced guidelines that set out the criteria it uses to assess whether a student is eligible for ORRS support. The guidelines include profiles of students to illustrate each criterion. The guidelines are available in booklet form and on the Ministry's website. Districts and service centres also produce letters, brochures, and "information packs", including some in te reo Māori, about ORRS support.
- 3.8 The Ministry's School High Health Needs Fund guidelines, also in booklet form and on the Ministry website, are laid out similarly to the ORRS guidelines. The Ministry also provides teachers and parents/caregivers with additional information after students have been assessed as eligible for receiving ORRS or School High Health Needs Fund support. The additional information describes what teachers and parents/caregivers can expect of the support services, the processes involved, and the responsibilities of the school and teacher. It includes contact details and explains the allocation of teacher aide hours.
- 3.9 Educators and parents/caregivers we talked to as part of the audit were generally positive about the Ministry's guidance material. However, they felt that the Ministry did not clearly communicate, in either the ORRS guidance material or the application forms, the level of need required to be eligible for support. This was particularly so for students with complex needs (Criterion 9 in the ORRS guidelines) and students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

- 3.10 Some Ministry staff and some educators noted that the profiles in the ORRS guidelines are of younger children. Profiles of older children would be useful when the applications are for students whose needs were not identified when the children were young. Although the ORRS guidelines have been revised twice to make explanations clearer, the 2008 resourcing survey noted that people still found the criteria unclear. The Ministry is currently reviewing the guidelines to align them to the new curriculum. We were told that this review would include looking at whether the criteria could be simplified.
- 3.11 We agree that the information about eligibility for ORRS support could be clearer, particularly in the profiles used to illustrate each criterion. There are no profiles in the guidelines of students more than five years of age. The Ministry told us that this is because very few applications are for children older than school-entry age. In our view, the Ministry could include additional wording to give a clearer picture of an older student in the profile of Criterion 9 in the guidelines, because this is the criterion that is most likely to apply to older students who become eligible for ORRS support.
- 3.12 The profiles deliberately do not mention any specialist diagnosis because the Ministry wants those completing the application forms to focus on the student's behaviours and capabilities. The Ministry also said that the behaviours noted for each criterion were unlikely to differ for older children. However, in our view, the behaviours and circumstances described in the profiles could be interpreted in different ways, indicating different intensities and types of needs.
- 3.13 We analysed application approval and decline figures provided by the Ministry. The data shows that, in the last three years, the Ministry has consistently declined about 20% of ORRS applications. The Ministry told us that about half of these applications were declined because the level of need was well below that required for eligibility.
- 3.14 The Ministry noted that about two-thirds of the applications were filled in by the Ministry's Early Intervention teachers, who should be aware of the level, intensity, and types of needs meant, and were also aware of the circumstances that would influence the level of support required. The number of applications that were declined because the level of need was too low suggests to us that Ministry needs to also clarify this for its staff.
- 3.15 If the guidelines are not clear about the level of need required for eligibility, people might not apply because they mistakenly believe that the child is ineligible for support. Equally, people could prepare detailed and time-consuming applications for students who are ineligible – applications that Ministry staff spend time assessing and responding to. We recognise that many decisions to apply rely on

the professional judgement of Ministry staff. However, there are clear benefits for the public and for the Ministry in ensuring that the guidelines are as clear and unambiguous as possible.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Ministry of Education provide clearer information about the intensity and type of need required for a student to be eligible for the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes.

Severe Behaviour Initiative

- 3.16 Information about the Severe Behaviour Initiative is available on the Ministry's website. The Ministry provides district offices with letters about its general services, and brochures specifically about the Severe Behaviour Initiative. The letters and brochures are adapted by district offices, and distributed to schools and parents/caregivers.
- 3.17 Referrals are managed by district offices, and there is a standard referral form for educators to use. In the Tai Tokerau district, the referral forms have been translated into te reo Māori.

Speech Language Initiative

- 3.18 The guidance material the Ministry has produced about the Speech Language Initiative is largely written for parents/caregivers and educators of young children. This is appropriate, because students with speech language difficulties are usually identified at an early age by their parents, by health practitioners, or by staff in early childhood education centres. Much of the guidance aims to help parents identify whether their child has a speech language difficulty and, if so, the severity of the difficulty. In some of the districts we visited, the district offices had adapted the Ministry's generic material to explain the referral process in more detail. District offices also produced general information packs for schools.

Providing direct assistance with applications and referrals for support

Some Ministry staff provide help and support to people completing application forms and making referrals for the Ministry's support. Others do not see this as part of their role. Some applicants wanted more advice to help them to complete applications.

All four initiatives

- 3.19 The Ministry's specialist staff provide a range of assistance and support to applicants and those making referrals for support, including explaining eligibility criteria, providing specialist observations and assessments, and helping to gather relevant information from other agencies and professionals. The Ministry's Early Intervention teachers and other staff also help early childhood centre staff prepare applications for students who need support and are about to start school. All districts also have staff in a Kaitakawaenga role, who advise and help Māori students to access services. Some districts we visited have Pasifika liaison staff and established links with Pasifika community organisations.

Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes and the School High Health Needs Fund

- 3.20 Applications for ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund need to be comprehensive and highly detailed. Some Ministry staff give direct advice to applicants, especially to applicants for ORRS. However, while some staff in the districts we visited provided a lot of help, others did not see providing such assistance as part of their role. Educators we talked to as part of the audit noted that it was hard to access Ministry staff for help.
- 3.21 About two-thirds of applications for ORRS and School High Health Needs Fund are completed by the Ministry's Early Intervention staff and early childhood education centre staff before the child goes to school. Of the remainder, most are completed by a teacher designated as the special educational needs co-ordinator, or by the school principal, with help (in some cases) from an RTLB. This includes reapplying when applications by the Ministry's Early Intervention staff have been unsuccessful.
- 3.22 When the Ministry assesses eligibility, it considers the applicants' individual circumstances and the level of support they may already have. Some Ministry staff and educators told us that applications were often not comprehensive enough when the person applying was not familiar with the ORRS application process. We were told that, in some cases, educators were daunted by the application process

and did not apply. During our interviews, a number of Ministry staff and educators also noted some frustration and discouragement when applications that had taken a lot of time, organisation, and expense were turned down.

- 3.23 The ORRS guidelines were revised in 2002 to reflect revised criteria. They were revised again in 2006, after feedback⁸ that the ORRS application process was too complex and complicated. However, educators and Ministry staff told us that they needed to provide schools and parents/caregivers with further explanations to help them to fill out ORRS application forms. Some of those we spoke to told us that they tried to tailor the description of the student's needs to particular criteria that they perceived to be a priority for the Ministry or, based on previous experience, criteria that were more likely to result in the student's verification by the Ministry.
- 3.24 In our view, the number of applications that are declined (see paragraph 3.13) might be reduced if the Ministry provided clearer guidance and direction about the level of need required for a child to be eligible for ORRS support, including guidance about considering the child's individual circumstances.
- 3.25 In our view, the Ministry's advice and support to all ORRS applicants should provide a clear understanding of the level of need required for students to be eligible for support, the process involved, and the range of supporting information that has to accompany the application. If the advice is not readily available, as well as clear and specific, students who would otherwise be eligible might not receive the support they are entitled to because their application was not completed properly, or not submitted.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Ministry of Education ensure that its staff consistently provide applicants to the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes with enough advice to ensure that applications are completed properly.

Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative

- 3.26 The Ministry is working to establish good relationships with RTLBs and their schools, because most referrals for the Severe Behaviour Initiative are submitted through RTLBs. The Ministry's RTLB Toolkit lays out the policy and requirements for RTLB "clusters" to prepare protocols for working with schools and the Ministry. Several districts we visited as part of the audit had put in place, or were preparing, protocols for referral procedures, although difficulties in establishing effective links with local RTLBs were noted in some Ministry districts. The

⁸ The feedback was provided after an extensive exercise in 2005 (see the Ministry's *Local Service Profiling National Report*, March 2005).

Taranaki consultation process, involving educators and RTLBs in an ongoing and collaborative way, was noted by Ministry staff as a successful and effective process, and has been adapted for elsewhere in that region and in other districts.

- 3.27 Students who are identified as having speech language difficulties are initially seen by a speech-language therapist who, as part of their assessment, advises parents and educators whether to refer the child for more support. Some districts we visited had outreach initiatives for Speech Language Initiative support services, such as presentations to educators and parents/caregivers, and assessment packages for teachers, to help identify whether a student has a severe communication difficulty.

Assessing applications and referrals for support

The Ministry employs experienced specialist staff, who assess applications and referrals for support. There are comprehensive national criteria to assess a student's eligibility for ORRS and School High Health Needs Fund support. During 2009, the Ministry has been implementing national access criteria for the Severe Behaviour Initiative and national criteria for the Speech Language Initiative.

Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes and the School High Health Needs Fund

- 3.28 For ORRS support, students need to meet at least one of nine criteria related to the student's need for support to attend, participate, and learn in school. Students are assessed as being at either a very high or high level of need. Each criterion relates to a particular area of need, including learning, hearing, vision, mobility, or language use and social communication. Students may need most or all of their school work adapted, specialist care, and assistance with communicating, moving around, and/or personal care. Students are also eligible (under Criterion 9) if they have a combination of three different moderate to high needs that interrelate to significantly reduce their ability to do school work.
- 3.29 For School High Health Needs Fund support, students must meet four of five criteria related to the student's need for physical or medical support in order to safely attend and participate in school.
- 3.30 The Ministry's team of eight verifiers assess applications against the criteria for ORRS and School High Health Needs Fund support. They follow a set of processes and procedures. Each application for ORRS support is assessed by three verifiers, including one with particular expertise in one area of the student's needs. If the three verifiers cannot agree, the application is considered by all eight verifiers.

For each application for School High Health Needs Fund support, all verifiers independently assess the application, then discuss and agree on a decision.

- 3.31 Most of the verification team have worked for the Ministry for 10 years or more. They are experienced in early childhood or primary school teaching, and have specialist qualifications in special education.

Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative

- 3.32 Throughout 2009, the Ministry has been implementing national access criteria for the Severe Behaviour Initiative support. The criteria include a history of unsuccessful interventions, physical and verbal aggression, putting the safety of others at risk, disruption to the class programme, property damage, consistent non-compliance, behaviour requiring the teacher to seek assistance, lack of (or inappropriate) communication with other students, recent trauma, and being socially withdrawn.
- 3.33 Throughout 2009, the Ministry has also been implementing new national access criteria for Speech Language Initiative support. The criteria replace the Ministry's national prioritisation checklist and guidelines, and a range of checklists and tools used in different district offices.
- 3.34 Service managers within the district offices, along with speech-language therapists and communication support workers, educational psychologists, special education advisors, and support workers manage the referral and screening processes to determine eligibility for the Speech Language Initiative and the Severe Behaviour Initiative. Most management and specialist Ministry staff we met as part of our audit fieldwork had worked for the Ministry for many years and were experienced within their specialist fields.
- 3.35 The Ministry considers that the professional judgement of its staff is very important when assessing all applications and referrals for support. It also recognises that its new national access criteria, when applied throughout the country, will help to ensure that those professional judgements are applied in a thorough and consistent way. We support the Ministry in its implementation of these access criteria.

Reviewing assessment decisions

The Ministry has clear formal processes to review eligibility decisions about support through ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund. There are no nationally consistent processes or protocols for reviewing decisions to decline support through the Severe Behaviour Initiative or the Speech Language Initiative.

Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes and the School High Health Needs Fund

- 3.36 The Ministry's verifiers regularly audit successful and unsuccessful applications to ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund, to help measure the consistency of their decisions. Two verifiers visit selected students to check that the correct decision was made and that the criteria were applied consistently to students with similar needs. Audits can be general, or targeted to one particular criterion or an individual student. The verifiers record what they read, see, and hear as part of the audit, and provide a report to all the other verifiers.⁹
- 3.37 Applicants for ORRS and School High Health Needs Fund support can request, in writing, one or more reviews of the verifiers' decision within six months of the decision. If, after these reviews, the parents/caregivers are not satisfied with the verifiers' decision, they can write to the Secretary for Education to ask for a reconsideration under section 10 of the Education Act 1989. This reconsideration is arranged independently of the verifiers. There is no formal right of appeal available to parents/caregivers for decisions about the School High Health Needs Fund.

Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative

- 3.38 At the time of the audit, the Ministry did not have a formal process for reviewing decisions to decline support through the Severe Behaviour Initiative or the Speech Language Initiative, when requested to do so by referrers. The Ministry told us that this was because the support it provided through these initiatives was of a shorter duration and less intense, and therefore posed less risk. Also, the Ministry considered that its team approach in district offices for assessing referrals for eligibility, including peer review, provided a rigorous decision-making process that did not require further review.
- 3.39 The Ministry told us that, if a school or an RTLB asked for a review of an assessment decision, staff in the district offices usually offered information about other avenues of support, or reconsidered the referral. To reconsider the referral, they might ask for further information or seek an expert opinion (for example,

⁹ Revoking the funding is one of the options available if there is a significant mismatch between the information provided in the application and the findings from the audit. Applicants can also be invited to reapply.

from a medical specialist). The small sample of documents we reviewed as part of our audit, and comments we received from educators, indicated that actual practices vary between districts.

- 3.40 After we completed our audit fieldwork, protocols for RTLB–Ministry¹⁰ collaboration have been set up in all districts. These protocols cover the process for reviewing decisions that decline support for the Severe Behaviour Initiative and the Speech Language Initiative. However, the Ministry noted that in some districts the protocols are not yet fully implemented. In our view, the Ministry should ensure that all its districts are consistently following protocols with RTLBs for reviewing Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative assessment decisions that decline an applicant. Without consistency, students in different parts of the country may receive different responses to their requests for a review.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Ministry of Education ensure that all district offices follow consistent protocols for reviewing Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative assessment decisions when applications have been declined.

Providing assistance for ineligible students

The Ministry has initiatives and resources to support students with moderate special educational needs. It has some procedures in place to inform those students who are assessed as ineligible for the highest level of support about these initiatives and resources. At the time of our audit, actual practices in the districts we visited were variable and inconsistent.

- 3.41 The Ministry provides funding for a range of individually allocated and school-based initiatives and resources to support students with moderate special educational needs. The Ministry also refers students who have not met eligibility criteria for the four initiatives to many interagency or other support services.
- 3.42 Some information about other options for support is provided in the guidelines and the letter telling an applicant that their application was unsuccessful (decline letters) for ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund. Decline letters for the Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative also include guidance and offer the applicant the opportunity for further advice. In some cases, Ministry staff give direct advice to those who have made unsuccessful referrals.
- 3.43 At the time of our audit, the Ministry told us that districts had follow-up measures when declining a referral for Severe Behaviour Initiative or Speech Language

¹⁰ Ministry of Education (2007), *Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) Policy and Toolkit* (2007), Wellington.

Initiative support. These measures included telephone calls to the referring school or RTLB to provide advice and guidance about other support options, information in letters, meeting the referrer to explore other options, or directing the referral to another agency. The Ministry told us that the decline letters usually included an invitation to discuss further options.

- 3.44 However, some educators told us that their experience was a lack of active follow-up by Ministry staff. They told us that further discussion often depended on the principal's persistence in pursuing the matter. They also told us that the information in the decline letters was not particularly helpful. Educators told us that it fell to the school or RTLB to investigate other options, which could involve making a number of different applications to a range of funding sources. Although the Ministry has noted that this is part of the RTLB's job, as outlined in the RTLB–Ministry protocols, the Ministry also noted in its Business Plan for special education in 2008/09 that the Ministry's role included "brokering" appropriate support for students with special educational needs.
- 3.45 We looked at a small sample of the Ministry's decline letters for ORRS, and for the Severe Behaviour and Speech Language Initiatives, in the districts we visited as part of the audit. We found varying practices. The decline letters for ORRS support focused on explaining why the needs presented by the applicant did not meet the criteria, and did not provide much advice about other support options. Some decline letters for the Severe Behaviour and Speech Language Initiatives offered no advice about other forms of support (and, instead, enclosed pamphlets outlining the criteria for support). Other decline letters (particularly those for the Speech Language Initiative) described groups and programmes that might support the student, and enclosed information booklets and a list of private providers.
- 3.46 In our view, the Ministry should ensure that it is consistent (throughout all districts) in the information and advice it gives about other forms of support to those who are not supported through the four initiatives. Educators and parents/caregivers should be made aware of, and have access to, other support options. Without this advice and information, it could be difficult for students to access the appropriate type of support for their needs.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Ministry of Education ensure that district staff provide consistent information and advice about the other support options available to students who are not eligible for the four initiatives.

Part 4

Allocating resources for supporting students

- 4.1 In this Part, we set out our findings about how the Ministry:
- allocates funding and resources to support students;
 - makes sure that students receive timely support; and
 - trains and supports its staff who provide support for students.

Summary of our findings

- 4.2 The Ministry pools funding for ORRS and School High Health Needs Fund nationally, and distributes it to districts for allocation to students. For the Severe Behaviour and Speech Language Initiatives, districts receive funding allocations based on the total student population of each district. The allocations may not match the level of need in a particular district.
- 4.3 The Ministry had processes for allocating resources and funding to students. These processes and the timeframes for providing services varied across and within the districts we visited. Managing the balance of teacher aide hour allocations for ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund was putting pressure on some district budgets. The Ministry was implementing a National Moderation Plan to achieve better consistency in its approach to the ORRS and School High Health Needs Fund allocation process. The Ministry was also implementing processes for more timely delivery of its services for Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative support.
- 4.4 Staff capacity problems in some districts caused significant delays in providing Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative support to students. The Ministry was working to improve this through closer contact with schools and RTLBs, and also improving its waiting list data. Ministry staff received regular and appropriate training.
- 4.5 We have made four recommendations in this Part, for the Ministry to improve:
- the consistency with which districts allocate and moderate ORRS and School High Health Needs Fund teacher aide hours;
 - the timeliness with which students receive services;
 - its checking of the integrity of its waiting list data; and
 - its management of staff capacity.

Allocating funding and resources to students

At the time of our audit, the Ministry’s approach to allocating funding and resources to students receiving support through the four initiatives was not nationally consistent. This meant students with similar needs and circumstances could receive different levels of support in different parts of the country.

Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes and the School High Health Needs Fund

- 4.6 When students are verified as eligible for ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund, they generate a set funding figure. The Ministry pools this funding, and allocates some funding directly to “fund holder” schools.¹¹
- 4.7 The rest is allocated to the Ministry’s district offices. Each district office then allocates funding to students who are assessed as eligible and enrolled at schools in its district. This funding is for specialist services, teacher aide hours, and extra resources and materials.
- 4.8 Districts receive weekly notification from the Ministry’s national office, confirming which students are to receive ORRS and School High Health Needs Fund support. District offices then allocate and co-ordinate specialist Ministry staff and teacher aide hours according to staff capacity and the student’s level of need.
- 4.9 The individual circumstances of the student are also considered, such as whether resources are already in place in the school for other students with high special educational needs, the degree of support from the student’s family, and the student’s current learning needs. In districts we visited, the allocation occurred through regular team meetings, or was decided by the service manager, or was agreed at meetings that included staff from different service centres within a district.
- 4.10 Most of the district funding for ORRS students (70%), and all of the funding for School High Health Needs Fund students, is made as a contribution to funding teacher aides to support the student in the classroom.¹² The funding supports an estimated 17.5 teacher aide hours each week for a student with very high needs, and an estimated 10 teacher aide hours each week for a student with high needs (for both ORRS and the School High Health Needs Fund). The hours are then pooled at a district level.

11 About 2000 ORRS-funded students (20% of all ORRS-funded students) receive support through “fund holder” schools.

12 Teacher aides are seen by educators as highly important for ensuring continuity and direct support for the student. The Ministry told us that higher demands for teacher aide hours may reflect the need for schools to “top up” both the hourly rate paid to teacher aides and the number of teacher aide hours, in order to provide the support needed.

- 4.11 The teacher aide hours are allocated by district offices to students each year (usually in October or November) for the next calendar year. This occurs through the Ministry's rating and allocation process (known as "moderation"), which includes these steps:
- schools submit requests for teacher aide hours to the Ministry based on the needs of the student, and with the help of the lead caseworker;¹³
 - these requests are considered by a team who assess each student's learning, sensory, and physical needs using the Ministry's national descriptors and rating scale, which generates the number of teacher aide hours the student is likely to need;
 - the Ministry district moderation panel considers the individual student's current needs and circumstances, and decides whether the student needs fewer or more hours than the rating scale has indicated; and
 - regional moderation meetings compare allocations between districts (further adjustments may then be made by districts).
- 4.12 Students who need fewer hours are called "unders" and those who need more are called "overs". This process allows the district to balance the level of resource for individual students against the regionally moderated level of resource for students with that level of need and in similar circumstances.
- 4.13 At the time of our audit, the approaches to "moderation" were many and varied. Approaches in the districts we visited, and other approaches that were reported to us, included:
- in several districts, involving only Ministry specialist and administrative teams;
 - in one district, involving parents/caregivers, educators, and the student's lead caseworker to a greater or lesser extent;
 - in some districts, using the student's Individual Education Programme (IEP) plan as the basis for allocation;
 - in one district, adapting the Ministry's national rating scale; and
 - in some districts, involving either teams or the whole staff in decisions about allocating teacher aide hours.
- 4.14 The risk of districts using different approaches to allocate teacher aide hours is that students with similar needs in different parts of the country may receive more or fewer hours. The number of hours they receive could depend on how the rating scale has been adapted or interpreted in their district, who has been involved in the rating and allocation process, and whether the student's IEP plan has been used.

¹³ The lead caseworker is the person (usually a Ministry specialist staff member) designated as the leader for the wider support team that works with a particular student.

- 4.15 In several of the districts we visited, Ministry staff estimated that there were generally more “overs” students in their districts than “unders” students. They told us that in the past few years this had made balancing the distribution of hours difficult within a fixed budget. In some cases, they had relied on the School High Health Needs Fund and other funding sources to supplement the ORRS funding.
- 4.16 In 2008, the Ministry surveyed staff about the arrangements for ORRS, and became aware of variability in nearly all aspects of the funding and moderation processes. The Ministry has now implemented a National Moderation Plan, in response to those survey findings. The National Moderation Plan includes re-establishing national criteria for funding, nationally consistent annual moderation processes and rating scales, and nationally consistent letter templates explaining how teacher aide hours are allocated and what the funding is provided for.
- 4.17 The National Moderation Plan also separates out the School High Health Needs Fund and the ORRS process and funding, which will enable the Ministry to be clear about the differences in figures between projected allocation and actual surpluses or deficits. The Ministry expects that, once national consistency has been established and the next moderation round has been completed in October 2009, it will be able to determine with greater certainty whether districts have a greater number of students needing more teacher aide hours in each district. The National Moderation Plan includes reviewing and co-ordinating district’s budget management strategies.
- 4.18 In our view, the Ministry needs to give priority to implementing its National Moderation Plan for ORRS and School High Health Needs Fund funding and moderation processes, to ensure that funding and resources are allocated as fairly and equally to students throughout the country as possible within fixed district budgets. The risk of continuing with varying approaches to rating students’ needs is that the number of hours allocated to students with similar needs and circumstances in different districts will be different.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Ministry of Education ensure, through its National Moderation Plan, the consistency and appropriateness of its approach to moderating teacher aide hours for students supported through the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes and the School High Health Needs Fund.

Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative

- 4.19 There are no nationally prescribed processes for funding and allocating Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative support services. However, allocation decisions are usually made in a similar way by district offices, with variation according to budget constraints and demand. Districts receive funding allocations for both initiatives from the Ministry's national office in April of each year, for specialist Ministry staff, based on the district's student population.¹⁴ Because it is based on population, the funding allocation for a district may not match the district's actual level of need for these initiatives.
- 4.20 Districts then allocate their specialist services and support worker hours depending on their staff numbers and according to the number of students they are supporting. In most districts, specialists make allocation decisions in consultation with the service manager, according to their caseloads. Referrals are prioritised for allocation to specialist staff according to the level of need, assessed against the national criteria used in that district, and also according to waiting times. The Greater Wellington district also adds a decile weighting to its allocation methods.
- 4.21 The Ministry told us that it balances capacity with quality and quantity of service delivery, to avoid spreading its services so thinly that they are ineffective. For the Severe Behaviour Initiative, the Ministry told us that it considers more intense interventions to be the most effective, and bases the allocation for support on depth and intensity rather than quantity. The Ministry also told us that, as research shows that interventions for severe behaviour are more effective when children are younger, the rating scales used to assess need in the allocation process are weighted toward children in the younger age groups.
- 4.22 District offices have a limited amount of flexibility to determine staffing levels and capacity within their funding allocations. Ministry staff in districts we visited told us that they have, or were setting up, close contact with schools and RTLBs, in accordance with the RTLB–Ministry protocols discussed in paragraphs 3.26 and 3.40. Using this contact to understand likely trends and patterns of need is expected to help districts to prioritise better and avoid the risk of having little or no staff capacity when needs arise.
- 4.23 We encourage the Ministry's district offices to continue to work actively with RTLBs, schools, and early childhood centres, gathering information that will help with more accurate forecasting and planning for funding and resources within district allocations, and staff capacity. This is important for providing a consistent level of support to students receiving Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative support throughout the country.

¹⁴ The funding is based on the targeted population – Year 1 to Year 3 for the Speech Language Initiative; Year 1 to Year 10 for the Severe Behaviour Initiative – and allocated by the district's total student population.

Making sure that students receive timely funding and resources

At the time of our audit, the Ministry did not have clear or consistent processes to ensure that funding and resources are allocated to students in a timely manner. The Ministry did not have reliable data about the numbers of students on waiting lists for the Severe Behaviour Initiative and the Speech Language Initiative.

All four initiatives

- 4.24 Ministry staff record information about students who have been referred or verified, allocation of staff to cases, services provided, and closure of cases for all four initiatives in the Ministry's national reporting and work outputs database, Te Pātaka.
- 4.25 The district offices we visited managed the allocation of resources differently. They had different schedules for how regularly they met to decide on referrals and the allocation of resources, different methods for making those decisions, and different patterns of communication with early childhood education centres, schools, and RTLBs.
- 4.26 Some district offices we visited had combined early intervention and school teams, and managed the change of support easily when children move from an early childhood education centre to a school. Other district offices had protocols or tools such as "transition plans", which they used with the early childhood centre or the school where the student will go.
- 4.27 Some of the districts we visited were having trouble recruiting and retaining psychologists and speech-language therapists. Educators we talked to as part of the audit commented that they sometimes received services between one and two terms after referrals for support were accepted. By this time, the student's behaviour could have changed, or the student could have left the school.
- 4.28 The Te Pātaka *User Manual* sets out a 10-day timeframe for acceptance of a referral, but states that cases should not be allocated if services are unlikely to start within six to eight weeks of acceptance.
- 4.29 After our audit, the Ministry introduced an expectation that there be no more than 90 days (about one school term) between referral (or a successful application) and receiving support through ORRS, the Severe Behaviour Initiative, or the Speech Language Initiative. The Ministry is currently working to ensure that students receive services within 90 days of acceptance after referral. (We discuss this further in paragraphs 4.33 to 4.39.)

Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes and the School High Health Needs Fund

- 4.30 At the time of our audit, the Ministry had not set a required timeframe for allocating specialist staff time or teacher aide hours to a student eligible for ORRS or the School High Health Needs Fund. However, Ministry staff told us that most Ministry offices did this within two or three weeks, or sooner if the school already had a teacher aide whose hours could be extended to cover the student.

Severe Behaviour Initiative

- 4.31 The Ministry provides services through the Severe Behaviour Initiative either as an immediate response to a severe situation or after receiving a referral from its early intervention staff or RTLBs. The Ministry has a policy of responding quickly to requests for severe behaviour support, with a 24-hour response time to a situation that poses safety risks to an individual or group.
- 4.32 At the time of our audit, staff in many district offices and RTLBs worked together in consultation or according to Ministry protocols so that children received support quickly (immediately or within two weeks). As noted earlier, protocols for RTLBs, schools, and the Ministry working collaboratively are now in place nationally. Most districts have interim intervention measures, especially for urgent cases, to provide support while staff consider the referral. Staff in the district offices also keep schools informed about waiting lists.

Speech Language Initiative

- 4.33 At the time of our audit, the Ministry had not specified how long it should take to allocate a specialist after an eligible student was referred for support through the Speech Language Initiative. District offices took similar amounts of time to process referrals through to their acceptance, but their timeliness in providing support depended on staff capacity and the level of need.
- 4.34 The Ministry has recently implemented a standard timeframe for referral decisions, and the allocation and delivery of support, to ensure that students receive services no more than 90 days after they have been referred.
- 4.35 In our view, the Ministry should ensure that it implements and monitors its standard timeframe for the allocation of funding and resources for all four initiatives, to ensure that all students receive support in a timely manner. If students are not supported within a reasonable timeframe, their situation may worsen and they may be more difficult to manage when support is provided.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Ministry of Education implement and monitor its standard timeframes for allocating funding and resources for all four initiatives, to ensure that all students receive support in a timely manner.

Severe Behaviour Initiative and the Speech Language Initiative

- 4.36 The Ministry has identified three points in the referral process for the Severe Behaviour Initiative and the Speech Language Initiative where referred students might be placed on a waiting list:
- after the referral is received and before it is accepted;
 - after the referral is accepted and before resources are allocated; and
 - after resources are allocated and before the student receives any services.
- 4.37 Ministry staff are required to enter data into Te Pātaka at each point for each case, and also when cases are closed. At the time of our audit, the Ministry was not able to accurately determine how many students were waiting at any of these points, because the information in Te Pātaka was neither complete nor reliable.
- 4.38 The Ministry was not able to give us reliable waiting list data for all districts. However, it knew that the Manukau district had a particularly high waiting list for the Speech Language Initiative, estimated in mid-2008 at about 800 students. The Ministry told us that this number could include duplicate entries, and the names of students who were no longer in the district.
- 4.39 After our audit, the Ministry told us that it was checking the integrity of the data in Te Pātaka. The Ministry is confident that implementing the Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative referral criteria will result in accurate record keeping and better data within Te Pātaka, and provide the Ministry's national and district offices with accurate waiting list figures.
- 4.40 In July 2008, the Manukau district office made a project of its efforts to reduce its waiting list. It reviewed all the student files on its waiting list, limited the service period, closed some cases, and used private speech-language therapists to deliver services. This reduced the waiting list significantly (by about 75% by February 2009). At that time, it was still the largest waiting list in the country, which reflected the level of need for speech language support in the area, and also the difficulties in finding specialist staff to work in the district.
- 4.41 After our audit, the Ministry put in place monthly monitoring reports based on the upgraded data in Te Pātaka. These reports provide districts with more accurate waiting list figures at each point of waiting. These figures also provide a clearer overall picture for informing management at the national level.

- 4.42 In our view, the Ministry needs to further improve and regularly check the integrity of data held in Te Pātaka, so it has more certainty about the demand for its services. Without this certainty, it is difficult to plan and prioritise resources. The Ministry should also actively review and manage districts where staff capacity to provide support services is not meeting this demand. If district offices are not able to manage staff capacity, services may reduce and the waiting times for students may become unacceptably long.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Ministry of Education further improve and regularly check the integrity of the data held in its national reporting and work outputs database.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Ministry of Education actively review and manage districts where staff capacity to provide support services is not meeting the demand for services.

Training and supporting staff who provide support for students

The Ministry's staff who provide support through the four initiatives are appropriately experienced. The Ministry provides staff with access to appropriate training and support.

All four initiatives

- 4.43 The Ministry's specialist staff responsible for providing support to students include educational psychologists, speech-language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, special education advisors, advisors on deaf children, Māori and Pasifika liaison staff, and behaviour and communication support workers. The Ministry's specialists work with students, their schools, and parents/caregivers in both an advisory and facilitative role, particularly when a student is receiving support from other staff, or needs to access support from other agencies.
- 4.44 As part of the audit, we spoke with several Ministry staff who were responsible for providing support for students with high special educational needs. Most staff had many years of experience in special education.

- 4.45 The Ministry prepared service standards in 2006 and provided staff with training about those standards. The Specialist Service Standards document sets out guidance for staff responsible for providing support to students. It includes an expectation about the quality of service that should be provided, professional practice standards, good practice guides for each standard, and specific behaviour standards.
- 4.46 District offices provide induction, training, and study programmes that include training and mentoring for specific disciplinary groups, training in technology and the use of assessment tools, and training for teacher aides and support workers. District offices have also produced guidelines for staff about internal management and managing client cases.
- 4.47 Staff are supervised by the service team leader within their service teams, and by the lead practitioner within their specialist discipline. The lead practitioner (there is one for each of the four initiatives) is primarily responsible for practice support for specific students, and training staff on new systems (such as the new speech language assessment criteria).
- 4.48 Ministry staff and educators we talked to as part of the audit told us that there was a lack of training for classroom teachers and teacher aides who teach and support students with high special educational needs. While schools are mainly responsible for the professional development of teachers and teacher aides, the Ministry has run training programmes for teachers, teacher aides, and special educational needs co-ordinators. The Ministry's Positive Behaviour and Learning plan includes providing more robust initial teacher education and teacher development programmes to build teacher competency in effective behaviour management.
- 4.49 Behaviour Support Workers and Communication Support Workers are trained teacher aides whose hours are allocated under the Severe Behaviour Initiative and Speech Language Initiative respectively. Ministry staff and educators commented that it is important to have adequately trained teacher aides for students receiving ORRS and School High Health Needs Fund support, because the teacher aides are often the main support in class for the students. This was reflected by educators in the 2008 resourcing survey, and is also reflected in the Ministry's Positive Behaviour and Learning plan. Educators told us that they find it hard to attract and retain experienced and trained teacher aides with the funding they are allocated.
- 4.50 We encourage the Ministry to continue to work with schools and training institutions to ensure that classroom teachers and teacher aides are appropriately trained in working with students with high special educational needs, and to improve teacher and teacher aide competence and confidence in this area.

Part 5

Monitoring the support for, and progress of, students

- 5.1 In this Part, we set out our findings about how the Ministry:
- monitors the support it provides to students;
 - receives feedback on the support it provides;
 - monitors the progress of students; and
 - uses monitoring information to inform the planning of support for students in the future.

Summary of our findings

- 5.2 The Ministry adequately monitors the quality and consistency of the support services it provides through the four initiatives against its Specialist Service Standards, and through client satisfaction surveys. The Ministry has a range of peer review processes, and gains feedback from the community through stakeholder reference groups and, in some districts, through other community groups. The Ministry tracks the progress of individual students receiving support through the Individual Education Programme plan and Individual Care Plan processes. However, the Ministry is not able to review or evaluate the effectiveness of its support for students at an aggregated national level. The Ministry has identified the need for better systems to aggregate information.
- 5.3 We have made one recommendation in this Part, for the Ministry to further improve its systems for monitoring students' progress at an aggregated level.

Monitoring the support provided to students

The Ministry monitors the quality and consistency of the support it provides to students through the four initiatives. It has various monitoring activities to measure performance against its Specialist Service Standards, and uses peer review processes.

All four initiatives

- 5.4 The Specialist Service Standards include the expectation that all Ministry staff will comply with professional standards. The Ministry's service managers carry out a range of activities to check their staff's compliance with the Specialist Service Standards, including selected and random reviews of individual student files. Service managers report the results of these reviews to district managers. In all the district offices of one region, service managers require staff to complete a certain number of student file reviews each school term.

- 5.5 Other monitoring activities include discussions about individual students during professional supervision sessions and at team meetings, assessing the results of and responding to client satisfaction surveys, and informal feedback from schools and parents/caregivers. In some districts, compliance with the Specialist Service Standards is examined during performance reviews of the staff.
- 5.6 The Ministry also has peer review processes to monitor the quality and consistency of support provided to students, including the national Review of Individual Behaviour Service (RIBS) process. All individual student behaviour cases that are open are eligible for these processes. The RIBS process allows specialists working with students with behavioural issues to come together at least once a term for an in-depth, practical discussion of common issues and concerns.
- 5.7 Districts we visited as part of the audit varied in the regularity of the RIBS process, with one district having a minimum of one RIBS completed for any case where a child had been receiving behaviour support for more than three school terms. The Southern region has adapted the RIBS process to measure the quality of services provided across all of its services and staff. This is known as the Review of Support Services.

Receiving feedback on the support provided to students

For all four initiatives, the Ministry obtains feedback from parents/caregivers and educators about the support it provides to students. Recent client surveys have noted a high degree of satisfaction from parents/caregivers and educators about the Ministry's support for students.

All four initiatives

- 5.8 The Ministry carries out client satisfaction surveys each year, and in some districts more frequently. The surveys ask parents/caregivers and educators about how the Ministry delivered the service, including the accessibility of staff, how staff communicated and shared knowledge with them, the guidance provided, how the Ministry kept parents/caregivers and educators informed throughout the process, and whether the support made a positive difference.
- 5.9 The districts we visited carried out their client satisfaction surveys at different times of the year from each other, used different survey formats, collected different data, and collated and presented that data differently. While the surveys provided useful feedback for districts, it would be more helpful to have standardised formats and procedures, to allow easier collation of data at a national level.

- 5.10 The Ministry reported in 2007 that 10% of all parents/caregivers were given the opportunity to complete a survey, of which 82.3% responded. About 80% of the respondents thought that the Ministry's services were timely and made a positive difference to their child, and that the Ministry kept them informed in an appropriate manner. Educators we talked to as part of the audit commented that the Ministry's service delivery could vary, and depended on the Ministry staff involved. Some of the Ministry's staff were considered excellent.
- 5.11 The Ministry has told us that a national survey was also completed in 2008/09, and that for future surveys it plans to use the State Services Commission's Common Measurement Tool, which is designed to allow comparison of results between government agencies and also with overseas agencies.
- 5.12 Some district offices we visited have established stakeholder reference groups, involving representatives from the district office and parents/caregivers and educators, to obtain feedback on Ministry policies and practices. The feedback is used to inform practices and to seek options and solutions for particular problems. There are also meetings held at times with local cultural community groups such as the Pasifika fono in North West Auckland district, and meetings with a Pasifika church group in Canterbury.
- 5.13 The Ministry gathers informal feedback regularly from its contact with parents/caregivers and educators, and from any complaints. Complaints are dealt with by the service or district managers. The IEP plan and the ICP process (discussed in paragraphs 5.14-5.18) also provide an opportunity for regular feedback from parents/caregivers about their child's support.

Monitoring the progress of students

The Ministry regularly monitors the progress of students who are provided support through the four initiatives, through the Individual Education Programme plan or Individual Care Plan processes.

All four initiatives

- 5.14 Individual Education Programme (IEP) plans are intended to support students receiving ORRS, Severe Behaviour Initiative, and Speech Language Initiative support. Students receiving ORRS support are required to have a separate service agreement that links their identified needs with their IEP. Individual Care Plans (ICPs) are intended to support students receiving support through the School High Health Needs Fund.
- 5.15 IEP plans provide guidance for each student's individual programme for a defined period, outlining the student's skills and needs, and identifying achievement

objectives and goals. The IEP plan is a tool for collaborative planning and assigning responsibilities between the Ministry, school, parents/caregivers, students (where appropriate), and other agencies where necessary. The IEP guidelines recommend that the plan be reviewed every term, or according to the needs of the student and any changes in circumstances.

- 5.16 Schools are responsible for reviews of a student's IEP plan. The reviews are carried out by the wider support team for a student, and assess progress toward the outcomes that were identified in the initial assessment. Individual reviews are done in a variety of ways in different districts, including measuring against the key competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum, and using as a basic structure the Ministry's priorities of presence, participation, and learning.
- 5.17 The ICP specifies the care and supervision tasks the teacher aide will carry out, the monitoring system to ensure that the care remains appropriate to the student's needs during the year, and the evaluation process to determine the student's ongoing level of need for care and supervision.
- 5.18 Like IEP plans, ICPs are a tool for collaborative planning and assigning responsibilities between the Ministry, school, parents/caregivers, students (where appropriate), and other agencies and specialists where necessary. ICPs are reviewed each year, or according to the needs of the student and any changes in circumstances, and are the responsibility of the school. The reviews are carried out by the student's wider support team, and assess progress toward the outcomes identified in the ICP.

Using monitoring information to inform planning

The Ministry uses information gained from its monitoring and from feedback to review, evaluate, and inform its support for individual students. However, the Ministry does not have the systems in place to review or evaluate the effectiveness of its support for students at an aggregated level.

All four initiatives

- 5.19 The Ministry has noted that the highly individualised nature of each student's needs and circumstances, and consequently their IEP plan or ICP, makes it difficult to aggregate and analyse results from the IEP/ICP process about the effectiveness of the support provided.
- 5.20 The Ministry is trialling a goal attainment scaling tool (an evaluation technique that involves preparing an outcome scale to measure individual or group progress towards achieving identified goals). It will use this tool to aggregate the evaluative outcomes data from the IEP/ICP process. The Ministry will use the tool to help assess the effectiveness of its services.

- 5.21 The Ministry has carried out other reviews of particular aspects of its support for students. Nationally, the Ministry is reviewing the Specialist Service Standards. The 2008 resourcing survey provided feedback from schools about the effectiveness of services, noting a rating of “high” for more than half of the students in the survey. At a district level, the Ministry has carried out reviews of communication support workers, client files, specialist services, and processes for allocating services.
- 5.22 The Ministry told us that it has several separate databases for client and funding data. This has made it difficult for the Ministry to accurately track the services provided to a particular student because the databases are not able to share and aggregate outcome data. Also, inconsistent data entry and repeated entries of particular students into one or more of the databases has made it difficult to identify students and track services. The Ministry has been working to improve regional practices in entering and maintaining accurate data.
- 5.23 After our audit, the Ministry told us that it was working to ensure easier monitoring of students and services, and had gained funding approval to put in place a “business data warehouse” system. The Ministry also told us that it was working on a “Student support interventions” project, with indicators that are intended to provide information about the effectiveness of its interventions.
- 5.23 The Ministry’s new client filing format, designed to provide greater national consistency in the recording and collation of student information, has been implemented during the last two years. However, at the time of the audit, the Ministry noted that most of the feedback it received about the support for individual students was provided on paper, and the Ministry did not have systems that can readily collate this feedback for monitoring purposes. This means that the Ministry was not able to use the feedback to review or evaluate the effectiveness of its support for students at an aggregated level. The Ministry is investigating a case management system that will allow it to aggregate data and gain a complete picture of the outcomes of its service delivery.
- 5.24 In our view, the Ministry needs to improve its systems to gather and aggregate information about students so it can review and evaluate the overall effectiveness of the support the Ministry provides. Without reviewing and evaluating the overall effectiveness of its support, the Ministry cannot easily plan programmes and procedures it knows to be successful.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Ministry of Education improve its systems to gather and aggregate information about the effectiveness of its support for students.

Appendix 1

About the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes

What do the schemes provide support for?

The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme and the Reviewable Resourcing Scheme provide resources for students who have the highest need for special education, primarily to provide specialist services, teacher aide support, and extra resources for additional teacher aide time. Together, the schemes are referred to as the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS). Funding through ORRS is additional to the teacher funding and operational grants that are paid to schools.

Students eligible for ORRS support generate funding at two levels – high and very high needs. Each student receiving ORRS support generates an allocation of specialist teacher time for the school in which they are enrolled, at the rate of one tenth (0.1) of full-time equivalent teaching time at the high level, and two tenths (0.2) of full-time equivalent time at the very high level. Students also generate a number of teacher aide hours (10 for high needs and 17.5 for very high needs every week), which are pooled at a district level and allocated according to the students' actual needs each year.

Who is eligible for support under the schemes?

Students of all ages with high to very high special educational needs – including children and young people with either extreme or severe difficulties with learning, hearing, vision, mobility, language use, or social communication – are eligible. Most of these students will have this level of need throughout their school years, and are identified at a young age. For example, ORRS support can be provided to students:

- with extremely delayed cognitive development;
- with profound hearing loss in both ears, who use sign language in all settings;
- who experience severe muscle spasms or have a severe low muscle tone disability, and difficulties in eating, speaking, and swallowing;
- who communicate or behave in extremely unusual, repetitive, and inappropriate ways;
- who have severe delays in their cognitive development, resulting in major difficulties with learning; and
- who have a severe physical disability and are unable to stand and walk without support.

The Reviewable Resourcing Scheme is for students who meet the criteria at the time they apply, but it is unclear whether their needs will remain at the same level throughout their school years. They receive intensive specialist programmes

for the year they enter the scheme, and for three more school years. This is the reviewable period. Students are placed in the scheme at the high or very high level, and almost all of them exit the scheme after the reviewable period.

The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme is for students who have very high or high needs at the time they apply, and they will clearly need the highest level of specialist support until they leave school.

What does the application process involve?

An educator gathers information about the student's needs and completes the application form. Application forms are available from the Ministry's website, and (when completed) are sent to the Ministry's national office for consideration.

Who makes the decisions about eligibility?

The verification team within the Ministry's national office is responsible for making decisions about each applicant's eligibility for funding, based on information provided in the application. Applicants can appeal the decision made, and ask the Ministry for a review of the decision.

Who allocates the funding?

The Ministry is the overall fund holder for all students receiving support through ORRS. Locally, the funding is managed by each district office or a school with Ministry accreditation to manage ORRS funds.

Each student receives a set amount of teacher aide time, based on their level of need. The other resource levels are not pre-determined, because each student receives an allocation of specialist, therapist and paraprofessional time according to their needs and circumstances. The allocation of funds and level of support is determined by the fund managers, who respond to the needs identified in each student's Individual Education Programme plan. A system of moderating the number of teacher aide hours against the district's norm for individual students with that level of need is used by fund managers to allocate resources to each student while working within an overall budget. This means that students can receive different levels of support over time.

How much funding is involved, and how many students are supported?

Together, the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme and the Reviewable Resourcing Scheme receive about \$140 million in funding each year, and support between 6550 and 6950 students. The most recent Budget has included funding to support more students.

Appendix 2

About the School High Health Needs Fund

What does the fund provide support for?

The School High Health Needs Fund provides funding for teacher aide hours. The teacher aides support students with high health needs so that they can safely attend and participate in school.

Who is eligible for support under the fund?

The fund is for students with high health needs who require care and supervision for more than six weeks. This can include students who:

- need support during and after seizures that cannot be managed effectively by medication;
- need help with mobility or personal care arising from severe fatigue directly related to a medical condition (for example, a student with cancer who is undergoing therapy and suffers from severe fatigue, headaches, nausea, and vomiting and is unable to move a wheelchair by themselves);
- need support to protect them from (or manage the effects of) exposure to injury, infection, or an allergen that would result in a medical crisis (for example, a student with severe allergies, asthma, or eczema as a reaction to common allergens in the school environment); or
- depend on specialised medical appliances, apparatus, or equipment such as oxygen bottles or tracheotomy (breathing) tubes.

What does the application process involve?

Educators are responsible for completing the application form, and obtaining up-to-date medical information from the child's medical specialist. Application forms are available from the Ministry's website, and are sent to the Ministry for consideration.

Who makes the decisions about eligibility?

The verification team within the Ministry's national office makes decisions about each applicant's eligibility for funding, based on the information provided in the application.

Who allocates the funding?

The Ministry (Special Education) is the overall fund holder for all students in the School High Health Needs Fund. Some schools are accredited to manage funds. Funds are paid each term to the student's school to employ teacher aides. The

allocation of funds and level of support is determined by the fund managers who respond to each student's needs as identified in their Individual Education Programme plan. The fund holder or accredited school is responsible for ensuring that the student has an annual Individual Care Plan that details:

- the care and supervision tasks the teacher aide will carry out;
- the monitoring system for ensuring that the care remains appropriate to the student's needs during the year; and
- the evaluation process to determine the student's ongoing level of need for care and supervision.

Each student being supported through the School High Health Needs Fund is reviewed annually by the Ministry's verifiers. For some students, verifiers renew eligibility on the basis of existing information. For others, verifiers will ask to see the current Individual Care Plan and a recent medical report to decide whether the student continues to meet the criteria and is funded for a further year.

How much funding is involved, and how many students are supported?

The School High Health Needs Fund receives about \$3.1 million in funding each year, and supports 550 students.

Appendix 3

About the Severe Behaviour Initiative

What does the initiative provide support for?

The Severe Behaviour Initiative involves behaviour specialists working with children and young people displaying severe and challenging behaviour that may endanger themselves or others, damage property, or affect their social interactions and learning. Support is also provided by specialists for teachers and families. Specialists working in Behaviour Support teams include educational psychologists, special education advisors, teachers with significant experience in working with students with behaviour difficulties and behaviour support workers. The Severe Behaviour Initiative also includes Centres for Extra Support, which operate differently throughout the country. All centres offer short-term support (up to 40 weeks) for the small number of students with behaviour difficulties who cannot be managed within their local schools.

Who is eligible for support under the initiative?

The Severe Behaviour Initiative targets students from age 10 to 14 with severe and challenging behaviours who are not already receiving ORRS funding. For example, this could include a student who has been expelled more than once for intense and frequently aggressive behaviour toward teachers and other students and who is significantly disruptive to their class or school.

What does the application process involve?

Referrals for support for students with severe and challenging behaviour are generally made by educators (co-ordinating information about the student's needs) or through the RTLBs.

Who makes the decisions about eligibility?

Service managers and relevant specialist practice staff within the Ministry (Special Education) district and local offices are responsible for making decisions on each referred student's eligibility for funding, based on information provided in the referral.

Who allocates the funding?

The Ministry (Special Education) is the overall fund holder for all students supported through the Severe Behaviour Initiative, and funding is allocated on the basis of student enrolments in the region. At a local level, the funding is managed by each district office. The allocation of funds and level of support is determined

by the fund managers who respond to each student's needs and circumstances as identified in their Individual Education Programme plan.

How much funding is involved, and how many students are supported?

The Severe Behaviour Initiative receives \$24–34 million in funding each year, and supports between 4000 and 6000 students.

Appendix 4

About the Speech Language Initiative

What does the initiative provide support for?

The Speech Language Initiative provides the funding that enables the Ministry's speech-language therapists to work with students (usually at school) who have severe communication needs. For example, the students may have speech difficulties, fluency disorders, voice resonance disorders, language difficulties, or significant language delay.

Speech-language therapists support the student and advise families and teachers about communication problems. The Speech Language Initiative also includes training courses for teachers, so they can identify communication difficulties and arrange programmes to meet a student's needs.

Who is eligible for support under the initiative?

The Speech Language Initiative is largely for students who are not already funded under ORRS and have severe communication needs in their first three years of school. Some older students may receive help through the Speech Language Initiative if they have difficulties that developed later or were not apparent during their first three years at school.

What does the application process involve?

Usually, educators co-ordinate information about a student's needs and submit a referral for support to the appropriate district office.

Who makes the decisions about eligibility?

Service managers and relevant specialist practice staff within the Ministry's district and local offices are responsible for making decisions on each referred student's eligibility for funding, based on information provided in the referral.

Who allocates the funding?

The Ministry allocates funding to district offices, based on the number of students enrolled in each district. Fund managers in the district offices determine how much support to give to an individual student, based on the student's needs and circumstances (as identified in their Individual Education Programme plan).

How much funding is involved, and how many students are supported?

The Speech Language Initiative receives \$9–13 million in funding each year, and supports between 5500 and 7000 students.

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