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# Individual Education Plans — working as a team

Some children with special education needs will have an Individual Education Plan, or IEP. This information sheet explains what IEPs are and how parents/caregivers, whānau and educators can work together to develop successful IEPs.

## What is an IEP?

An IEP is a written plan that sets out a student's goals. It identifies teaching strategies, resources and support needed from the people around the student to help them achieve those goals.

It is developed as part of a collaborative process between those who work with and know the student

well. These people form a team around the student so support needs for both the student and the team, are identified and met in a managed and co-ordinated way.

## Who needs an IEP?

The special education needs of many students can be met by class and school-wide strategies.

However, some students with special education needs require an IEP for specific areas of their learning and a few students need one that captures every aspect of their learning. The school and parents decide together if an IEP is needed. Other specialists who may be involved may also suggest an IEP.

## Make the IEP process successful

- ▶ The success of an IEP is as much about the way a student's team works and thinks as it is about what's in the IEP document.
- ▶ For a student to learn and achieve, those who know them best must plan and work well together.
- ▶ Consider the student's perspective. View the world through their eyes.
- ▶ Make sure the student has a voice, whether it's through being present themselves or through their parents and whānau.
- ▶ Recognise every student as an active and capable learner (IEPs look at adapting the school programme to fit the student rather than expecting the student to fit the school programme).
- ▶ Consider the student's successes and challenges.



### Who is involved in IEPs?

A student's school is responsible for organising IEP meetings.

The team usually includes the student's parents, teacher and any Special Education staff or other specialists.

The student themselves should also be included wherever possible – their voice is vital to a successful IEP process.

Parents play a very important part in the IEP process because they know their child and what's happening in their life best.

Parent participation is vital to the student's success at school.

### IEP meetings

IEP meetings are frequently held at school but the IEP team may wish to consider other options, such as a community centre, marae or the student's home. This often makes the meeting process more comfortable and acceptable for everyone.

Together, the IEP team decides where and when the meeting should take place, and what it will cover.

The IEP meeting usually covers:

- ▶ agreeing on a team process
- ▶ setting the IEP vision and primary purpose
- ▶ reviewing the student's progress and achievements

- ▶ setting the team and student IEP goals
- ▶ identifying how those goals will be met.

### Updating the IEP

The IEP is a living document. It should reflect the student's changing needs and be monitored and reviewed regularly with this in mind. This is done through team meetings that record the student's learning progress and what their next goals will be. Everyone on the team should receive a copy of the updated plan after each meeting.



“ [The IEP meeting] is 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. 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.”

*Lisa, Special Education Coordinator (SENCO)*

## Things parents should know

Your involvement in the process is essential for success.

- ▶ You have a say in who you want at meetings. You can have as few or as many people as you wish, including whānau members. Tell the school who you are bringing and they will talk with you about who they want to include.
- ▶ You can ask for your preferred time and place for the IEP meeting. Consider a time and place that makes it possible for all family and whānau you would like at the meeting to attend.
- ▶ Before the meeting you might want to make a list of the things you want to talk about.
- ▶ Before the meeting, gather information about your child and think how it might be useful to discussions.
- ▶ During the meeting you might hear educational terms that mean very little to you. If you don’t understand something, please ask.
- ▶ You can ask for your child’s IEP to be reviewed at any time. You can also ask for reports before the next IEP meeting and talk to your child’s classroom teacher any time about your child’s progress.
- ▶ The IEP does not replace your child’s school report. You should always receive a report on your child’s progress from the school.

If you have questions about the process, talk to the classroom teacher, the school’s SENCO (special education needs coordinator), social worker or principal, specialist services staff, or other parents, non-government agencies or support groups.



## Checklist – what should be in the IEP

- ✓ A long-term goal or vision – where are we going and how are we going to get there? Consider the student's strengths and remember to identify what success will look like.
- ✓ Teaching practices and a learning programme for the classroom that will support the student to learn – this guides the adaptations and differentiations the classroom teacher will make to support learning.
- ✓ Specialist services and support the student might need and how these will support the classroom programme – this could include, for example, psychologists, speech-language therapists, advisers on deaf children, resource teachers: learning and behaviour.
- ✓ Other resources, materials and any extra or specialised equipment or assistive technology the student might need.
- ✓ The role of each team member in supporting the student, including how parents and whānau can support the student's learning at home.
- ✓ How the team will communicate on an ongoing basis.
- ✓ The skills and needs of team members – that is, what skills, knowledge, or attitudes they need to support the student and one another.
- ✓ Ways to check on the student's progress against their goals and success factors and when this will be done – remember to identify ways to show progress outside of the classroom as well, such as making friends.
- ✓ An agreed review date for the IEP.

**Remember:** An IEP doesn't need to be a large document. It also doesn't necessarily need to be all in words – consider visual content, such as charts, photos or pictures.

## More information and tips about IEPs

The website, IEPOnline has information, tips and tools to help teams develop successful and collaborative IEPs. You can also download a copy of Collaboration for Success – Individual Education Plans. Go to <http://seonline.tki.org.nz/IEP>.