



**Submission to the Parliamentary Education and
Workforce Committee's inquiry into school
attendance**

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1. Key points and recommendations

IHC recommends that the Government

- 1.1. Create an enforceable right to education
- 1.2. Remove the policy disincentives to enrolling disabled students by overhauling the funding system, so that students have what they need for learning, socialising, and enjoying all that school has to offer.
- 1.3. Ensure that the overhaul of the funding system is based on sound prevalence data
- 1.4. Make the curriculum accessible for all by adopting Universal Design for Learning approaches at the policy and practice level and ensure that access to the curriculum for disabled students is an aspect of school evaluation and review.
- 1.5. Ensure that initial teacher education and ongoing professional development includes mandatory courses in inclusive pedagogy so that all teachers are confident teaching diverse learners

2. About IHC

IHC advocates for the rights, inclusion, and welfare of all people with intellectual disabilities and supports them to live satisfying lives in the community.

IHC was founded in 1949 by a group of parents who wanted equal treatment from the education, health, and social service systems for their children with intellectual disability. Today IHC is still striving for these same outcomes and is committed to advocating for the rights, welfare, and inclusion of all people with an intellectual disability throughout their lives.

We believe that people with an intellectual disability have the right to be to be part of a family, to be treated with respect and dignity, to have a say in their own lives, to live, learn, work and enjoy life as part of the community, and to have support that meets their goals and aspirations.

IHC is New Zealand's largest provider of services to people with intellectual disabilities and their families. IHC supports 1500 families with children who have an intellectual disability, provides support and training for 4000 adults in workplaces and helps more than 3500 people with disabilities to live in IHC houses and flats. We also provide specialist services such as behaviour support and training.

3. Disabled students and attendance

Unlike some of their peers, disabled students want to attend school. Ministry research using Census data has advised that the ‘prevalence of disability increases with age, from 8% of students of primary school age in 2017 to 15% of intermediate or secondary school age’¹

The same research tells us that there ‘are only minor differences in attendance rates between disabled and non-disabled students, and most differences are medical-related.’ This suggests that the same issues that the education system has with non-disabled student attendance exist for disabled students.

We understand that disabled students are not necessarily the focus of this inquiry, but as there are some very common and well-known themes that cause them to miss school, we suggest that the inquiry should be extended to include a specific focus on barriers to attendance for disabled students. Within the disability sector we have significant knowledge of the barriers that disabled students face at school generally and in respect of school attendance.

Most disabled students would love to attend school, however in New Zealand because we do not have an inclusive and accessible education system, many disabled students have reduced attendance or limits and conditions placed on their attendance.

For over three decades now IHC has submitted many documents to the Ministry of Education detailing what we think disabled students need for equitable access to education.

IHC feels so strongly about the inclusion of disabled students at school that in 2008 we lodged a complaint under Part1A of the Human Rights Act alleging that disabled students experience discrimination in their access to education. We have yet to progress to a hearing in this matter.

We would be happy to provide documents that outline IHC’s concerns again to help the inquiry. What follows is a fragment of the recommendations we have provided over the years.

3.1 The New Zealand government provide disabled students with an enforceable right to education consistent with New Zealand’s obligation as having signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

Despite the legislative requirement that schools ensure all students attend all day every day that schools are open, schools frequently ask parents to take their child home for part or all the school day or week.

¹ The educational experiences of disabled learners, Mercy Mhuru, Ministry of Education, 2020, page 1

Some of this is due to the flawed Learning Support resourcing framework that leaves school short of what they need to provide for full attendance of disabled students and some of this is due to decisions made by a school that is not committed to full inclusion of disabled students.

Regardless of the reason, disabled students should not be disadvantaged and treated less favourably than their non-disabled peers in respect of their right to attend school and if they are, they and their family need recourse to a transparent and affordable mechanism that ensures accountability on their right to attend.

3.2 Disabled students do not get what they need to attend school

We have strong evidence from families that disabled students do not get what they need to attend school all day, every day. This could be in the form of access to technology, specialist advice or a teacher aide or teacher who understands and accommodates diverse learners.

For example, disabled students who receive ORS funding, the highest level of funding available, frequently do not get funding for a teacher aide for more than 7 – 10 hours a week. The resourcing and funding framework is inadequate for the students it is intended for. In addition, ORS funding is based on criteria that have not been reviewed since 2001.

For low – moderate needs disabled students there is a hotchpotch of funding available. Most of it is inadequate, not appropriately targeted or monitored, and not linked to disability prevalence data.

Disabled students need resourcing that is targeted and individualised to their needs. Schools need levels of human and financial resourcing that enables them to provide a quality education to all students on their roll.

3.3 Disabled students need the curriculum to be accessible and give teachers the skills and confidence to teach diverse learners

We hear from families and disabled students that they are not able to engage fully or achieve due to the curriculum not being accessible to them and their teachers not having the knowledge or skills to teach diverse learners.

The New Zealand curriculum needs to embed approaches such as Universal Design for Learning to ensure that schools can adopt diverse approaches to learning.

Disabled students tell us that their teachers are often unable to understand them, their disability, the way they learn or the sensory issues that sometimes lead to disability related behaviours. Many disabled students experience trauma due to the lack of inclusive practices and attitudes. There is inadequate initial teacher education and ongoing professional development in teaching and including diverse learners

We need graduating teacher standards that include requirements to know how to include students with disabilities requiring accommodations to learn and for this knowledge to be a specific competency. We also need graduating teachers to demonstrate their knowledge of teaching diverse learners We also need practising teachers to have this knowledge and competency.

4. Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information to aid the inquiry. We wish you well with this important work and look forward to being involved with it in the future.