



Inclusive Education

For a fairer society



GREEN PARTY ELECTION PRIORITY

Summary

Every child has a right to be fully included and thrive in the education system. The Green Party is passionate about improving inclusive education services so that every Kiwi kid gets to fully participate in school life.

The Green Party will:

1. Properly fund a full-time Children's Champion for every 400 children to coordinate support for children with high needs (SENCO), costing \$70 million over three years.
2. Create a \$5 million annual School Camp fund to support students with additional learning needs to attend camps and other activities that should be enjoyed by all kids.
3. Double funding for the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) and the Early Intervention Service (EIS) to increase the students who can access these services, at an additional cost of \$215 million over three years.
4. Invest \$25 million over three years in targeted learning support professional development for teachers.
5. Ensure every child can be included at their local school, by strengthening the child rights provisions in the Education Act.
6. Establish new processes to reduce the number of children who get suspended or excluded, especially those with learning support needs.
7. Centrally fund school support staff to ensure that all students get the help they need.

All children benefit when schools and ECE are inclusive and every child's needs are being met. Schools and teachers need better funding and training so they can help their students to have the best possible education experience and build an inclusive classroom culture.

All Kiwi kids deserve to learn in a supportive environment that helps them thrive. But too many children with learning support needs like autism and dyslexia are being overlooked. Learning support resources are stretched too thinly, and kids are being denied their human right to learn. Currently, support and funding is fragmented and complicated to apply for, with thousands of children missing out on the support they need.

Situation

The Green Party is passionate about fostering inclusive education that means everyone gets to participate.

An estimated 80,000 to 100,000 young people receive some form of additional learning support each year,¹ about ten percent of young New Zealanders. The vast majority, around ninety five percent, are enrolled in regular schools and early childhood education (ECE) centres, which are not always equipped to provide inclusive education for all students. Most of the support comes in the form of additional staff, who work alongside students to make sure they have the tools and help they need for a positive learning experience.

Many schools and ECE centres are doing a great job supporting students with learning difficulties. But on the whole, they have not been provided with enough resources and support to ensure a fully inclusive school culture.

Hundreds of New Zealand principals say they are unable to cater for special-needs students in their school.

- New Zealand Principals' Federation survey

This persistent underfunding of the learning support sector has frustrated many parents and children and contributed to an environment where children's human rights are undermined. The furore around seclusion rooms demonstrates how damaging this lack of training and support can be for kids who are already facing some serious challenges accessing their right to an education.

All children should be able to attend their local school and have a positive learning experience. There are currently a number of barriers that children with learning support needs face in education. For example, the Education Act is not specific enough to ensure that every child can continue to attend their local school. Some children are unable to attend a full school day and are being excluded from extra-curricular activities. Around 1,000 students

with disabilities (high learning needs) are suspended from school every year.² The system is not working.

Students with the most serious needs can access support through the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS), but it is capped, with only one percent of students being able to access it. The criteria is narrow and it is very difficult and time consuming for families to apply. Last year, 574 children were declined access to ORS.³

The Government's Learning Support Update currently has a proposal to reduce ORS support for 18 to 21-year-olds. But young people need more support, not less, during this time when they are transitioning away from school.

The Early Intervention Service (EIS) exists to provide a range of professional support for young children who with behavioural problems or difficulty participating in learning activities, before they start school. The EIS can refer them to speech language therapists, advisors on deaf children, kaitakawaenga, and other experts. This kind of diagnostic help and early intervention can make a huge difference in a child's life.

But under the National Government, spending by the EIS has been cut in real terms by about \$300 per child.⁴ Too many families cannot wait the months required or to pay independently for an initial diagnosis, and many children go without help for far too long. One child went 381 days before accessing any support from the EIS.

The inquiry into dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorders in schools

Last year, the Green Party initiated a Select Committee inquiry into support for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and autism spectrum disorders in schools. The grief and anger of families was always present in the Inquiry's hearings, as was frustration at the potential of children's potential being wasted, and the failure of our education system to take on that challenge.

The inquiry made it clear that there are huge discrepancies between how support in the system is supposed to work and how it is frequently inaccessible to families. Accessing funding for extra learning support is fragmented and unnecessarily complicated.

Part of the problem is the lack of national data about how many students have learning support needs and their level of need. There specifically needs to be more research into the needs of Māori and Pasifika children who require additional learning support. Without comprehensive data, the competitive and capped funding system continues to fail the wide range of students who need assistance.

Solution

The Green Party will prioritise improving inclusive education services so that every Kiwi kid gets to fully participate in school, and learn in a way that works for them.

A Children's Champion

The Green Party will properly fund a full time Children's Champion, currently called a Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), for every 400 children in New Zealand. Currently, many staff in these roles are part-time and untrained in the specific learning support needs of individual students.⁵ They often do not have the time, training, or resources that they need to do a good job.

To properly support students, we will ensure that there is one centrally funded SENCO for every 400 students (both primary and secondary). This will ensure each co-ordinator has enough time to support students and teachers. There are currently 800 SENCOs. On current student numbers, the Green Party would increase that to 1,970 at a cost of \$70.2 million per year.

A School Camps Fund

School camps are a crucial part of our curriculum and something that many kids appreciate and enjoy. Children with high and moderate learning support needs have often been excluded from camps due to funding pressures and attitudinal barriers to their full participation.

The Green Party will create a School Camps Fund, providing financial assistance to include all students in school camps. This will help pay for the support staff, equipment, and infrastructure required to make sure that school camps are more accessible.

Initially, the fund will be \$5 million a year but funding levels will be reviewed regularly to ensure funding meets demand. Schools will apply to the fund on behalf of their students.

Double funding for the Early Intervention Scheme and Ongoing Resourcing Scheme

The Green Party will ensure that all children with moderate to high learning needs, who need ongoing assistance, can access it.

The Green Party is committed to uncapping ORS and EIS funding to ensure that children's needs can be met, instead of families being forced to fit narrow criteria and compete against one another to access assistance. As an interim step towards uncapping funding for ORS and EIS, the Green Party will double the current funding over three years.

Funding needs to be doubled for the EIS so that children under five can get the help that they need, when they need it. This will cost \$10 million in the first year, rising to \$31 million in the third year and every year thereafter. We will do this over three years because it will take time to build the workforce capacity to spend this funding.

We will also double the ORS, with an additional \$184 million over three years. This is needed to help students with the highest needs. Without proper support, they often cannot attend school and are left out of other activities that are an important part of learning and development.

Better professional support for teachers and schools

Inclusive schools need well trained and properly resourced staff. The Green Party will establish a \$25 million inclusive education professional development fund for all primary, secondary, and ECE teachers. This centrally funded professional development will be mandatory.

Improving this system also starts at initial teacher education. We will work with EDUCANZ to require providers to expand the curriculum.

The Green Party will expand the curriculum for primary, secondary, and ECE teacher training so that new teachers have the necessary skills to work with high needs students. In particular, we will make sure that all teachers have specific training to help identify and support students with dyslexia at an early age.

Centralising support staff

The Green Party is recommitting to centralising funding for additional learning needs, to make sure that all children that need support get it.

Funding to support children with additional learning needs is currently taken from schools' operations grants. This means school could have to choose whether to fund their students' needs, or pay their power bills. In response to the Government's freeze on operations grant in 2016, NZEI Te Riu Roa undertook a survey asking school principals how they were planning to cope. Around 40 percent said they were considering cutting back on the hours of teacher aides and other support staff.⁶

The Ministry of Education needs to better measure how many children need help, and what sort of assistance will best meet that need. The Education Review Office needs to monitor how well schools are meeting the needs of all students and their families. We will ensure proper, anonymised data is collected so that the Government can better plan for and respond to the needs of kids with diverse learning needs. This data is needed to help plan what resources are needed, including support staff.

Change the Education Act for the right to meaningful education

The Education Act enshrines the right to an education, but for some children with high needs this has not been borne out in practice. For example, resourcing constraints mean some children are unable to complete a full day at school.

The Green Party will update the Act with a child rights focus to ensure all children with all levels of needs have a legal right to be educated alongside everyone else.

Keeping kids in school

The real test of an education system is what happens to children when things go wrong. We want to support children to be able to stay at their local school. Currently, processes for children with extra learning needs are discriminatory and don't really offer a recourse to justice. Families have had to take schools to court to ensure that their child's right to an

education is protected. We need a child focused disputes resolution scheme so that schools and families will have a better system for resolving issues, and can avoid suspending or excluding children.

The Green Party will strengthen the mediation process that the Ministry of Education is piloting, and will include access to arbitration when mediation fails. We envision a mediation-type process for schools, families, and students, and which would apply to all students regardless of their level of need. It could be based on the mediation service that the Human Rights Commission provides, but specialised for education, as recommended by Youth Law.⁷

Sources

¹ <https://education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Initiatives/special-education-update/Report-to-Minister-Special-Education-Update-16-Nov-2015-redacted.pdf>

² Independent Monitoring Mechanism of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Making Disability Rights Real (December 2012)

³ https://www.parliament.nz/resource/en-NZ/QWA_04701_2017/8fbc4f47777dbb18bd7205bcd0222e1444436178

⁴ QWA 422 (2017), QWA 1188 (2017)

⁵ NZEI Te Riu Roa 'Supporting Diverse Learners: Survey of Special Needs Education Co-ordinators (SENCO)', 2016
<http://www.standupforkids.org.nz/wp-content/uploads//2012/08/SENCO-report-05feb2016.pdf>

⁶ <http://betterfunding.org.nz/dealing-with-changes-to-school-funding-what-principals-are-saying/>

⁷ Challenging the Barriers to Power to make binding decisions and directions to schools and the Ministry of Education From Youth Law report 2016.

**[www.greens.org.nz/
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