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Feature

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Education Planning



COLLABORATING FOR SUCCESS

All students progress when those who know them best plan and work together. Supported by research and experience, a sector advisory group has developed new guidelines on individual education planning.

WORKING TOGETHER is at the heart of a successful individual education planning process, and supporting students with special education needs is everyone's business – parents, whānau, classmates, teachers, boards of trustees, and specialists.

Collaboration for Success: Individual Education Plans replaces the previous 1998 individual education programme guidelines. A broad sector advisory group, which included parent, whānau, educator, and specialist representatives, helped the Ministry of Education project team develop the new guidance on individual education planning (IEP).

Resource teacher: learning and behaviour (RTL) Julie John said sector group representatives were invited and included in every step along the way.

“They were encouraged to not only share their own opinions but also to seek and share the thoughts of others in their groups. In this way the new IEP guidelines are truly reflective of those involved in special education throughout New Zealand,” Julie said.

Comprehensive review

Collaboration for Success: Individual Education Plans draws on a comprehensive review of international and national research about IEP for students with special education needs.

The review was carried out by a team from the University of Canterbury: David Mitchell, Missy Morton and Garry Hornby. The review focused on:

national and international developments in individual education planning

assessment practices in special education

research into effective, evidence-based IEP practices.

The review identified a number of positive aspects of New Zealand practice. However, it also noted gaps between the original vision for individual education plans and some current practices. The review showed that many opportunities for improvement exist. Two concerns were flagged as particularly significant in the review: many individual education plans are unwieldy and unhelpful; and often parents, whānau, and students are only marginally involved in the IEP process.

The full review is available on the Education Counts website: www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/literacy/literature-review

College launch

Collaboration for Success: Individual Education Plans was launched at Queen Charlotte College, where every student is seen as a full member of the school and wider community. Students with significant special education needs excel through the school's collaboration with parents, whānau, and local businesses.

College principal Tom Parsons said his school was "very conscious that school is about socialisation as well as education". He cites several examples of students with significant special education needs who are thriving.

"One lad with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) recently greeted a minister of the Crown with eye contact, a handshake, and a greeting using the minister's surname. The minister asked the open question, "How is the principal doing?" to which the student replied after lengthy reflection, "Improving".

Another student enjoys weekly work experience with the nearby New Zealand King Salmon marine farm. "His eyes are now wide open to the career structure available in that industry, fully aware that the staircase is available only to those with a good education," Tom said.

Rewarding

Lisa Suthers, the special education coordinator (SENCO) at Queen Charlotte College, reflected on their process for developing IEPs and why it was always a rewarding experience for everyone.

"It's a process that begins with celebration and recognition. We share heart-warming stories about the student's progress and achievements, and remind ourselves that they are just like any other child – uniquely special and gifted in their own right," Lisa said.

"We also look at ourselves and celebrate how hard we work and how far we have come in our ability to manage situations that challenge us. Unless this is recognised and said out loud I don't think any plan or IEP will serve much beyond the paper it's written on. IEPs are full of opportunities. We all respect and value the process and the contributions of everyone involved – most of all, the students."

Teachers at Queen Charlotte College said they had noticed that many students with learning difficulties have low self-esteem about their academic ability, particularly in secondary school.

"They believe that they are 'dumb' and will never be able 'to keep up'," Lisa said. "But adaptations to the teaching and learning programmes help students to regain a sense of achievement.

"We promote a caring community where diversity is valued and teaching methods support social relationships in the classroom and beyond."

COMMENTS FROM PRACTITIONERS

Sally Direen is the primary schooling representative on the sector advisory group. Sally said the *Collaboration for Success: Individual Education Plans* guidelines are clear, succinct and easy to follow. "They will give parents, teachers and all who are

involved in individual education plans the information they require to ensure the meetings are inclusive and collaborative,” Sally said.

Sarah Pledger is a regular class teacher at Balaclava School in Otago. She said success in developing, implementing and reviewing individual education plans is highly dependent on the relationships and collaboration between group members.

“Five or six people usually make up the IEP team. Before and between meetings the class teacher keeps in close contact with the parents.” Sarah considers that “the new IEP guidelines are a valuable guide to ensuring this process is purposeful, seamless, and simple”.

Karen Stanford is a new entrant to year 3 teacher at Paparoa Range School. Karen tries to set aside 15 minutes every week for the team to discuss individual education plans, and said “we are constantly referring to the IEP as part of classroom practice”.

“We all learn better with visuals. Preparing resources to implement individual education plans is a shared responsibility,” she said.

Karen described how the school supported a student who moved from a specialised school for the deaf to their small rural inclusive school, noting that the whole school learned New Zealand Sign Language. “Classmates supported the IEP goals. The student with special education needs asked what, where, and how questions by signing to the classmate giving their news.”

Annie Guerin is an itinerant specialist teacher supporting a number of students with special education needs on the West Coast of the South Island. Annie is particularly interested in supporting student to know their own goals and what they are working towards.

Annie said James, a student, told her: “I can write a story using spaces between the words. I can make up a story and an adult usually writes it and I copy it. I can write three sentences without an adult helping me. Then they help check the spelling and fullstops. I want to learn to write faster and neater. I can use a timer to see how fast I am writing. I want to do this so I can get a good job and I can do the reading and writing work at high school. My family can help me when I am doing my homework.”

Links

For the IEP literature review:

www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/literacy/literature-review

Collaboration for Success; Individual Education Plans:

<http://seonline.tki.org.nz/IEP>

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