

March 2011



The Communication Service

The Ministry of Education, Special Education's Communication Service provides support at school/kura for students with high speech and/or language needs. Speech-language therapists work collaboratively with you, the student, their parent/s and family/whānau, and if requested, kaitakawaenga – Māori cultural advisors who support everyone to work in culturally appropriate and responsive ways.

Who can receive this support

The service's main focus is on students aged five to eight years with high communication needs. To receive support, your student needs to meet one or more of the following criteria, which prevents them from being able to participate and learn:

- ▶ speak in a way that's very difficult for people to understand eg, have difficulty making speech sounds correctly
- ▶ have a significant language delay or disorder eg, they find it difficult to follow instructions and understand what they've been asked to do, or they can only talk in short sentences
- ▶ have difficulty developing social skills eg, find it difficult to interact with other children and adults who are familiar to them
- ▶ have a stutter eg, frequently repeat words or sounds, or get stuck on words so that people have trouble understanding them
- ▶ have voice difficulties that make it very difficult for them to communicate with people in typical everyday situations eg, they might have an extremely husky voice or keep losing their voice.

How to apply

If you have a student who appears to meet the above criteria, discuss this with their parent/s. You will need to obtain parent or legal guardian agreement as part of the referral process and complete a referral form. Copies are available from your local Special Education office.

We encourage parents to discuss their concerns with the teacher or principal or a kaitakawaenga if they believe their child has a significant communication

difficulty that needs to be addressed. You might have someone on the staff whose role it is to work with the parent/s, such as a SENCO.

If you're unsure if a student meets the criteria, a speech-language therapist can work with you to help decide whether to go ahead with an application.

What happens next

Usually a speech-language therapist will read the referral information. They will clarify your student's communication needs and decide whether they need to contact you for further information, including information about their participation in social activities, learning and their wellbeing.

Assessments are time-consuming and not all applications progress to an assessment. Once your student's needs have been clarified, we will make a decision about whether they need further assessment.

When your student is accepted for an assessment, a speech-language therapist will contact you and the student's parent/s and outline the assessment procedures, where and when the assessment will take place and the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved.

At this stage we will provide the parent/s with information about the Special Education service, the management of private information and complaint procedures. We will ask them to sign a consent form for Special Education staff to work with their child.

Working out what support your student needs

The speech-language therapist might:

- ▶ carry out tests or record your student speaking to get a sample of their language
- ▶ observe your student in their classroom and school environment
- ▶ talk with the teacher and parent/s and any other specialists working with your student
- ▶ work with an interpreter or cultural support person if needed.

We will usually send copies of the assessment report to both you and the parent/s. If your student has high communication needs, the speech-language therapist will work with you and their parent/s to

develop a service agreement and/or an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

The support provided through the service

We might provide support in a range of ways, including:

- ▶ through an individual therapy programme that's followed up at home and at school
- ▶ helping a teacher's aide at school/kura develop and carry out a programme for your student
- ▶ small group work
- ▶ classroom strategies for the teacher
- ▶ advice and guidance to everyone working with your student
- ▶ help from a Communication Support Worker (CSW). These are trained aides who work with speech-language therapists to provide short-term support for students' speech-language therapy. CSWs work in schools and might support your student within the classroom or through individual sessions in a quiet room
- ▶ kaitakawaenga support. Māori cultural advisors will support everyone to work in culturally appropriate and responsive ways if your student identifies as Māori.

We would outline the goals and activities, as well as each person's roles and responsibilities, in a service agreement and/or an IEP.

Other support available if your student isn't accepted for the Communication Service

Your school receives a Special Education Grant that they can use

to support children with special education needs. They can spend this in a variety of ways – on resources, teacher training, teacher's aide time and for individual students or groups of students.

You might also make a referral to Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTL B). RTL B can provide teacher guidance and support for whole-class or individual behaviour and learning issues.

If your student is being supported by the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) and has high communication needs, these will be addressed as part of their ORS service (see our information sheet *The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme*).

For more information

If you're unclear about any part of our service or have questions about the help your student receives, please talk with staff at your local Special Education office, or call the Special Education information line on **0800 622 222**.

You can get more detailed special education information, including *A Quick Guide to extra support*, under the educator section of our website: www.minedu.govt.nz, or on Te Kete Ipurangi a website that provides educational material for teachers and schools: www.tki.org.nz.

New Zealand Government

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