

Ruru Special School Education Review

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This report has been prepared in accordance with standard procedures approved by the Chief Review Officer.

About The School

Location	Invercargill
Ministry of Education profile number	4011
School type	Special School
Decile rating[1]	4
Teaching staff:	15.39
Roll generated entitlement	0.61
Other	16
Number of teachers	
School roll	67
Gender composition	Boys 64%; Girls 36%
Ethnic composition	New Zealand European/Pākehā 66%; Māori 28%; Samoan 3%; Other 3%
Special features	Special Education Itinerant Teacher, Vocational and Transitional Programmes, two satellite classrooms, 42 students ORRS verified.
Review team on site	July 2009
Date of this report	18 September 2009
Previous ERO reports	Education Review, August 2006 Education Review, November 2002 Accountability Report, November 1998 Assurance Audit, October 1994 Review Report, July 1991

The Education Review Office (ero) Evaluation

Ruru Specialist School and Resource Centre provides a holistic education for students aged between five and 21 years. Experienced support staff including therapists, specialists and teacher aides, complement the teachers' good quality work. The school is situated in Invercargill with two satellite classes based at Donovan Primary School and at Salford Primary School. The school also owns a non-residential flat for older students.

The board and staff have made good progress in addressing the recommendations of the 2006 review. They are planning to have intermediate and secondary satellite classes operating in 2010.

The teaching programme is targeted to meet the varied needs of the students. Teachers and support staff work cooperatively, supporting each other in meeting the individual needs of students. Parent and community involvement in the school and attendance at school-related activities is high.

Students experience a warm, caring inclusive environment where they appear settled, happy and secure. Many students initiate social interactions and develop strong friendships with their peers. Most students are eager to learn. They willingly participate in the wide range of activities and opportunities made available to them.

All staff focus on developing students' independence. They interact positively with students and operate within well developed support teams and networks. They skilfully engage students in the programme and respond sensitively to their individual needs and strengths. Staff view students as capable learners. Many students are involved in writing their individual education plans (IEPs) and understand what they are learning and why. Teachers use IEPs to closely monitor students' achievement.

Other positive aspects of the school are the high quality and well planned learning and teaching programmes. Students are happy and secure and are achieving their individually-set goals and learning tasks. The learning environment is well resourced and stimulating. Teachers use a highly effective personalised behaviour management system.

The principal and staff represent the bicultural heritage of Aotearoa/New Zealand well through their practices. Cultural aspects are promoted within the school through marae visits, kapa haka and waiata. Māori staff members help to expose staff and students to both te reo and tikanga Māori. Māori students achieve success at this school.

Trustees and staff use effective processes for reviewing and improving their performance.

Teachers collate, analyse and report IEP results to the board. They use action research to monitor the effectiveness of their teaching. Trustees receive high quality curriculum, student achievement and operational information from the principal. They use this information to guide their decisions about the governance of the school. Trustees have sound policies and procedures to ensure the health and safety of students and staff.

The trustees and principal have identified that the following next steps for the school area to:

- · investigate options for a larger site due to the restriction of the present site on developing curriculum appropriate for all students; and
- · improve the quality and consistency of feedback to students and the use of open-ended questioning techniques to further enhance students' oral language.

Future Action

ERO is very confident that the board of trustees can govern the school in the interest of the students and the Crown and bring about the improvements outlined in this report. ERO is likely to carry out the next review in four to five years.

The Focus Of The Review

Student Achievement Overall

ERO's education reviews focus on student achievement. What follows is a statement about what the school knows about student achievement overall.

Teachers have a good knowledge of the progress and achievement of their students through the students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs). These plans focus on a holistic approach to ensure that the health and learning needs of each student are met. IEPs viewed by ERO showed clearly the progress being made by students. Parents' aspirations around achievement are that students will be happy, safe and learn to their potential.

The principal and teachers set targets that are challenging, achievable, measurable and based on student needs. They keep high quality data and have sound processes for monitoring student achievement. Most students (85%) achieve the goals set in their IEPs. The assistant principal monitors and reports comprehensively on Māori student achievement. Results show that 84% of Māori students are achieving their IEP goals.

Students have opportunities to also achieve in kapa haka, swimming, music and social skills. Some students pass unit standards in hairdressing at the Southern Institute of Technology (SIT). Some gain their driver's licence and many obtain work in the community on leaving school.

All data is reported to the board and forms part of the school's rigorous annual reporting cycle.

School Specific Priorities

Before the review, the board of Ruru Special School was invited to consider its priorities for review using guidelines and resources provided by ERO. ERO also used documentation provided by the school to contribute to the scope of the review.

The detailed priorities for review were then determined following a discussion between the ERO review team and the board of trustees. This discussion focused on existing information held by the school (including student achievement and self-review information) and the extent to which potential issues for review contributed to the achievement of the students at Ruru Special School.

ERO and the board have agreed on the following focus areas for the review:

- quality of learning and teaching with an emphasis on individual education plans (IEPs).

The Quality of Learning and Teaching

Background

The school charter states that the school's purpose is to help all students achieve to their full potential according to their individual needs and abilities. Teachers have developed a safe and supportive environment where learning is both challenging and enjoyable. The vision of the board and staff is that, through their influence and example, students will become life-long learners. ERO agreed to evaluate the impact the IEPs have had on student learning.

Areas of good performance

- Positive, safe school. Students and staff work and learn in a safe environment. They experience positive and caring relationships with one another. Teachers and support staff model respectful attitudes that encourage students to behave in similar ways. Staff know the students well and know when to expect more from them or when to allow them more time. The school has clear procedures and guidelines to ensure the wellbeing and safety of students and staff. Teachers and support staff have high, consistent expectations of themselves and of students. They make sure that safe practices and caring and respectful interactions are evident throughout each day.
- Learning opportunities. Students participate in a range of learning activities. Teachers link specific activities to the goals each student is trying to achieve. Students have access to the school's swimming pool, gymnasium, sensory room, music therapy room and speech therapy room. They are able to select from activities including:
 - communication, reading, writing, mathematics, physical activity, social skills, music therapy and self-management;
 - kapa haka;
 - attending a camp;
 - visiting the school's local marae; and
 - work experience including supermarket, parks and reserves, hairdressing, SPCA and cooking.

Students also have opportunities to be leaders within these activities.

- Life skills. Students have a range of opportunities that are helping them to develop increasing levels of independence. Senior students are able to do work experience in their local community. They learn how to manage their lives in a flatting situation. The teacher at the school's flat plan a range of activities related to living independently. Students do the

shopping, maintain the gardens and lawns, and keep the flat tidy. They learn how to prepare and cook a three-course meal for visitors. They also learn how to be good hosts. Teachers plan programmes that include budgeting, making formal applications and gaining a driver's licence.

- Quality of teaching. The senior management team have developed clear guidelines and expectations that help teachers to plan effectively. Teachers provide high quality teaching and learning opportunities for students in classrooms and in the community. They plan programmes that are specifically based on evidence gained from the IEP results. This approach makes it easy for students to be involved in their learning. New staff can easily follow the planning. Teachers encourage students and celebrate their achievements. Some teachers give students feedback that informs them specifically about what they have achieved. The principal and teachers are reflective and regularly engage in professional readings and discussions. They are constantly reflecting on their teaching and its impact on student learning.
- Individual education programme (IEP). Most students are encouraged to take an active part in their goal setting. Teachers help students to set goals and key competencies that are based on life skills and social skills. They focus on students working towards independence. Teachers work closely with students to track their progress and achievements each day. They change or modify goals in line with student progress and achievement. The principal states that reports to the board now need to indicate the overall extent of progress and achievement based on data from the IEPs. They also need to clarify the benchmarks they use and make the achievement objectives they select for students more specific.
- Behaviour management systems. The senior managers have developed a behaviour management system that is understood by students, teachers, support staff and parents. ERO reviewers observed students generally engaged and on task in the classrooms. The learning environments were calm and positive. Students were focused on achieving their IEP goals. Teachers were encouraging and gave positive affirmation when students achieved a stage towards meeting their goals. Teachers care for and take responsibility for all students and support one another well.
- Support staff. Students are supported in their learning by experienced and well qualified teacher-therapists in the fields of music and speech. Students benefit from programmes offered by therapists that are focused on the students' health and learning needs. Therapists provide written reports on the impact of their programmes on student progress and achievement. They communicate regularly with teachers and teacher aides to ensure everyone is kept informed. Experienced teacher aides support students and teachers in all aspects of the school life. They are committed to the school's vision for students. They are able to access professional development to meet the needs of the students.

- Action research. The principal and teachers have built a reflective culture that has impacted positively on their practices. They use action research to find out how well their programmes help student learning. Teachers use the research tasks as another way of evaluating their teaching and the students' learning. This approach is part of the school's professional culture. The research provides useful assessment information about learning and teaching. Teachers use these evaluations to identify next steps in programme planning.
- Leadership. Teachers told ERO that the principal is a visionary leader who provides direction and purpose. The principal continues to provide strong leadership and is fully supported by the assistant principal and the deputy principal. The principal delegates responsibilities to other staff so that decision making is a shared process. Curriculum leaders report to the board of trustees. Support staff are included in the decision making related to students' needs. The principal encourages open communication between staff. Teachers told the review team that they were proud of the positive relationships and work environment.
- Parent and community involvement. Parents support the school in meeting the needs of the students. They work closely with teachers in helping students to achieve their learning goals. Students have opportunities to develop skills through work experience. Members of the business community welcome students into their work environment to gain valuable vocational experience. Students annually hold a market day that is well supported by the community. They give the money they raise to a local charity. Students are able to use local sporting facilities such as the velodrome on a regular basis. Students develop their ability to make decisions for themselves and this in turn increases their self-confidence.

Areas for improvement

- Consistency in use of feedback. Some teachers could give students more consistent feedback about their achievement and use open ended questioning techniques to further enhance students' oral language. Some teachers use effective feedback to encourage students in their learning and progress. However, feedback is not always linked to each individual goal or focused on what has gone well or what needs to improve for the student. This may hinder students' ability to see progress towards a selected learning goal. Regular consistent feedback, directed towards meeting individual learning goals, should improve students' progress and understanding. [Recommendation 6.1]
- Improved space to deliver the revised curriculum. Teachers struggle to provide some learning programmes due to lack of classroom space or outdoor areas for physical activity. Larger learning spaces and outdoor areas would assist the teachers to provide the opportunities for learning outlined in their revised curriculum document and programme

plans. Many older students need space within classes to develop motor skills for movement and physical activity. The board is investigating possibilities and is planning for two additional satellite classes in 2010. [Recommendation 6.2]

Areas Of National Interest

Overview

ERO provides information about the education system as a whole to Government to be used as the basis for long-term and systemic educational improvement. ERO also provides information about the education sector for schools, parents and the community through its national reports.

To do this ERO decides on topics and investigates them for a specific period in all applicable schools nationally.

During the review of Ruru Special School ERO investigated and reported on the following areas of national interest. The findings are included in this report so that information about the school is transparent and widely available.

Success for Māori Students: Progress

In this review, ERO evaluated the extent to which the school was familiar with the Māori Education Strategy - Ka Hikitia: Managing for Success and progress made since the last review in promoting success at school for Māori students.

The school reports it has taken Ka Hikitia into account when revising planning documents for this year.

Areas of progress

- Māori concepts. The principal, teachers and support staff demonstrate specific Māori values in their relationships with students. For example, their acceptance that students are the responsibility of all staff aligns closely to whanaungatanga (family relationships). Their respect, caring and support of one another is expressed by Māori as manaakitanga. The Māori staff members and board member support the staff in understanding these Māori concepts. Students and staff visit their local marae each year to learn about tikanga Māori.
- Consulting with Māori parents and whānau. The board is aware of the aspirations that parents have for their children. They regularly consult with parents and whānau on a range of matters including students' learning, safety and wellbeing. The principal has responded positively to the parents' wish for their children to learn about their Māori culture. Whānau members and Māori staff members have combined to form a kapa haka programme for all students. This activity is exposing students to both te reo and tikanga Māori.

Preparing to Give Effect to the New Zealand Curriculum

Schools are currently working towards implementing The New Zealand Curriculum by February 2010. During this review ERO investigated the progress Ruru Special School is making towards giving full effect to the curriculum as part of its planning, organisation and teaching practice.

ERO found that school leaders and teachers at Ruru Special School are making good progress towards giving effect to The New Zealand Curriculum in their planning, organisation and teaching.

Board Assurance On Compliance Areas

Overview

Before the review, the board of trustees and principal of Ruru Special School completed an ERO Board Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklist. In these documents they attested that they had taken all reasonable steps to meet their legislative obligations related to:

- board administration;
- curriculum;
- management of health, safety and welfare;
- personnel management;
- financial management; and
- asset management.

During the review, ERO checked the following items because they have a potentially high impact on students' achievement:

- emotional safety of students (including prevention of bullying and sexual harassment);
- physical safety of students;
- teacher registration;
- stand-downs, suspensions, expulsions and exclusions; and
- attendance.

Compliance

During the course of the review, ERO identified no areas of non-compliance.

Recommendations

ERO and the board of trustees have developed the following recommendations:

6.1 all teachers provide specific feed back directed towards students meeting their learning goals and next learning steps; and

6.2 the board and principal investigate ways to provide appropriate space that will enable teachers to extend learning programmes.

Future Action

ERO is very confident that the board of trustees can govern the school in the interest of the students and the Crown and bring about the improvements outlined in this report. ERO is likely to carry out the next review in four to five years.

Dr Graham Stoop

Chief Review Officer

18 September 2009

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To the Parents and Community of Ruru Special School

These are the findings of the Education Review Office's latest report on Ruru Special School.

Community Page

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Review Coverage

ERO reviews do not cover every aspect of school performance and each ERO report may cover different issues. The aim is to provide information on aspects that are central to student achievement and useful to this school.

If you would like a copy of the full report, please contact the school or see the ERO website, www.ero.govt.nz.

Dr Graham Stoop

Chief Review Officer

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT REVIEWS

About ERO

ERO is an independent, external evaluation agency that undertakes reviews of schools and early childhood services throughout New Zealand.

About ERO Reviews

ERO follows a set of standard procedures to conduct reviews. The purpose of each review is to:

- improve educational achievement in schools; and
- provide information to parents, communities and the Government.

Reviews are intended to focus on student achievement and build on each school's self review.

Review Focus

ERO's framework for reviewing and reporting is based on three review strands.

- School Specific Priorities - the quality of education and the impact of school policies and practices on student achievement.
- Areas of National Interest - information about how Government policies are working in schools.
- Compliance with Legal Requirements - assurance that this school has taken all reasonable steps to meet legal requirements.

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Review Recommendations

Most ERO reports include recommendations for improvement. A recommendation on a particular issue does not necessarily mean that a school is performing poorly in relation to that issue. There is no direct link between the number of recommendations in this report and the overall performance of this school.

[1] Decile 1 schools draw their students from areas of greatest socio-economic disadvantage, Decile 10 from areas of least socio-economic disadvantage.