

Achieved

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Schools around New Zealand are failing their disabled students and families. Disabled students have the same rights as other students to receive a good school education. However, a research that ERO (Education Review Office) undertook showed that “a quarter of families have been asked to keep their disabled child away from class, at home or at daycares”. As well as this, “1 in 5 parents of disabled students have been discouraged by schools to enrol their child.” (Information from ERO) Another thing that the report revealed was that there is between 1.4 to 3 times more of a chance for disabled students to be stood down, expelled or to move schools. One of the main causes of these issues is that teachers do not have the resources and knowledge to be able to confidently teach a disabled learner. In addition to this, almost all the disabled learners they asked said that they felt excluded from school activities inside and outside of class.

Trish Grant is the Society for Intellectually Handicapped Children (IHC) NZ director of advocacy, and says “The Government has failed to engage with the discrimination disabled students' experience”. Trish Grant has a humanitarian perspective. Grant holds these perspectives from extensive experience as a social worker, counsellor and a secondary school teacher, which gave her real life insight of the education system from a disabled and abled students point of view. Grant then became the Senior Advocate at the Office of the Children's Commissioner, giving her further knowledge and experience into a disabled child's perspective and life challenges. Grant has over 20 years of experience working as an advocate for disabled youth and has worked tirelessly for the Government to change policies for more inclusion and support in schools. Change is happening slowly with the Education and Training Act 2020 making those students' rights more explicit, “students who have special educational needs (whether because of disability or otherwise) have the same rights to enrol, attend, and receive education at State schools as students who do not”- The Education and Training Act 2020.

Grant's humanitarian perspective is influenced by her values of equality, inclusion and human rights along with her experience of knowing that the education system is slowly failing their disabled students.

Her response as a result of her perspectives is that she regularly speaks to the media and presents to the government. She also holds workshops for elected members of the government, who are decision makers. “A charity approach to supporting disabled students at school is out of step with the Government’s commitment to Whaikaha and Enabling Good Lives.” she says, clearly stating that a charity should not be doing the work that the government should be doing

XXX holds a social perspective as a parent of a disabled child who is struggling in the education system. XXX’s son has autism (ASD) and has been stood down three times so far this year. “The

reason for her son being stood down is not because he is misbehaving in class”, but because his school and teachers do not have the experience or resources to be able to teach him. XXX has had to give up her office job and her freelance contracts, losing her family over \$110,000 per year so that she can look after her son as the education system refuses. XXX says “it is the Ministry of Education’s responsibility, not the parent’s responsibility, to provide children with an education”.

It’s not that XXX’s son does not want to go to school, it is that the MoE will not provide funding for him to attend school full time with additional support such as a teacher aid. Tomorrow Schools is currently under public consultation with the Government seeking change. XXX says, “much respect to Deputy Education Minister Tracey Martin – who is driving the review, for recognising the need for systemic change and acting on it. But the elephant in the room is not being addressed: funding.”

XXX’s perspective is influenced by her values of wanting the best for her child and seeing that he is being rejected by the educational system that has a responsibility to educate him. XXX’s viewpoint is that she is viewing this as a loving parent who wants the best for her child and other families that are in the same position as her own.

XXX’s response as a result of her perspectives was to spread the word in her own voice online to encourage New Zealanders to take action and submit on the Tomorrow’s School consultation.

Both Trish Grant and XXX are advocating for change and are both coming from different viewpoints and perspectives, Grant as an advocate and XXX as an end user of the education system, with her child being directly affected. The long term impact is that there are disabled youth missing out on the quality education that the MoE is responsible for providing. Additional funding would be used to upskill teachers in working with disabled youth and gaining more access to resources like teacher aids. This affects the families of disabled students as their child is not receiving the education they deserve as well as the student themselves. This also directly affects the students future and their future family if they wish to have one. They may struggle to find a job and help provide for their family. This could even lead to poverty or homelessness.