



# Making our education system work for children with additional needs

National is the party of equal opportunity. We want all children in New Zealand able to access a high quality education that gives them the best chance to succeed.

As many as one in five young people require some additional support for their learning, which encompasses disability, learning difficulties, socioeconomic disadvantages, and physical, mental health or behavioural challenges.

One of the most common complaints we hear from parents is that children with a low to moderate level of additional need do not receive the specific support they need, and so tend to fall through the cracks.

Through better identification and a significant investment in support for children with additional needs of all levels, we can help to address the long tail of underachievement and give every child the education they deserve.

That's why we've developed an eight step plan to ensure better support for children with additional needs.

## Step 1 – Better and earlier identification of needs

National will ensure additional learning, behavioural and mental health needs are identified for each child at an early age. This will mean appropriate interventions can be made in a timely manner by parents, early childhood education providers, schools and other support services so that every child is able to fully engage with our education system and reach their full potential.

To achieve this, National will introduce a revamped B4 School check at age three – to be delivered on-site by medical professionals at early childhood education centres – that will identify any developmental concerns, screen for trauma, brain injury and foetal alcohol syndrome, and trigger early

intervention services where needed.

These checks will involve input from health and developmental specialists, as well as parents and early childhood educators, so the most comprehensive approach to identifying needs is taken while ensuring parents can take an active and engaged role in their child's development.

Information from these B4 School Checks will be recorded in Child Passports – an enhanced version of the existing Well Child Tamariki Ora book that will record each child's needs and be used over time to track progress to key physical, emotional, developmental and education milestones.

Whenever developmental concerns are identified, families will be guided through an expedited intervention process – for example with fast-tracked referral to appropriate medical services for additional screening or, where necessary, rapid provision of early intervention services such as auditory screening, speech therapy, physical therapy and other interventions.

## Step 2 – Individualised learning plans

Every child identified as having additional learning, behavioural or mental health needs will be equipped with an individualised learning plan before they start school. This plan will build on the information identified through the enhanced screening programme, and will capture input from parents, teachers, medical professionals and other specialists.

These individualised plans will mean every teacher a child encounters during their schooling has been provided with the most up to date information and context for how to set that child up for learning success. Schools will be required to update this plan at least annually, report against it to parents, and ensure the information travels with the child



from school to school, or from early learning settings into the primary and secondary school sector.

### Step 3 – Learning Support funding boost

National will invest around half a billion dollars in new spending over our first four years in Government to boost learning support. Once fully implemented, this will provide a new \$160 million per year funding allocation that will be ring-fenced to support children with additional learning, behavioural or mental health needs. Schools will be given a high level of discretion about what they choose to invest their allocation in, based on the specific needs they have identified in their community and student body.

Examples of what schools could choose to spend their new entitlement on include:

- Specialist support such as educational psychologists.
- Professional development and training for teachers.
- Physical resources such as sensory aides or learning materials.
- Additional teacher aide hours.
- Student counselling or mental health services.

Funding will be allocated based on need according to a transparent funding formula that takes into account school roll, need, and other relevant information, including whether a school has been identified locally as a centre of best practice for special education. Accountability will be maintained by requiring schools to report annually on how their funding is being used and the outcomes being achieved.

Until the needs-based funding system is fully operational, the familiar decile system will be used to determine the amount of additional funding each school will receive, using the following formula:

Decile	Per student
1 - 2	\$400
3 - 4	\$300
5 - 6	\$200
7 - 10	\$100

How much additional funding will each school get?

The following table provides an indication of how much additional funding each school will receive to support children with additional needs, based on school roll and decile.

Decile	100 students	200 students	400 students	1000 students
1 - 2	\$40,000	\$80,000	\$160,000	\$400,000
3 - 4	\$30,000	\$60,000	\$120,000	\$300,000
5 - 6	\$20,000	\$40,000	\$80,000	\$200,000
7 - 10	\$10,000	\$20,000	\$40,000	\$100,000

Will this impact funding for Learning Support Coordinators?

We will continue to fund Learning Support Coordinators (LSCs) but ensure schools are given maximum control over this resource, with flexibility to directly hire LSCs if that is their preference. We will work with schools to evaluate the effectiveness of the current scheme before rolling out the second tranche of LSCs.



## Step 4 – More teacher aides in classrooms

Having an extra pair of hands in the classroom is invaluable. Teacher aides work with students on a one-to-one basis, or in groups, and support teachers to provide a more equitable and inclusive educational experience. When it comes to children with additional learning needs, teacher aides are one of the most effective tools we have at our disposal.

There are currently around 18,000 teacher aides in New Zealand. National will invest \$150 million over four years to fund an additional six million hours of teacher aide support in New Zealand classrooms, which is equivalent to around 1500 new teacher aides (at 25 hours per week), or an average of 600 hours per school each year.

## Step 5 – Improved mental health training for teachers

The majority of young people in New Zealand are creative and resilient and thrive during their adolescent years. But unfortunately, around one in five exhibit behaviours or emotions or have experiences that put their wellbeing and mental health at risk. In 2016, National launched the Prime Minister's Youth Mental Health Project to address these concerns. The Education Review Office (ERO) was tasked with evaluating the extent to which schools were promoting and responding to student wellbeing and mental health issues, and understanding what the most effective schools were doing well.

Out of this project we found teachers who are attuned to mental health issues and equipped with the training, knowledge and confidence to deliver mental health skills to students had a positive impact on student wellbeing.

That's why National will strengthen mental health skills training for teachers so they are better equipped to deliver skills to children. We will also ensure schools are delivering mental health skills to children as part of the curriculum, and instruct the ERO to explicitly evaluate the performance of schools in delivering mental health skills to students.

## Step 6 – Simplified and streamlined learning support funding

One of the most common complaints we hear from parents about the current system for delivering support to children with additional needs is the amount of needless bureaucracy, form-filling and hoop-jumping families are required to go through to access the support they are entitled to.

Such overly complex application processes ultimately mean children miss out on the support they are entitled to, which has a detrimental impact on their ability to excel in our education system.

To address this, National will simplify and streamline the process for applying for learning support funding, and will ensure support gets to the children that require it with as little friction as possible.

We will reduce regional variation in funding levels for learning support while providing greater long-term funding certainty for parents, to reduce unnecessary interactions with bureaucracy and enable parents and educators to establish long term learning plans safe in the knowledge that funding and support for children with additional needs is locked in over the long term.

National will also ensure learning support spending is tailored to need by giving parents greater control over how their funding entitlement is spent.

## Step 7 – Multi-disciplinary teams in schools

National believes that innovation and new thinking will be essential if we are to lift educational achievement and ensure that our education system is accessible for all children, especially those with additional needs. We want maximum flexibility around how support is delivered for children, and will work to shift central Government resources down to the regional and local levels where possible to enable funding to be delivered for a more diverse and localised range of educational interventions.



One such intervention that National is committed to trialling is the use of multi-disciplinary teams of specialist support personnel in secondary schools. These teams, made up of professionals such as GPs, nurses, guidance counsellors and mental health workers providing enhanced support to secondary school students, have been successfully implemented in a small number of schools with impressive results. National will ensure this sort of innovation can be rapidly scaled up wherever it proves effective at supporting students with additional needs.

## Step 8 – Increased school choice

Every parent should have confidence that the needs of their child will be catered to by their local school, and that schools should support the additional needs of every child on their roll. We also recognise that some schools have developed particular expertise in catering to children with specific learning, behavioural or mental health needs. National's view is that such specialisation in our education

systems should be encouraged. Wherever local communities and school boards wish to, we will support the expansion of such centres of excellence, so as to provide parents with choice and additional options to ensure their children receive the education they deserve.

### National will:

- Invite applications for Partnership Schools specifically targeting children with additional learning needs.
- Consider applications for special character status from schools that cater specifically to children with additional learning needs, and have proven track records of delivering improved education results for these children.
- Affirm every child's right to have their additional needs catered to at their local school, while also providing families of children with additional needs more choices about the school their child attends. We will exempt families of children identified with a high level of additional learning needs from school zone restrictions, allowing them to enrol their child in the state or state-integrated school they choose as best serving the needs of their child.

## Cost (\$)

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Total
Enhanced screening	9	9	9	9	35
Child passports	5	5	5	5	20
Learning support boost	53	107	160	160	480
Additional teacher aides	38	38	38	38	150
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>685</b>