

MEDIA RELEASE

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The Inclusive Education Action Group (IEAG) is asking the Ministry of Education to take a stronger role around disabled children's rights and wellbeing in Residential Special Schools

The Inclusive Education Action Group (IEAG) has been following [media reports on the disturbing use of restraint on disabled children in Residential Special Schools](#). Children living in out of home care are vulnerable. For disabled children living in Residential Special Schools, that vulnerability is increased as they do not have access to the people who love them, their whānau. We point to fundamental flaws highlighted by this incident, including a lack of professional knowledge about positive approaches to teaching and learning; an apparent lack of oversight for disabled children's wellbeing; and a poor understanding of their rights as children and human beings.

IEAG rejects the use of restraint and agrees with the Children's Commissioner that [segregated environments can create additional risk of abuse](#). It is important that teachers are well informed and able to draw on their knowledge and a duty of care to use inclusive, trauma-informed practices. This is expected of teachers, who are bound by the Teaching Council's Code of Ethics and Standards to develop a culture that is focused on learning and is characterised by respect, inclusion, empathy, collaboration and safety.

Residential Special Schools claim 'specialist' knowledge and care that supports disabled students' learning, but neither are evident in the continued use of restraint or in the negative framing by the Board Chairperson of Halswell and Westbridge schools of disabled children ("big bullies weighing 100 kgs") as the problem. The schools' failure to step up is worrying in light of comments by the Ministry of Education that schools are supposed to be actively *minimising the use of restraint* due to the harm it causes. While the Ministry provides 'guidance' in this area it also defers to [school staff and their employers as responsible for managing workplace risk](#). This exposes a gap in oversight for children's safety and wellbeing.

IEAG is asking the Ministry of Education to take a stronger role around disabled children's rights and wellbeing in Residential Special Schools; to eliminate the use of restraints in line with the [Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture](#); and to invoke additional safeguards for disabled children similar to the standards provided by Oranga Tamariki for children in out of home care. IEAG also views the present use of restraint in Residential Special Schools as evidence that abuse in care is not only historical, there are new stories in the present that need to be uncovered.

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