



# Parents of Vision Impaired (NZ) Incorporated

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## "Supporting and Empowering Parents and Whanau"

Hon. Heather Roy  
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### Re Specific Education Review

Parents of Vision Impaired NZ Inc commonly referred to as PVI is delighted to be able to offer a submission to the Review of Specific Education. We have chosen to rename the term 'Special' and use the term "**Specific**" as this is a more appropriate term for children's education needs.

Inherent in this review is our belief that no-one knows our children better than we as parents do. What PVI is desperately seeking through this review is a commitment to acknowledging our knowledge together with schools/staff knowledge to educate our children.

We have also chosen to address other areas not covered in the discussion paper as we understand submissions will not be limited to the discussion paper.

For the purposes of this document 'blind and low vision' also includes learners who are deafblind and those with complex needs.

Key Policy drivers that influence this submission are:

- New Zealand's founding document "Te Tiriti O Waitangi"
- The United Nations Convention for the rights of people with Disabilities, specifically article 24. As signatories to this convention, NZ has made a legal promise to abide by this convention. It is time we delivered.
- The NZ Disability Strategy doc
- The Human Rights Act 1993 Sections 57, 65.
- PVI also believe the Minister should move to appoint an "Alternate Commissioner" under section 9 of the Human Rights Act 1993, specifically to address Specific Education needs of children with disability (cwd).

PVI believes that the Education Act 1989 may need amending with a view to further protect cwd education outcomes and protect funding in a manner that we have not seen before (refer 1A last bullet point).

PVI believes the IEP should be replaced with a Personalized Learning Programme not only for learners with Specific Needs but all learners in our schools. Imagine the better quality in learner outcomes... (Ref Step Change: Success the only Option doc)

PVI believes the "discussion doc" was well written and offered many parents with whom we have we have consulted have hope, the hope that there is a genuine intent to do better. It is with this recognition that PVI writes this submission.

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## Responses to Review Questions

### Schooling

Question 1a: What is needed to help schools succeed?

- **More resource needs to be made available to educate teaching staff both at teacher training level and in the field. PVI applauds the recently announced introduction of post graduate specific education courses being offered by Canterbury and Massey Universities. Notwithstanding this move, PVI also wishes to acknowledge the very good work done by Auckland University in the past.**
- **PVI believes School Principals need educating in not only how to welcome cwd and their families but more important understanding that diversity is okay. Enrol the child and adapt the teaching environment to the child's needs rather than the other way round.**
- **Education is needed for Parents and schools to better understand their respective responsibilities; both socially and legally. Specific Parent Education will be required to be undertaken. This Review should make funding available for NGOs to bid for Specific Parent Education.**
- A highly trained and competent body of **specialist** Resource Teachers Vision (RTVs). The appropriateness of the specialist training for these teachers is critical PVI warns against any dilution of the existing course with a greater proportion of generic special education content, as a response to the cost of training a relatively small number of specialist teachers each year
- The provision of professional learning to enable specialist RTVs of learners who are blind and low vision to appropriately meet the needs of Maori families and to work effectively in Maori educational settings; as well as with all other cultures.
- Specialist RTVs must be available in appropriate numbers to meet the needs of learners who are blind and low vision but also to provide quality support to schools, families and communities.
- **Perhaps the Education Act 1989 needs to change to ensure Principals are employed by the MoE and not BoTs. PVI`s thinking here is that with Principals under the direct employment of the MoE; may make accountability's easier to achieve.**

### Question 1b

**How could schools work together to succeed?**

- A number of educational options have been presented for consideration in the discussion document. PVI strongly favours the model which is already followed by BLENNZ, and which is not included in the preferred options, in that it includes the Homai Campus School. The BLENNZ model is a cohesive network of services which provide a range of educational placements for blind learners, with the choice of fluid movement between the options according to the learner's needs. It is a world class model, one that many overseas view as **the way** to deliver education for blind and vision impaired students nationally. By way of example, PVI recalls a conversation with Dr Phil Hatlin, the former Superintendent of the Texas School for the Blind. Phil, after hearing of our intentions, commented, "If you achieve this model, you will have the best model in the world". We have and we are proud of what we have, we just need better resourcing.....

The Homai Campus is the hub for an array of services which embrace and support inclusion. BLENNZ provides placement choices, including the Homai Campus School, to meet the needs of individual learners as determined by the Personalised Learning Programme team. These placements are viewed as flexible and subject to ongoing review.

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The Homai Campus options include:

- Regional outreach services with learners having educational placements in their local communities, supported by Resource Teachers Vision who are based in regional Visual Resource Centres. This is the norm for the large majority of the learners
- A school for a small number of learners, where the Personalised Learning Programme determines it to be the most appropriate placement. This provision includes a satellite option in a local secondary school, with an intention to further develop other satellite provisions
- A national assessment service for comprehensive transdisciplinary assessment, both on the main campus and regionally
- A national immersion programme for enskilling learners nationally in elements of the Expanded Core Curriculum – this includes group courses through to single learner immersion placements in the Homai Campus School
- An Early Childhood Centre at Homai Campus to serve the local learner population and as a national resource for early intervention programmes
- A residential facility to support these educational activities

The national base is also the hub for the BLENNZ professional learning community, with staff from throughout the country coming on and off the campus for professional activities such as immersion courses, professional development and group initiatives to achieve the goals of the BLENNZ Annual Plan. It provides a professional heart to the network.

Option C (as offered in the Discussion doc) 'Special schools as resource centres' is not seen as appropriate as it does not include a special school as part of a range of services. Homai Campus School is an integral part of the BLENNZ network of services.

- The option of Homai Campus School as both a day and residential facility provides for those learners, who for a period of their teaching require intensive teaching and learning in the Expanded Core Curriculum in support of achievement in the regular curriculum, with an ultimate aim of successful schooling in a regular education setting
- It provides a further educational choice for an Personalised Learning Programme team where there is no appropriate local educational placement to meet the needs of a learner at that point in time
- It provides a setting for immersion with learners from around the country, and at times their teachers and teacher aides, coming into the classrooms for immersion experiences from a day a week to longer periods
- It plays a key role in the week long national assessments with learners spending time in the Homai Campus School classrooms as a part of the assessment process
- There is a need for strengthening of the funding mechanisms for the BLENNZ model, introducing greater transparency. Immersion Courses are a flagship programme but do not have their own explicit funding stream. The present arrangement of resourcing through Residential funding seems an ad hoc arrangement for such a key BLENNZ programme.

The funding stream for the Homai Early Childhood Centre is likewise somewhat fragile, even after 10 years of discussion with the Ministry of Education. This programme is key to the BLENNZ early intervention services and should have a more robust financial foundation.

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## Question 2

### What needs to be done to make transitions work better?

- Learners who are blind and low vision have more intensive support needs at times of transition. The blindness sector favour a much more flexible approach to the use of the learner's ORRS funding package. At present the funding in this package is allocated inflexibly, whereas support needs often vary over time and typically are greater at times of transition.

A system of 'banking' of the ORRS funding package over time is favoured, with the Personalized Learning Programme determining the funding needed over the ensuing 12 month period, and if the full funding for the year has not been spent, the capacity to 'bank' any remaining funds to support future needs.

- More funding options are needed for students who are blind and low vision in order to support them as they move from secondary school into the world of tertiary study or work.
- There needs to be far greater clarity and information about support that is available to learners once they leave school. Often parents discover funding options by chance.

## Question 3

### How could services be better coordinated and focussed on the needs of students and families?

- PVI believes there should be more support from the Ministry of Education for families when they initially engage with schools and principals. This support could be in "Parent/Family Education contracts", possibly delivered by Parents for Parents etc...
- Parents want choice as to who they have as a lead or key worker.
- There is a need for a more consistent and holistic approach from the agencies who work with families. The sector recommends that core data is exchanged by agencies to avoid the stress for a family of unnecessarily repetitive assessment processes, as each agency seeks the same core data set.
- The Needs Assessment process should be able to be accessed by other agencies. We see no reason why this information cannot be shared. As parents we find having to have N/A after N/A unnecessary and a waste of time and resource.
- Ministry of Education - Specific Education: - P.V.I. would like to see all Ministry of Education - Specific Education specialist staff placed in Resource Centres within schools. P.V.I believes specialist staffs need to be where the learners are. The benefits for schools and specialist staff we believe would be immense. By better understanding the specific education needs of the learners, specialist education staff could be housed as per needs of the area dictates.

## Question 4

### What arrangements for funding, decision-making, verification, and fundholding should we have?

- PVI would like to see the current funding categories that exist within the Sp Ed diagram as per page 12 of the Discussion doc, changed. PVI would like to see a much more seamless approach to verification and funding, the following is considered by PVI as more appropriate: -

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1. The Verification process be done away with and replaced with a ***Need Assessment process***. This we believe would allow for more specific allocation of funding and perhaps create opportunities for more prudent allocations based on need rather than the current approach of bulk allocation as per ORRS.
  2. By removing verification we are doing away with a barrier to funding, we believe this current process unacceptable.
  3. We see no need for any barrier to funding, we see a needs assessment process creating a seamless access to **Specific Education Funding** and the top 2 categories as shown on page 12 would become 1 category.
  4. BY doing away with all the current pockets of funding, parents would be clearer of accessing a "***Specific Education Fund***" that if as a result of the Needs Assessment, funding/resources would be allocated. The measure of how the funding/resources are used should be qualified through the Personalized Learning Programme. We see this as easier to understand and perhaps more appropriate use of Government funding.
  5. A system of 'banking' of the Specific Education Funding package over time is favoured, with the Personalised Learning Programme determining the funding needed over the ensuing 12 month period. If the full funding for the year has not been spent any excess should be 'banked' to fund future support needs. Our thinking here is around the current waste we see with ORRS bulk funding. In general terms we see entrance to high school as perhaps a high cost year re transitioning and possible technology costs. We see year 10 as perhaps a less expensive year. Year 11 might require a technology upgrade, year 11 less cost with perhaps more costs being assessed for year 13 with the transitioning out of school etc. We can achieve efficiencies in cost allocation compared to the inflexibility of ORRS. These efficiencies could be saved and allocated when needs change.
  6. We would like to explore the option of Fundholder status being made available for Parents, and other NGOs should that be their choice. Parents would appreciate the opportunity to become an IF fundholder as some already have this status. PVI is keen to work with the MoE on this with a view of ensuring IF is seen as a successful model and one that is easily accessed and managed with very clear accountabilities in place. We believe this is in keeping with current options as available under other ministries and furthermore we believe this is in line with current Government thinking.

### **Question 5a**

#### **How can individually targeted services and supports be made more efficient?**

The following is taken from the United Blindness Sector submission; PVI endorses this approach: - And furthermore believes the current 0.1 and 0.2 component of ORRS funding **MUST** be re-allocated back to the MoE or MoE approved fundholders.

*The blindness sector believes that there is a serious equity issue with regard to the way in which the system of .1 and .2 extra teacher time allocation is currently operating. Learners who receive this extra teaching resource meet the criteria for high or very high needs verification, and by definition are those that have the greatest need for specialist teacher support from a teacher trained in the education of learners who are blind or low vision. This extra teacher resource is however allocated directly to the learner's regular school and it is the decision of that school how it will be used.*

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*It is the blindness sector's contention that under the original Special Education 2000 policy this teaching resource was intended to fund specialist teachers for blind and low vision learners i.e. Resource Teachers Vision, and the historic decision to allocate the extra teaching resource to schools was an error. This contention is supported by the fact that Visual Resource Centres were originally established and funded to provide educational support to learners in early childhood and those with moderate needs only. The specialist teacher support to learners with high or very high needs was to come from the ORRS package and this would provide a mechanism for the Resource Teacher Vision workforce to grow, in line with the number and needs of the learners on the BLENNZ caseloads.*

*With the ORRS specialist teacher resource locked up in regular schools and therefore no way to grow a stable and permanently employed specialist teaching workforce, the Ministry of Education suggested that the way to increase RTV staffing was to negotiate with schools to transfer these .1 and .2 additional teacher ORRS staffing allocations across to the Visual Resource Centres, who would then use the allocations to employ RTVs. This system had been followed and has created many problems encompassing logistical and equity issues:*

- *Some schools have been very reluctant to make the transfer for a range of reasons*
- *The schools usually expect exactly the amount of time transferred every week and this takes away any flexibility in service provision across an RTV caseload in response to individual need*
- *There is no provision for travel time with ORRS transfers – it is impossible for one RTV to undertake 5, .2's*
- *Every .1 and .2 of teacher time has to be separately negotiated, with an agreement passing from the regular school to BLENNZ and signed off a Board level. BLENNZ currently holds the .1 or .2 teacher allocation for 130 learners who are blind or low vision. To administer this constantly changing teacher resource is an enormous task, which requires a huge input of time and resource for all concerned.*
- *It has created a 2-tiered teaching workforce, some with permanent status and others with temporary. In addition permanent RTVs receive a salary unit, those employed under the ORRS transfer scheme do not.*
- *An arbitrary arrangement has been entered into whereby the MOE fund the operations for up to 15 FTE ORRS transfers. BLENNZ now has 14.54 FTE ORRS transfers. Once that figure passes 15 there is no mechanism for receiving operational funding for those additional ORRS transfer positions.*

*It seems very obvious to all that the main issue is that the .1 and .2 additional teacher allocation generated by the ORRS packages is sitting in the wrong part of the system and that students are being denied access as of right to the blindness education services they need.*

- a) **Reviewing policy anomalies** - *Under current policy RTVs are mandated to provide services only to children classified as having 'moderate needs'. If working to this policy, this would preclude RTVs from providing support to those learners who most require specialist provision i.e. those who are blind or have significant vision impairments. As RTVs are the only group who can teach Braille this is not practical and conflicts with current practice. The policy should allow both moderate and higher needs children to receive support from RTVs.*

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b) **Addressing workload issues** - Children classified as 'moderate needs' must receive an appropriate level of support. At present there are not enough RTVs to provide support to both this group and to those children in the 'high' and 'very high' needs categories. Despite a recent increase in funding for Resource Teachers Vision, the current ratio of these specialists to children is still 1:29 meaning children supported by these teachers cannot provide the level of support required by children on their caseload. Internationally, ratios are often much lower, such as those in Australia (1:12) and the US state of Iowa (1:10)<sup>1</sup>.

**A sustainable resourcing framework is needed for RTVs, with positions generated by the numbers and needs of the learners. This would be achieved by the ORRS package being automatically transferred to BLENNZ along with RTV travel and operations grants as the learners enter the school system.**

## Question 6

### How can the quality of services be improved?

- PVI believes a focus on specialist teacher intervention rather than a generalist approach is desired
- Perhaps we need to review the teacher aide component in our childrens education, is there an over reliance on the teacher aide? Young adults who have recently left school often advise that they were so glad to see the back of T/A, that by having a T/A allocated, they were made to feel different... We say this with respect to the work T/A do, but question the teachers or schools approach of their current use
- There is a need for increased collaboration across agencies and providers when working with learners with Specific Needs. This approach must be better developed; perhaps we need to look at appropriate resourcing to ensure there is time and staff allocated to allow this collaboration to succeed. The collaboration and partnership principles are really fine words, however we need to deliver, and will need to resource it appropriately.

## Questions 7 & 8

### How can families and schools be better informed?

### What does successful special education look like and how can we measure it?

- PVI believes resourcing needs to be made available to ensure appropriate information is made available to families and schools in a timely manner. Over the years the MoE has tried to achieve this but we believe there are cheaper and more useful ways of getting
- Information/training out to parents in particular. PVI, other parent governed bodies and NGOs would like to work closer with the MoE to further advance information and parent education
- Choice for students to develop a personal learning plan and for them to choose a learning provider who will meet their needs, interests and goals
- Flexibility for providers to expand and find staff, curricula and pedagogies that match student needs
- Quality that is reflected in school leadership, teaching, content and student performance outcomes
- Accountability that sees providers measured by outcomes pertaining to student success and satisfaction.

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## Question 9

### When things do not go well, what arrangements should be in place to resolve issues?

- PVI believe the MoE needs to have some teeth with regard to the LAW rather than relying on social policy as has been the approach of past Governments. At the beginning of this submission we have quoted what we consider as the key policy drivers for change. We would wish to see LAW reforms that make it very clear to a School, BoT, MoE and Parents that failure to comply with the LAW will result in possible criminal charges etc.
- An Independent Advocacy service to work with MoE, Other service providers, schools and parents/families.

## Question 10

### What is the most important change that would improve outcomes for children and young people with special education needs?

PVI believes changing attitudes as key, with a need for the active encouragement of attitudes of tolerance, fairness and equity, and an understanding of the richness of diversity and the right to education for learners who are blind and low vision. Then and only then could the following apply: -

***We seek an approach that sees education as a preparation for the whole of life: that sustains and lifts the civilised spirit; that genuinely embraces ethnicity, families, professional and concerned communities; that fosters cross-government and community collaboration and action; that sees special needs education as an investment in human potential; that grows young people with disabilities as valued contributors, endowed with self-efficacy and who are truly integrated as participants in everyday life.***

***A quote from Don McKenzie  
(Past Chair of the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind)***

Submission ends.

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