

June 2013



The Communication Service

Support at school for children with speech and/or language difficulties

This information sheet outlines how the Ministry of Education can support your child at school/kura if they have speech and/or language difficulties.

The Ministry employs speech-language therapists and support staff who can work with your child, their teachers and you if your child has high communication needs. Speech-language therapists are trained to support children who have difficulties with talking, listening and understanding language. The service is funded by the Government and is free.

A speech-language therapist assesses your child's communication skills to work out what kind of support they need. They might work directly with you and your child, and offer advice to you and your child's teachers on the best ways to work to improve your child's speech and language.

The Ministry also employs kaitakawaenga who are Māori cultural advisors. If your child identifies as Māori, kaitakawaenga can provide cultural support for your child, you and your whānau.

A focus on the first years at school

The main focus of the Communication Service is on children with high communication needs who are aged five to eight years.

This is because listening and speaking are important parts of learning, relating to other people and being able to express needs and ideas. Supporting your child when they start school/kura – or soon after – gives them the best chance of being able to learn alongside other children in their class.

Support available for children under five

The Ministry also employs speech-language therapists who work in Early Intervention teams with children who have significant speech and/or language needs in early childhood.

If you're worried about your child's speech or language development, talk to one of the teachers at their early childhood education centre, someone in your local Ministry of Education office or see our information sheet *The Early Intervention Service*.

Support available for children over eight

If your child is older than eight, your child's school can discuss with you options for meeting their communication and learning needs.

Working together

When you apply for support from the Communication Service, you, your family/whānau, other support people, including kaitakawaenga if you wish, and your child's teacher will work together to support your child's communication programme at school and at home.

Speech-language therapy works best when everyone works together to help your child communicate in everyday situations.



How to apply

Talk with your school about applying for support from the Communication Service. The school can then refer your child to our service and fill in the referral form, with your input.

You or your child's school can also discuss your child's needs with a speech-language therapist, manager or kaitakawaenga at your local Ministry office.

Can my child get this support?

To receive support from the Communication Service, your child needs to meet one or more of the following criteria:

- ▶ speak in a way that's very difficult for people to understand eg, have difficulty making speech sounds correctly
- ▶ have a significant language delay or disorder eg, they find

it difficult to follow instructions and understand what they've been asked to do or they can only talk in short sentences

- ▶ have difficulty developing social skills eg, they find it difficult to interact with other children and adults who are familiar to them
- ▶ have a stutter eg, frequently repeat words or sounds or get stuck on words which means that people have trouble understanding them
- ▶ have voice difficulties that make it very difficult for them to communicate with people in typical everyday situations eg, they might have an extremely husky voice or keep losing their voice.

A speech-language therapist will work with you and your child's teacher to decide whether your child meets the criteria for a communication service.

What happens next

Our staff will work with you and your child's teachers to decide whether your child's needs should be assessed. They might call you or their school to discuss your child's needs.

Once your child has been accepted for an assessment, a speech-language therapist will be in touch with you and their school to arrange a time and place to meet with you and your child.

When you meet with the speech-language therapist, they will discuss the assessment process with you and ask you to sign a consent form giving permission for Ministry of Education speech-language therapists to work with you, your child and their school. The

consent form explains how private information about your child will be protected. It also contains information on the process for making a complaint.

The therapist will ask about cultural aspects of your family/whānau that might be important for us to know.

Working out what support your child needs

The speech-language therapist will assess your child's needs in one or more of the following ways:

- ▶ talking with you, your child's teachers and any other specialists who work with your child
- ▶ observing your child in their classroom and school environment
- ▶ assessing or recording your child speaking to get a sample of their speech and language.

They will work with an interpreter or cultural support person if needed.

When the therapist has completed the assessment they will discuss the results with you. If your child has high communication needs, they will work with you and your child's teacher to develop a plan to address your child's speech and/or language needs.

If you're unclear about any part of the assessment process, please ask. You're entitled to know what's happening with your child and to feel comfortable with it.

The support available for your child

The support your child receives through the service could include:

- ▶ advice and guidance to everyone working with your child to ensure

your child's plan is on track and that they're making progress

- ▶ an individual therapy programme that's followed up at home and at school
- ▶ classroom strategies for the teacher to support your child
- ▶ work in small groups
- ▶ help from a teacher's aide at school/kura
- ▶ support from a communication support worker (CSW) – this person works with a speech-language therapist and is trained to provide support within the classroom or works with individual children at school to support speech-language therapy programmes
- ▶ support from a kaitakawaenga if your child identifies as Māori – a kaitakawaenga will work with you, your child, your whānau and the therapist to help develop the most effective and appropriate cultural support.

Language and Learning Intervention

Your child may be offered Language and Learning Intervention (LLI). This approach is based on evidence that helping children with language is most effective when it is set in everyday conversations with significant adults in the child's life. The classroom provides many opportunities for conversations throughout the day.

Your child's team will attend an initial planning workshop together. The team might include you or other members of your whānau, classroom teacher, teacher's aide, speech-language therapists and other specialists.

At the workshop, everyone will learn about your child's language and communication skills. Your child's team will agree on the priorities for communication, literacy and numeracy that your child is likely to achieve with support. The team then considers how to support your child in everyday classroom conversations, and this is recorded in an action plan which the team implements.

The speech-language therapist supports the team through discussion, modelling and video-coaching with the teacher and teacher's aide. Your child's progress will be reviewed and further workshops may be offered.

About Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

If your child is found to have high communication needs, the school might develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This is a written plan that outlines your child's goals and how your child can reach those goals.

You can talk with the school about who you want at IEP meetings. They will usually include you, your child's teacher and specialists working with your child. You can have as many or as few people at the IEP meeting as you want. You'll play a very important part in this team because you're the person who knows your child best and what's happening in their life.

During this meeting you will be able to inform the team about your child's strengths and needs so that you can set short- and long-term goals together.

Your child's IEP will also identify:

- ▶ teaching strategies that will support your child to learn
- ▶ resources or special equipment your child needs
- ▶ who will be working with your child and what their role will be
- ▶ how you and your family/whānau can support your child's learning at home
- ▶ the time it's likely to take for your child to reach their goals and ways to check that they're making good progress.

Your child's IEP should be reviewed regularly with you and the team around your child. The review meeting will record your child's learning progress and decide what the next goals will be. You will receive an updated plan after each meeting.

Other support available for your child

If your child's communication needs are not high enough to be eligible for our Communication Service, discuss what other options are available with the speech-language therapist or kaitakawaenga.

Schools receive a Special Education Grant that they can use to support children with special education needs. They can spend this in a variety of ways, including on resources, teacher training and teacher's aide time and on individual students or groups of students.

You can also talk to your child's teacher, or the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) if your school has one, about what support the school can offer.

This could include support from a Resource Teacher: Learning

and Behaviour (RTLb). These are experienced teachers who support children with learning or behaviour difficulties. They usually work with your child's teacher but may do some individual work with your child or a small group of children. RTLbs can support and advise class teachers on different ways they can engage your child in the classroom programme and support their learning. For example, they might help teachers to adapt the curriculum to meet your child's needs, or help develop a behaviour management plan. Your child may not realise that the RTLb is there supporting and working with them.

If your child is being supported by the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS), and has communication needs, then these will be addressed as part of their ORS services (see our information sheet *The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme*).

Contact us

If you are unclear about any part of our service or have questions about the support your child receives, please ask. Start by talking with those who work most closely with your child. You can also talk with staff at your local Ministry of Education office or call the Special Education information line on 0800 622 222.

You can get more detailed special education information on our website: www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/YourChild/SupportForYourChild/ExtraSupport

If you are deaf or have a hearing impairment, you can also contact the Ministry of Education through the New Zealand Relay Service on 0800 4 711 711 or go to www.nzrelay.co.nz.

Your feedback is important. By letting us know what's going well – and what we can do better – we can improve what we do to support all children with special education needs.

Contact details for my local Special Education office:

New Zealand Government

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