

Press Release

Inclusive Education Action Group

19 June 2012

Closing residential special schools makes sense

“The Inclusive Education Action Group (IEAG) supports the Ministry of Education’s proposal to close the four remaining Residential Special Schools and to focus attention on building a new “wrap-around” service for children and young people with complex needs in the community”, says Ian Armstrong, co-convenor of IEAG.

The Government has been taking submissions on its intention to close the residential schools and provide specialist support services so that students with complex needs can live at home and attend school in their local community.

“The New Zealand Disability Strategy and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities commits New Zealand to developing an inclusive society and education system, Residential Special Schools are an anomaly within this context”, said Armstrong. IEAG believed that it was inappropriate to have an education system that segregates children and young people from society. Students struggled to learn to be part of the community when they were excluded from it, and segregation bred misunderstanding and prejudice. “It’s also poor policy to have an education system that does this because it takes the focus off efforts for school improvement”, he said.

Those opposing the Ministry’s proposal to develop supports for students with complex needs in community schools could be reminded that New Zealand was adopting policies that have been successfully implemented in other countries, including Canada, Italy, Norway, and many parts of the United States and the U.K. “When we closed institutions there was opposition from those who did not fully understand the need for change, but the benefits of living in the community soon became apparent. This is no different. The Ministry of Education has set an important goal for all schools to be inclusive by 2014, and this proposal supports that goal”, Armstrong said.



Some schools were already doing exemplary work in this area, and the challenge would be to get all schools to this point. The provision of supports and resources to families and schools would be a vital ingredient for success, and IEAG was advocating for professional support and guidance for schools that would allow them to include and teach students with complex needs well.

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