

# ***Review of Special Education Provision***

***Ladbrooks School***

***April 2009***

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## Introduction

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the provisions provided at Ladbrooks School to students with special educational needs.

This project was undertaken at the instigation of the school as part of an on-going evaluation of services. It was made clear that the evaluation was commissioned to help provide the best possible education provision to students and that recommendations arising from this report will become the focus of discussion and review.

## Scope of This Report

The Board of Trustees and the Principal at Ladbrooks School have commissioned this report to review their responsiveness to students with special education needs. The report focuses on the following areas;

- The school's Policies and Procedures for catering for students with special education needs,
- The use and implementation of Individual Education Plans in the school,
- The attitude of school staff to students with special education needs,
- How the school meets the requirements of the New Zealand Disability Strategy,
- How the school meets the needs of students with special education needs,

As a result of this review the school are looking at both areas of good practice and areas where improvement could be made.

## Foundations of Good Practice

In order to review the provision of special education at Ladbrooks School, it is important to use best practice guidelines as a base reference point. The following are the key areas of best practice used in this review;

### 1. New Zealand Disability Strategy

Objective 3 of the New Zealand Disability Strategy is "Provide the best education for disabled people", and includes the following actions relating to this review;

3.1 - Ensure that no child is denied access to their local, regular school because of their impairment.

3.3 - Ensure that teachers and other educators understand the learning needs of disabled people.

3.4 - Ensure that disabled students, families, teachers and other educators have equitable access to the resources available to meet their needs.

3.6 - Improve schools' responsiveness to and accountability for the needs of disabled students.

3.7 - Promote appropriate and effective inclusive educational settings that will meet individual educational needs.

## 2. Ministry of Education Guidelines for Responding to Diversity

Responding to diversity is based around the 'Three R's' - Recognise, Respect and Respond.

These guidelines suggest that a school's implementation of this is based around 8 stages;

Stage 1 = Initial identification and data collection.

Stage 2 = Class-based assessment.

Stage 3 = Collaboration and problem solving within the teaching team..

Stage 4 = Collaboration and problem solving on a school-wide basis.

Stage 5 = School based assessment and support (on-going).

Stage 6 = Collaboration and problem solving with parents and whanau.

Stage 7 = Collaboration and problem solving with experts and other agencies.

Stage 8 = Ongoing monitoring, review and evaluation.

## 3. Ministry of Education Guidelines for ORS Funded Students and Individual Education Plans

These guidelines are comprehensive and can be accessed through the Ministry of Education website, [www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz).

## 4. Other

In addition, the experience and knowledge of this report's author gained through academic study and practical experience was used to identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement within the school.

## **Methodology**

This report focuses on the collation of information gained through individual and group interviews, phone conversations, and review of documentation.

All parents at the school were given the opportunity through a notice in the school newsletter to contact this report's author if they wanted to have any input. Several took up this invitation (some with students with special needs).

Also interviewed during the preparation of this report were;

- Teaching staff at Ladbroke School.
- The Principal of the School.
- Staff and Managers from The Ministry of Education's Special Education division.
- Board of Trustees Chairperson (Past and Present).
- A former staff member of the school who was employed to provide specific special education assistance to a special needs student.

In addition, the following documentation was reviewed;

- School policies and procedures.
- Copies of Individual Education Plans (with pupil names removed), including IEP reviews.
- Ladbroke School Charter.

## Findings

### **Policies and Procedures for catering for students with special education needs**

The school has Policies and Procedures which are appropriate and comprehensive. These Policies and Procedures clearly state the school's position in the following areas;

- How ORS staffing will be used in the school;
- Procedures for using Teacher Aides;
- Procedures for identifying students with Special Education needs;
- What constitutes learning support within the school;
- Criteria for placing children in learning support;
- Procedures and criteria for Specialist Referrals;.

### **Use and implementation of Individual Education Plans in the school**

Staff make good use of student Individual Education Plans to develop and implement needs-based teaching programmes. Teaching programmes are often modified as a result of emerging individual and group needs. Consequently, teaching is responsive to students' needs, however the current Individual Education Plans are not always communicated to all staff working in the school. This would help in other staff's dealings with these students.

The format staff use to document student Individual Education Plans does not always adequately identify a student's current skill level so that the reasons for choosing some objectives rather than others is not always clear. Ensuring that this is done would make these a more useful working document for students, staff and parents.

Individual Education Plans do identify clear priorities for students that focus on addressing their greatest learning needs. Plans incorporate both long-term goals and learning objectives that include a range of relevant skills. In some instances, students' Individual Education Plans do not provide sufficient information about some of the strategies staff should use to promote student achievement. This practice is particularly evident where students have made limited progress towards a previous goal or objective, and a similar objective has been included in the next Individual Education Plans . .

The extent to which parents and caregivers are involved in the review of their child's Individual Education Plans could be improved. Whilst parents are currently involved in the development process, management should explore ways of involving a greater number of parents in the review of their child's Individual Education Plans prior to the IEP meeting. This would ensure a greater 'meeting of the minds' during the development of the next IEP.

With the introduction of Learning Conferences into the school, this is an opportunity to use the same format to develop Individual Education Plans for students with special education needs.

## Findings (cont)

### **Attitude of school staff to students with special education needs**

Staff expect students with special needs to achieve well despite their unique needs and varying circumstances. These expectations are evident in the way staff interact with students and their persistence in making sure students engage in learning activities and in school life in general. These expectations provide a good basis for focused teaching, assessment and feedback to students.

The particular learning needs of this group of students are well catered for and they are able to experience success in a supportive and affirming environment.

### **Responding to Diversity** (as per Ministry of Education Guidelines)

*Stage 1 = Initial identification and data collection.* The school is proactive in identifying students with special education needs, both before students start school and for students currently at the school.

*Stage 2 = Class-based assessment.* Assessment processes within the school give accurate pictures of student achievement and needs.

*Stage 3 = Collaboration and problem solving within the teaching team.* All teachers in the school demonstrate a collaborative approach to all students, including those with special needs.

*Stage 4 = Collaboration and problem solving on a school-wide basis.* Whilst teachers work together to problem solve and take a collaborative approach in meeting the needs of all students, the school could improve the communication of strategies and techniques for working with individual students to all staff working in the school.

*Stage 5 = School based assessment and support (on-going).* The school is effective in ensuring that where students have been identified as having special education needs, there is on-going assessment and support provided for these students. In some cases the school goes beyond what would normally be provided for these students in a school environment.

*Stage 6 = Collaboration and problem solving with parents and whanau.* The school listens to input from parents and includes parent wishes in designing programmes for students. Some improvements could be made in parental involvement in Individual Education Plan reviews.

*Stage 7 = Collaboration and problem solving with experts and other agencies.* The school makes excellent use of Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour and the Ministry of Education's Special Education staff. There has previously been difficulties as a result of a Ministry of Education employee who was placed in the school to support an individual student with special needs. The reluctance of this Ministry of Education staff member to follow the recommendations of professionals created friction between the parents and the school. The school and the Ministry of Education have dealt with this issue and their collaboration continues to be effective in meeting the needs of students with special education needs at the school.

*Stage 8 = Ongoing monitoring, review and evaluation.* The school reviews the programmes provided for students with special education needs on a regular basis.

### **New Zealand Disability Strategy**

The school effectively meets the requirements of the New Zealand Disability Strategy. No child is denied access to Ladbrooks School because of their impairment, teachers show an understanding of the learning needs of disabled people, the school provides equitable access to the resources available to all students, and the school promotes appropriate and effective inclusive education that to individual educational needs.

## Summary

Ladbrooks School's provision for students with special education needs is characterised by:

- a commitment to meeting the special needs of all students in their school;
- valid assessment processes for identifying special education needs;
- knowledge and application of accepted effective practice in special education;
- the provision of the effective programmes based on current student assessment information;
- and effective communication and consultation with all parties involved in students' learning.

The following are recommendations for improvement;

1. That the school ensure that strategies and techniques for dealing with students who have special education needs are clearly communicated to all staff who work in the school.
2. Whilst the school has good processes for obtaining parental input into a student's Individual Education Plan, the involvement of parents / whanau in reviews could be improved.
3. The school should extend it's involvement in Learning Conferences to use the same process in establishing Individual Education Plans for students.
4. The school should explore ways of involving a greater number of parents in the review of their child's Individual Education Plans prior to the IEP meeting.

