
5. Providing for students with disabilities or who need learning support

Around 15–16% of students have learning support needs, including disabilities. Providing well for them has been a mounting concern.¹⁹ In 2019 the Ministry of Education responded with a new Learning Support delivery model and the Learning Support Action Plan—an additional 600 learning support coordinator roles in schools have been funded from 2020. Work has also been occurring to provide more nuanced markers of progress within *The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)* Curriculum level 1 for teachers (and students and their families).²⁰

In this section, we first draw together individual items from broader sets of questions about provision that we asked principals. Next, we report from the teachers' survey, focusing on a set of items specifically about working with students with learning support needs as well as individual items in other sets of questions. We then describe the views of parents and whānau with students who need learning support. This is the first time that we have asked parents and whānau to say whether they had a child who needed learning support, and the question has allowed us to provide a comparison with the views of other parents and whānau.

Principals' perspectives show some resourcing issues with provision for students who need learning support, but attention to their inclusion and progress

The achievement of students with learning support needs was identified by 34% of principals as a major issue facing their school.

Individual items from across the principal survey highlighted the resourcing of provision for students who need learning support.

- 23% of the principals said their school used operational funding or school-raised funds to employ one or more teachers to support students with learning support needs.
- 44% of principals thought that their school's buildings had sufficient flexibility to cater for students with disabilities or learning support needs.
- 21% of principals had difficulty finding suitable teachers for students with learning support needs.
- 30% of principals needed but could not readily access external expertise to support differentiated teaching for students with disabilities or learning support needs; the picture was better in relation to reporting on progress for students with learning support needs, with only 8% saying they needed but could not access external expertise about this.

¹⁹ Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce (2018). *Our schooling futures: Stronger together Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātinini* (initial report), pp. 78–85. <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/assets/TSR/Tomorrows-Schools-Review-Report-13Dec2018.PDF>

²⁰ <https://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-tools-resources/Learners-with-diverse-learning-needs/Level-One-Curriculum-Frameworks>

More positively,

- 74% of the principals said that they had support for the wellbeing of students with disabilities or learning support needs well embedded in their school, and 19%, that this support was partially embedded.
- Students who need assistive technologies to support their learning were reported to have good access to these by 75% of the principals.
- Inclusion was a focus for professional learning and/or change in 23% of the schools in the last 2 years, as it was for 17% in 2016.
- 90% of principals thought their teachers had knowledge and resources to support students' understanding of and respect for diversity of abilities and disabilities.
- 82% of principals said they worked closely with local early childhood education (ECE) services to ensure a good transition of children with learning support needs into their school, and 87% worked closely with their students with disabilities or learning support needs' next school to ensure a good transition for them.
- 73% of principals said that engagement and achievement data for students with disabilities or learning support needs played a significant role in their school board's decision making.

Most principals can identify effective school practices to improve outcomes for students with disabilities or learning support needs

The majority of the principals (86%) answered a question about the most effective thing their school had done in the past 3 years to improve outcomes for students with disabilities or learning support needs, showing a commitment to include these students and progress their learning.

The main themes in their comments were:

- employing a SENCO (special education needs coordinator): someone with school-wide responsibility for oversight as well as working directly with teachers, students, teacher aides, families, and outside agencies. The importance of the SENCO's knowledge and passion for inclusion was mentioned in a number of comments
- putting more resources into work with these students, often through using the school's operational grant or locally raised funds
- using IEPs (individual education plans) to plan and track progress, and having school-wide registers of needs, and team approaches
- working more productively with RTLBs (Resource teachers: Learning and behaviour), the Ministry of Education, agencies that can provide support, specialist schools, and Kāhui Ako to address specific student needs, and also share practice
- specific professional learning and development, for example on ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, anxiety, and on inclusion
- emphasising inclusion, in student activities, school productions, and learning beyond the classroom.
- getting more support from the Ministry of Education, including buildings and equipment as well as funding for teaching and teacher aides.

Teachers show confidence working with students who need learning support, but also need more support themselves

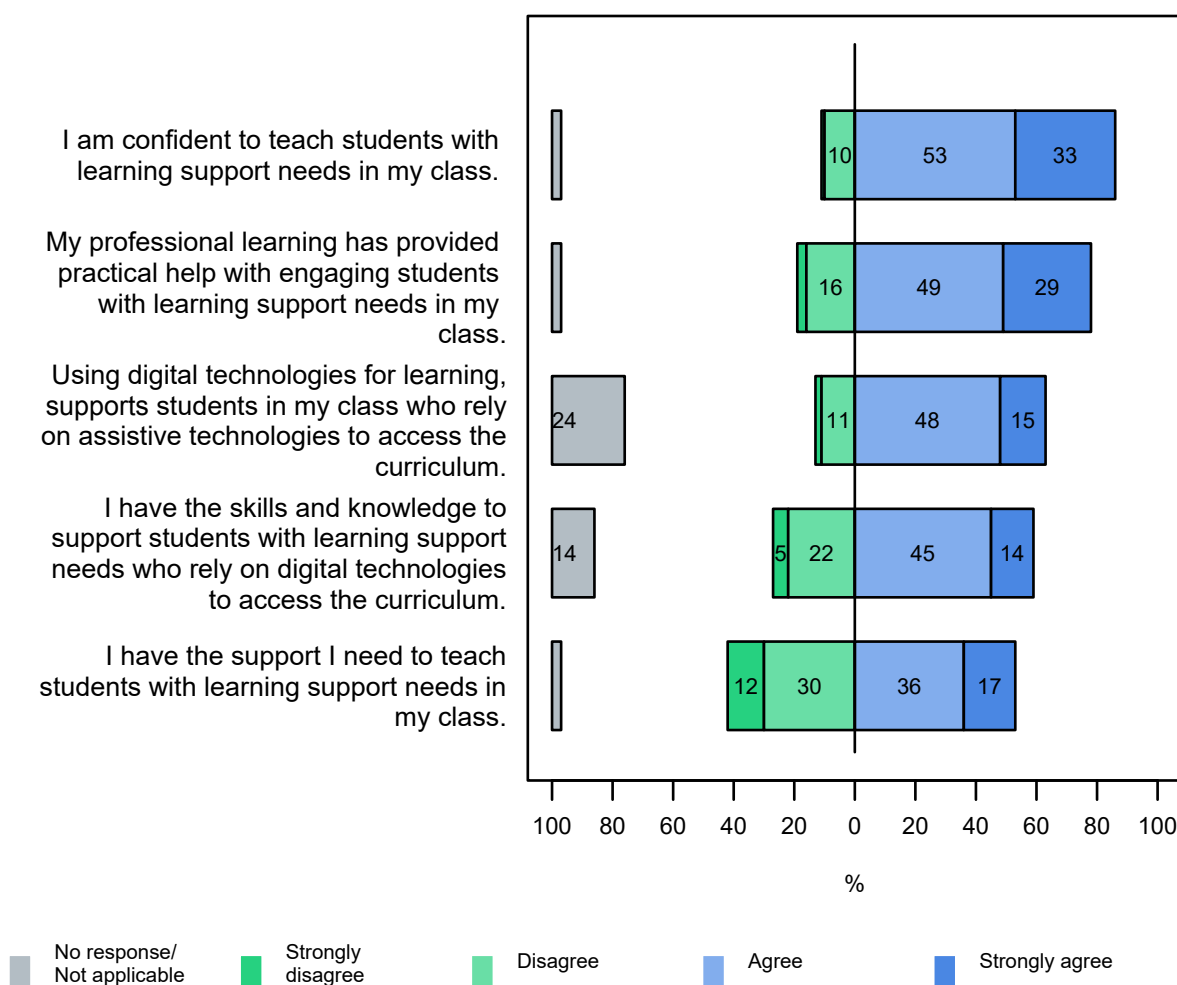
The majority of teachers responding (88%) thought they had the knowledge and resources to support their students' understanding and respect for diversity of abilities and disabilities. Many (72%) also thought that their school saw all forms of student diversity as a resource and strength, not a difficulty.

5. Providing for students who need learning support

Figure 24 shows that most of the teachers expressed confidence in teaching students with learning support needs in their class, and they judged recent professional learning to have provided them with practical help with engaging such students. However, only 54% thought they had the support they needed to teach these students.

Most of the teachers who had students who relied on digital technology to access the curriculum were positive about its use, and about their own skills and knowledge to support these students.

FIGURE 24 Providing for students who need learning support (Teachers, $n = 620$)



Information from other sets of questions asked of teachers showed that

- 67% saw their professional learning over the past 3 years as giving them practical help with improving the progress of students with learning support needs, and 66% with improving their engagement in class
- 64% thought that the support they got within their school for teaching students who need learning support was good or very good
- 61% thought that there was a good or very good level in their school in terms of all staff thinking it possible to address the barriers to learning experienced by students who need learning support.
- having more support staff (64%) was to the fore of the changes teachers wanted to see in their work.
- 35% would like more support so they can adapt NZC for students with learning support needs, increased from 19% in 2016, and 12% in 2013.

Parents and whānau of a child with a disability or who needs learning support are less positive than other parents and whānau about their child's school experiences

Twelve percent of parents and whānau responding said their child had a disability or needed learning support ($n = 49$), and a further 4% were not sure.

We asked parents and whānau a range of questions about their child's and their own experiences of their child's school. Section 9 gives the full picture. Here we show where parents and whānau who have a child with a disability or needing learning support showed a different pattern of responses than did parents and whānau of other students. They were less likely to rate something 'very well' or 'strongly agree' with it, and more likely to give negative ratings. However, the proportion giving negative ratings was mostly below 20%, with some exceptions.

School experiences of students with a disability or needing learning support

We included eight items about their child's experience of school. These parents and whānau were less likely to strongly agree and more likely to disagree (combining disagree and strongly disagree) with all eight statements, compared with parents and whānau whose child does not have a disability or need learning support.

My child:

- has good friends at school (45% strongly agreed, compared with 56% of other parents and whānau; 12% disagreed, compared with 3% of other parents and whānau)
- feels safe at school (37% strongly agreed, compared with 61% of other parents and whānau; 12% disagreed, compared with 2% of other parents and whānau)
- enjoys going to school (29% strongly agreed, compared with 57% of other parents and whānau)
- feels they belong in the school (29% strongly agreed, compared with 58% of other parents and whānau; 10% disagreed, compared with 2% of other parents and whānau)
- is included in lots of school activities (37% strongly agreed, compared with 51% of other parents and whānau; 14% disagreed, compared with 4% of other parents and whānau)
- is helped to set realistic learning goals (22% strongly agreed, compared with 43% of other parents and whānau; 14% disagreed, compared with 4% of other parents and whānau)
- has schoolwork with the right amount of challenge (20% strongly agreed, compared with 34% of other parents and whānau; 18% disagreed, compared with 9% of other parents and whānau)
- finds schoolwork interesting (10% strongly agreed, compared with 38% of other parents and whānau; 25% disagreed, compared with 5% of other parents and whānau).

School support for the development of skills and attitudes associated with the NZC key competencies and learning capabilities for students with a disability or needing learning support

Parents and whānau who have a child with a disability or needing learning support were just as likely as parents and whānau of other children to say the school helped their child have a 'can do' attitude, develop problem-solving skills and attitudes, discover a range of interests and passions, and learn to speak te reo Māori.

Their views did differ for the skills and attitudes below.

My child's school helps my child:

- try new things (33% said very well compared with 53% of other parents and whānau; 12% said not well or not well at all, compared with 2% of other parents and whānau)

- speak up when they need to (29% said very well compared with 43% of other parents and whānau; 24% said not well or not well at all, compared with 6% of other parents and whānau)
- ask good questions and be reflective (25% said very well compared with 49% of other parents and whānau; 20% said not well or not well at all, compared with 2% of other parents and whānau)
- keep at it when learning is difficult (25% said very well compared with 48% of other parents and whānau; 18% said not well or not well at all, compared with 2% of other parents and whānau).

Parents and whānau of students with a disability or needing learning support—views of their child’s teachers

When it came to statements about their child’s teacher/s, parents and whānau who have a child with a disability or needing learning support were just as likely as the parents and whānau of other children to find their child’s teacher/s committed and enthusiastic, treating their child fairly, and pronouncing their child’s name properly.

They had different views on the items below.

My child’s teacher/s:

- are aware of my child’s strengths and weaknesses (45% strongly agreed, compared with 54% of other parents and whānau; 8% disagreed, compared with 3% of other parents and whānau)
- think about my child’s wellbeing as well as their learning (45% strongly agreed, compared with 55% of other parents and whānau; 10% disagreed, compared with 3% of other parents and whānau)
- respond to any concerns I have (41% strongly agreed, compared with 58% of other parents and whānau; 12% disagreed, compared with 4% of other parents and whānau)
- provide clear feedback about their work (33% strongly agreed, compared with 46% of other parents and whānau; 16% disagreed, compared with 6% of other parents and whānau)
- motivate my child to want to learn (29% strongly agreed, compared with 57% of other parents and whānau; 14% disagreed, compared with 4% of other parents and whānau)
- have high expectations for my child (27% strongly agreed, compared with 40% of other parents and whānau; 18% disagreed, compared with 5% of other parents and whānau).

Parents and whānau of students with a disability or needing learning support—views of schools’ support for their child’s social and emotional development

Parents and whānau of a child with a disability or needing learning support were just as likely as others to rate their child’s school well when it came to getting on well with others and making friends, and getting along with people from different social and cultural backgrounds. They did see things somewhat differently for most of the other items in this set.

My child’s school helps them:

- take pride in who they are (49% rated this very well compared with 57% of other parents and whānau; 10% rated this not well or not at all well, compared with 3% of other parents and whānau)
- understand and feel part of their local community (39% rated this very well compared with 50% of other parents and whānau; 10% rated this not well or not at all well, compared with 3% of other parents and whānau)
- make decisions about healthy eating (39% rated this very well compared with 46% of other parents and whānau; 20% rated this not well or not at all well, compared with 5% of other parents and whānau)
- make good decisions about being physically active (33% rated this very well compared with 51% of other parents and whānau; 6% rated this not well or not at all well, compared with 2% of other parents and whānau)

- feel confident about change (33% rated this very well compared with 41% of other parents and whānau; 18% rated this not well or not at all well, compared with 6% of other parents and whānau)
- work through conflicts with other students (31% rated this very well compared with 38% of other parents and whānau; 18% rated this not well or not at all well, compared with 8% of other parents and whānau)
- recognise and manage their feelings (31% rated this very well compared with 41% of other parents and whānau; 20% rated this not well or not at all well, compared with 5% of other parents and whānau)
- take care of the environment (27% rated this very well compared with 42% of other parents and whānau; 14% rated this not well or not at all well, compared with 4% of other parents and whānau)
- deal with hard emotional situations (25% rated this very well compared with 33% of other parents and whānau; 10% rated this not well or not at all well, compared with 4% of other parents and whānau).

Parents and whānau of students with a disability or needing learning support—experiences with their child's school

Parents and whānau were also asked about their own experiences of their child's school. Parents and whānau of a child with a disability or needing learning support were just as likely as others to agree that they found it easy to understand what their child's teachers say, get good ideas about how to support their child's learning, and that the school genuinely includes parents in its activities. They did have different views on most of the items:

- I am generally happy with the quality of my child's schooling (43% strongly agreed compared with 52% of other parents and whānau; 18% disagreed, compared with 4% of other parents and whānau)
- I am pleased with the progress my child has made this year (35% strongly agreed, compared with 51% of other parents and whānau; 20% disagreed, compared with 6% of other parents and whānau)
- It's easy to talk with my child's teachers (59% strongly agreed, compared with 66% of other parents and whānau; 10% disagreed, compared with 3% of other parents and whānau)
- I feel welcome in the school (8% disagreed, compared with 1% of other parents and whānau)
- I trust this school (45% strongly agreed compared with 65% of other parents and whānau; 16% disagreed, compared with 3% of other parents and whānau)
- If my child had difficulty in learning, the school would help them (35% strongly agreed, compared with 47% of other parents and whānau; 20% disagreed, compared with 2% of other parents and whānau)
- If my child had any emotional difficulties, the school would help them (31% strongly agreed compared with 39% of other parents and whānau; 16% disagreed, compared with 4% of other parents and whānau)
- If my child had difficulties with other students, the school would help sort this out (29% strongly agreed, compared with 42% of other parents and whānau; 14% disagreed, compared with 7% of other parents and whānau)
- The cultural identity of my child is recognised and respected (37% strongly agreed, compared with 51% of other parents and whānau; 10% disagreed, compared with 2% of other parents and whānau)
- The school supports and includes ALL students (35% strongly agreed, compared with 54% of other parents and whānau; 12% disagreed, compared with 1% of other parents and whānau)
- I would recommend this school to other students (49% strongly agreed, compared with 64% of other parents and whānau; 16% disagreed, compared with 2% of other parents and whānau).

Cost more of an issue for parents and whānau of students with a disability or needing learning

Twelve percent of parents and whānau with a child who has a disability or needs learning support said their child had been unable to attend regular full-time classes when they needed a teacher aide, because it cost too much, compared with less than 1% of other parents and whānau. As well, cost had meant their child had been unable to use a digital device at school for 16%, compared with 5% of other parents and whānau.

Parents and whānau with a child with a disability or needing learning support were less positive about information on their child's progress

Parents and whānau with a child with a disability or needing learning support also had different views from other parents and whānau on the quality and clarity of information they get from the school. They were less positive about the information about their child's progress in maths, writing, and health and PE. They were also less positive about the information about their child's social development and behaviour:

- 33% rated the information about progress in maths as very good compared with 42% of other parents and whānau
- 35% rated the information about progress in writing as very good compared with 45% of other parents and whānau; 12% rated it as poor or very poor compared with 4% of other parents and whānau
- 25% rated the information about progress in health and PE as very good compared with 32% of other parents and whānau
- 27% rated the information about their child's social development as very good compared with 35% of other parents and whānau; 10% rated it as poor or very poor compared with 3% of other parents and whānau
- 8% rated the information about their child's behaviour as poor or very poor compared with 3% of other parents and whānau.

Summary

Principal and teacher reports of their work with students who need learning support point to general commitment to serving them well. There appears to be a more systematic approach to identifying student learning needs, designing appropriate programmes, and sharing and building the knowledge and capability of their teachers. Nonetheless, serving these students well continues to challenge resources, both within the school and beyond.

Parents and whānau of students who need learning support were less positive about their child's school experiences than parents and whānau of other students. While the differences were clear, however, they were not stark. Most of these parents and whānau were positive about their child's learning and their child's school.