

National Report Summary

ERO publishes evaluation reports on education issues of national importance. This handout is a summary of a recent national report – it captures the key points and highlights findings that you may find useful. The full report is available on our website – www.ero.govt.nz

Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour - Governing and Managing RTLB clusters

Why did ERO undertake this evaluation?

This evaluation focuses on the governance and management of the Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service. It follows on from an ERO evaluation in 2009 that recommended improvements to the quality and consistency of the service. The Ministry of Education responded to the evaluation by undertaking a substantive transformation of the RTLB service in 2012. In discussion with the Ministry, a decision was made to undertake another evaluation in 2017 to evaluate the impact of the transformation on the service.

What is the RTLB service?

The RTLB service aims to improve learning and teaching for students with learning or behaviour difficulties. RTLB are a group of trained itinerant specialist teachers, working across clusters of schools, who provide support to ensure good educational outcomes for Years 1-10 students. There are nearly 1000 RTLB in New Zealand today, working in 40 clusters throughout the country. RTLB services are managed by full-time cluster managers, situated in 40 lead schools/kura. The Ministry funds the RTLB service at a cost of approximately \$90 million per annum.

What did ERO do?

This evaluation included all 40 RTLB clusters and data was gathered between May and September 2017.

ERO considered information from a variety of sources. Meetings were held with key stakeholders including representatives from cluster schools and kura (including principals/tumuaki) and Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCO) or their equivalent, cluster managers, lead school board of trustees, lead school principals, practice leaders, and groups of RTLB.

What did ERO ask?

In this evaluation, ERO asked the following questions:

- To what extent has the quality and consistency of RTLB cluster governance and management improved to address the issues identified in ERO's 2009 evaluation?
- To what extent has the transformation of the RTLB service contributed to increased capability and capacity within clusters, to monitor and evaluate practice and service provision to identify what is working well and what needs to improve?
- How are RTLB clusters involved with Kāhui Ako, and how is the relationship developing? What is working well and what are the challenges?
- What contribution is the RTLB service making to the wider provision of learning support?
- What evidence is there of the impact of the RTLB service on improving learner outcomes?

What did ERO find?

The transformation has been well managed and led, resulting in a much improved service in terms of the extent to which RTLB clusters are governed and managed in general. Effective leadership and improved systems and processes have positioned the service well to continue to positively contribute to learning support for students in Years 1-10.

ERO's findings also highlight the changing system-level context for supporting students with additional learning needs and the establishment of Kāhui Ako. These changes present many opportunities for the RTLB service as well as issues and challenges going forward.

Priority needs to be given to ongoing capacity and capability building in clusters, so practice can move beyond monitoring and review. A key area for improvement is developing robust internal evaluation of service provision and RTLB practice.

This evaluation highlights several issues related to assessing and reporting on outcomes. The current Outcomes Framework does not align well to assessment and curriculum frameworks in schools and kura.

ERO also identified the need for a more systematic way to track sustainability of progress, achievement and wellbeing for learners who have received RTLB support. This would also need to include evidence of the impact of RTLB work on improving teacher capability and school-level systems, to better respond to learners with learning and behaviour needs over time.

Data management systems were also not yet compatible with systems in other agencies, thus limiting the extent to which data could be shared and used to make sure learners are at the heart of the system.

This report highlights the successes of the transformation of the RTLB service over the past five years and identifies some real challenges for RTLB clusters and the Ministry of Education going forward. Changes at a system level have the potential to bring about a more coherent, learner-focused approach to service delivery for our most at risk learners. The RTLB service has shown that it can be adaptive, flexible and responsive to the needs of schools and their students.

In my school we have some real high needs but there's no one out there. The RTLB helps but it's not his role. Principal

The nature of cases and complexity pushes RTLB to limits of expertise. RTLB

We see changes under the current system in the complexity of cases RTLB picking up partly because other agencies are not picking them up.

Principal

What did ERO recommend?

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education and RTLB clusters work together to:

- review the existing Outcomes Framework to strengthen evidence gathering and reporting of RTLB interventions on students' progress and achievement, in both the short and longer term
- develop clear expectations and responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating joint work with other agencies
- develop a shared vision of Learning Support provision and the service expectations for RTLB in light of the skills and expertise of this specialist group of teachers.

ERO recommends that RTLB clusters:

- strengthen their capability and capacity for robust internal evaluation of their impact on learning and wellbeing outcomes for learners.

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education:

- supports induction for new cluster managers, lead school principals and lead school boards of trustees
- closely monitors collaboration between RTLB clusters and Kāhui Ako to make sure the learning and wellbeing of students is central to decision making.
- works with other relevant agencies to ensure students with extreme behaviour needs and mental health issues receive 'the right support, at the right time, from the right service'
- reviews the expectations of the RTLB service (as set out in the Funding Agreement) to ensure the scope of what RTLB do reflects their specialist role in the system
- recognises and maintains the role the RTLB service has in supporting learners with increasingly diverse and complex learning needs
- supports induction for new cluster managers, lead school principals and lead school boards of trustees

FIND OUT MORE: For more ideas and information, you can read the full report online at www.ero.govt.nz/publications