

## **Inclusive Education Action Group disappointed that review does not go far enough**

The Inclusive Education Action group (IEAG) is pleased to see the Special Education Review's vision for "a fully inclusive education system" in New Zealand, although it awaits the details of the full report to ensure that the Ministry of Education has the policies, structures and supports in place that schools need as they work towards inclusion. Co-convenors Dr. Jude MacArthur and Ian Armstrong said they welcomed some of the initiatives that will support disabled students' learning and participation in regular classrooms. "The emphasis on inclusion in teacher education and professional development; the support for transitions in and out of school; training for Boards of Trustees and principals; interagency cooperation; and smoother applications processes for ORRS funding will help to improve schools responsiveness' to disabled children, and young people", they said.

However, there are some important anomalies and omissions in the Review. The Review acknowledges that schools will move towards inclusion when they have 'strong ethical leadership and standards', and 'innovative and flexible practice'. But inclusive education systems require that these elements are also present at the top, "It is vital that the Ministry of Education provides policy, leadership and support to ensure that all schools are able to develop as inclusive communities. At this stage we see little evidence for the kinds of changes that are needed to meet the goal of an inclusive education system".

While Minister Hide's covering letter suggests that ideas in the Review align with what research says about improving student outcomes, IEAG challenges this viewpoint. Research evidence confirms that a separate system of 'special education' and segregated schools disadvantages children and young people with disabilities socially and academically. They are inconsistent with an inclusive education system. As required by the UN Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the New Zealand Disability Strategy, inclusion involves removing barriers to student participation and learning in regular schools. IEAG wants to see evidence that regular schools will receive the practical and flexible support they have been asking for to teach a diverse group of students.

"We see the Review as a missed opportunity to transform the New Zealand education system into one inclusive system that supports teachers and schools to include and teach all students."

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