

Learning Support Fact Sheet

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In Aotearoa, and internationally, there has been growing recognition of the need to develop an inclusive education system where learning support for ākonga is provided in local education settings alongside their peers.

Currently Aotearoa offers a diverse range of learning support provisions intended to enable children and young people with the highest needs to achieve their full potential.

Data confirms gaps between learning support need and provision negatively affects ākonga. Multiple reviews have found that **reform to current funding and staffing models is needed to create a more inclusive education system.**

What is learning support and how is it resourced?

Learning support can be teacher aide support, learning support specialist engagement with students, professional support for teachers and others involved in a student's education, service co-ordination, or specialised learning settings.

One in five children and young people need extra support for their learning which includes learning difficulties, disadvantage, physical or mental health, or behaviour.¹

Support is provided by the Ministry of Education, schools and contracted providers.

The various learning support services each have their own funding. The criteria for accessing services from many of these funds is limited by population-based formula rather than need-based criteria.

A gap between need and provision

An **inclusive education system** serves the needs of all ākonga. Our current model identifies ākonga who are not well served.² Funding for additional support they require may be declined because funds are limited to a % of populations, or because criteria are not met.

The gap between need and provision has been quantified; **for every seven ākonga who receive support, the needs of three go unmet.**³

In 2024, **eight out of fourteen types of specialist learning support roles were identified as understaffed**, with overall understaffing of Ministry of Education roles at 16%.⁴

School-based learning support coordinator roles were established in 2017. The Minister of Education was advised in January 2024 that **these roles were understaffed**, and 1050 learning support coordinators were needed.⁵

A key in-school support is provision of teacher aides. When ākonga qualify for Ongoing Resource Scheme (ORS), their school receives government funding of \$23–\$23.78 per hour to employ teacher aides. As most teacher aides supporting ākonga are paid \$26.59–\$33.23, government funding does not cover the full cost.

Early childhood education learning support is funded by the Ministry of Education, with 203 early intervention teachers and 346 support workers providing this support across Aotearoa. The 2024 early childhood education workforce survey, Kōriporipo, reported **this was insufficient to address increasing need, resulting in excessive wait times, lack of specialists and insufficient professional development for in-centre support.**⁶

Reviewing learning support

A 2022 Government review of learning support made seven recommendations to achieve the objective of every ākongā reaching full potential and thriving.⁷ The recommendations were not progressed but referred to the Ministry of Education for further work:

- A new service delivery system
- Customised tailored supports
- an integrated and inclusive schooling network
- Learning supports for Māori and Pacific whānau and families developed by Māori and Pacific people
- A confident, capable workforce with the capacity to respond
- A new funding model to support a tailored and flexible approach
- Stronger integration with other agencies.

A review of stakeholder views (including families, whānau, school workers and learning support practitioners)⁸ found their most common needs were:

- Adults in the system have access to a wider range of professional learning and development
- Adequate and equitable access to funding, resources, and supports
- Review Ongoing Resourcing Scheme process, funding, and criteria (which provides support for students with the highest ongoing levels of need for specialist support.)

A 2023 review of teacher aide funding produced a reformed model for teacher aide funding that would provide more certainty for schools and whānau.⁹ The recommendations from this review are yet to be implemented.

In May 2024 Minister of Education Erica Stanford announced a priority to target effective learning support interventions for students with additional needs through a work programme.¹⁰ The programme outlined five areas for attention, but made no commitment to new funding.¹¹ These were:

- Operational changes to make the learning support system easier to navigate
- Improvements in data collection that would enable the creation of a data-driven funding model focused on delivering high-quality interventions, programmes and supports
- Workforce optimisation
- Building teacher capability to meet diverse learning needs
- Developing a network plan for specialist alternative provision.

Educators support the development of a fully inclusive education system. The reform needed is significant in scope so immediate solutions to the significant gap in provision have been identified.¹² These are:

- Teacher aide support for all mokopuna that need it
- Increase the number of learning support specialists working with mokopuna and teachers
- Fund learning support specialist roles for all schools (e.g. LSC/SENCO)
- Move from a formula-based to needs-based provision of learning support
- Lift professional learning for teachers on how to support mokopuna with learning support needs.

For more information:

<http://www.ngaaukaha.org.nz>

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References

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