16 and 17 year old learners 'at risk' of low achievement and poor outcomes

June 2013

Final Report

Identifying opportunities for, and barriers to, achievement of NCEA Level 2 and effective transitions

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Preface

This report has been prepared for the Ministry of Education by Donella Bellett and Meenakshi Sankar from MartinJenkins (Martin, Jenkins & Associates Limited) and Anna Kelly (sub-contractor).

Our goal is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisations we work with. We do this by providing strategic advice and operational support in the following areas:

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Executive summary

The research was commissioned by the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) to explore the achievements and transitions of 16 and 17 year old students with moderate special education needs. The aim was to understand how seven different schools identify students with moderate needs, what the schools' approaches are, and to gain an insight into the experiences of some of their students (and their families).

The research was commissioned to provide the Ministry with information about opportunities for, and barriers to, students with moderate needs achieving NCEA Level 2 and making effective transitions. The research is an important contribution to an evidence base being built by the Ministry to help them work collaboratively with schools to meet the Better Public Services target of increased achievement.

Case study research was undertaken in seven schools, selected to cover a range of characteristics (including priority students and low to mid decile schools).

The research was conducted in two phases:

- initial documentation of the schools' approaches
- a day of in depth interviews in each school.

Main findings

The seven school based case studies found evidence that schools have a clear focus on the needs of students who are likely to struggle to get NCEA Level 2. The schools had a strong sense of responsibility for assisting their students in whatever ways they could. This led to a willingness to try a wide range of approaches to support their students to achieve, and to make successful transitions beyond school. The schools that we talked to had significant numbers of students who needed support to achieve, and they worked hard to identify and provide creative, flexible pathways. The schools took a strong strengths-based approach – looking to support ways the students **could** achieve, to the best of their potential.

Key themes

The schools had significant issues with the research terminology – 'moderate special education needs'.

When asked to identify the group that needs support to achieve NCEA Level 2, schools talked about students with low literacy and numeracy skills (Low LNS, ie below average) and the challenges associated in supporting them to succeed.

The schools we talked to estimated that approximately 20-30% of 16 and 17 year olds have particularly Low LNS and are 'at risk'.

Schools were confident in their ability to identify students with Low LNS 'at risk' of poor outcomes.

However schools defined and conceptualised their 'at risk' group in different ways including:

- testing to identify students with Low LNS in relation to national averages

- testing to identify those falling behind the achievement levels of their school cohort

- identifying students who are disengaged or exhibiting poor behaviour (in addition to having low test results).

Schools told us that their group of Low LNS students 'at risk' of poor outcomes was not static or fixed, and that it changed over time.

Students with Low LNS are seen as a complex and multifaceted problem that requires schools to develop a coordinated, multi-disciplinary response.

Students' low skill levels were thought to be driven by a range of factors, often reinforcing or interacting with each other. Drivers and reasons given by the schools for low literacy and numeracy included:

- low socio-economic environments

- students coming from non-English speaking backgrounds

- low levels of motivation and aspiration, and poor engagement

- lack of family support or value for education

- behavioural issues

- diagnosed and undiagnosed learning disorders, sensory conditions/disabilities and underlying health issues.

The complex and interacting nature of the students' issues, home situations and backgrounds meant that the schools did not see students with Low LNS as a cohesive group. Rather, they were seen as a complex collection of individuals requiring complex strategies.

An area of concern for schools was their limited ability to identify students with undiagnosed learning disorders, sensory disabilities or underlying health issues. Where students had a labelled or diagnosed condition, they tended to be seen as separate to the more general group of students with Low LNS. In many cases, students with diagnoses had specific strategies or supports in place.

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Schools use a variety of approaches to maximise outcomes for students, including 'at risk' students.

Each of the seven case study schools had a unique approach and mix of interventions, but common themes were identified across the schools:

- a preference for mainstream teaching with additional support as required

- high expectations for achievement (while acknowledging that some would struggle to achieve NCEA Level 2 and some would find NCEA Level 1 a challenge)

- use of academic mentoring models and/or individualised learning plans

- increased focus on literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum

- increasing ability and desire to use student management system data and test results to monitor and plan teaching programmes

- offering a wide and creative range of course options (including unrelated courses primarily provided to allow students to earn extra credits, rather than for the value of the course content)

- professional learning and development for staff (focusing on literacy and numeracy teaching)

- pastoral support.

Years 9 and 10 are seen as the foundation years for preparing students for NCEA when schools implement interventions to 'catch up' students with Low LNS.

All of the schools described the junior years of high school as being critical for laying the foundations for students to be able to achieve NCEA qualifications: it being their last opportunity to improve basic literacy and numeracy skills.

These years are an important opportunity to 'catch students up' and to set high expectations for their futures. While the details of what each school did at this junior level varied, the overall approaches were similar. Schools typically introduced specific interventions targeted at students with Low LNS in order to 'catch them up'. This was most commonly done through streaming students and teaching those with the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy separately.

Years 11-13: interventions to maximise achievement and support transitions.

The approach for senior students differs to that for junior students but interventions were seen as a continuation of earlier interventions. On the whole, schools tended to conceptualise students at the senior level as falling into one of two broad groups:

- academic students – those likely to continue on to some form of further study (eg university)

- non-academic/vocational students – including students 'on-track' (looking to move into employment or trades/practical training) and students with Low LNS (who will need support to achieve NCEA Level 2).

Because there is an overlap between students with Low LNS and those 'on track', many interventions at this level are available to a wide group and are not limited to the 'at risk' group. Interventions at this level tended to have a dual focus on achievement and transition and included:

- different learning environments with a focus on practical, applied learning

- wide range of general interest, accessible study options

- the ability to study at multiple year levels.

The seven case study schools saw the successful transition of students as a primary responsibility of the school. In practice however, specific transition support tended to be the responsibility of transitions or careers staff, separate to the school's leadership and teaching staff. On the whole, schools did not have additional support options or structures for students with Low LNS, and the support they received was designed for all non-academic students.

Schools used a wide range of strategies and interventions to maximise achievement and ease transitions: they do not appear to monitor or evaluate the effectiveness or impact of these strategies.

Student and whānau experiences

We talked to a wide range of students (22) and whānau (13), from six of the seven schools.

Each student and whānau was dealing with a unique set of circumstances: differing reasons for the student's low level of achievement, different backgrounds and different aspirations for the future. Despite this, some key themes emerged:

- a number of the families had multiple children with Low LNS and/or identified conditions and so had experienced a wide range of teaching strategies and interventions

  - the most valued approaches were those tailored to the individual needs and circumstances of the student and where the parents were kept informed and could see progress being made

- students and families with identifiable needs and conditions (eg dyslexia, global development delay) usually had clear supports in place that they were happy with

- most of the students we talked to had clear aspirations and goals for the future, though a number had goals that were not realistic (eg occupations requiring university level qualifications)

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- students appreciated the opportunity to study at multiple levels and were happy to work at their own pace earning credits over two or more years

- most students had experienced a range of targeted interventions (eg participating in non-mainstream classes and having special learning aids or teacher aide support), demonstrating the fluid nature of support and various strategies used as short term interventions.

Conclusions

Schools typically identify a wide group of 'non-academic' students. This includes a range from those who are very capable through to those with Low LNS. Students with particularly low levels of literacy and numeracy along with other issues (such as behavioural issues or difficult home lives) pose the greatest challenge for schools. These students require the highest level of individualised support to help them achieve and transition successfully.

The reasons for the very low skills levels of this last group are complex and because of this, schools try a wide range of approaches and interventions. Many of these are ad-hoc and not necessarily targeted to address a specific, identified need. The research shows that schools' efforts and interventions are well intentioned and creative – however some of their actions (eg creation of new courses to facilitate credit acquisition) may result in qualifications that are not coherent or particularly useful.

The research also revealed some tension for schools with having to weigh up the benefits of retaining students (to maintain roll size and to provide continuity to students) with the benefits of students moving to alternative education or training providers (which may provide a more suitable way for some students to gain NCEA credits). A number of schools talked of their high expectations for the continuing development of vocational pathways for students – seeing this as an opportunity for schools and students alike.

Introduction

Aim of the research

This research was commissioned by the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) to explore the achievements and transitions of 16 and 17 year old students with moderate special education needs.

The aim of the research was to understand how seven different schools identify students with moderate needs, what the schools' approaches are, and to gain an insight into the experiences of some of their students (and their families). The research was commissioned to provide the Ministry with information about opportunities for, and barriers to, students with moderate needs achieving NCEA Level 2 and making effective transitions.

The research is an important contribution to an evidence base being built by the Ministry to help them work collaboratively with schools to meet the Better Public Services target of increased achievement.[1] It is anticipated that the research findings will be useful for Youth Guarantee Chief Advisors and Regional Ministry staff, and will be used to develop tools, materials and practical guidance.

Full background and context to the research are in Appendix 1.

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[1]   The result area that directly relates to this research is to boost skills and employment across the population through increasing the proportion of young people who achieve a NCEA Level 2 qualification (or equivalent) to 85% by 2017.

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Research approach

Research questions

The overarching research questions were:

- What are the characteristics of 16 and 17 year old students with moderate needs?

- What are the key issues that affect these students' abilities to achieve NCEA Level 2? What are they key issues that affect students with moderate needs' ability to transition to further education, training or employment?

- How could students with moderate needs and their schools be better supported to achieve and make effective transitions? What system level changes need to occur to help achieve government outcomes?

Methodology

Case study research was undertaken in seven schools. The schools were selected in collaboration with the Ministry using a sampling framework designed to capture a diverse range of schools[2] focusing on:

- priority students (Māori and Pasifika)

- low to mid decile schools

- geographic diversity (dense urban, urban, secondary-urban, rural)

- schools with NCEA pass rates below the national average.

The research was conducted in two phases: [3]

- initial documentation of the schools' approaches (a questionnaire was filled in by each school; key question areas were: numbers of students have moderate needs, how these students are provided for, their transitions, and school planning and decision making; this was followed up with a brief telephone interview with five of the seven schools)

- a day of in depth interviews in each school (interviewees were selected by the school and differed in each school, key categories of interviewees were: principal; senior school leadership – deputy principal, deans; careers and transitions staff; students identified as having moderate needs; parents/whānau of the students).

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[2]   The schools' characteristics are summarised in Appendix 2.

[3]   Full details of the methodology are in Appendix 3.

Main findings

This section presents the key themes that emerged from analysis across the seven case study schools. The analysis is primarily driven by the in depth interviews conducted during case study visits to each site, supplemented by the background information gathered in the first phase of the research (initial questionnaire and telephone interview responses) and other relevant information provided by the schools.

Overall, the research with schools found evidence that they have a clear focus on the needs of students who are likely to struggle to get NCEA Level 2. The schools had a strong sense of responsibility for assisting their students in whatever ways they could. This led to a willingness to try a wide range of approaches to support their students to achieve, and to make successful transitions beyond school. The schools that we talked to had significant numbers of students who needed support to achieve, and they worked hard to identify and provide creative, flexible pathways. The schools took a strong strengths-based approach – looking to support ways the students **could** achieve, to the best of their potential.

Key themes emerging from the research are summarised below.

- The schools had significant issues with the research terminology – 'moderate special education needs'. When asked to identify the group that needs support to achieve NCEA Level 2, schools talked about students with low literacy and numeracy skills (Low LNS) and the challenges associated in supporting them to succeed.

- Schools were confident in their ability to identify students with Low LNS 'at risk' of poor outcomes.

- Students with Low LNS are seen as a complex and multifaceted problem that requires schools to develop a coordinated, multi-disciplinary response.

- Schools use a variety of approaches to maximise outcomes for students, including 'at risk' students.

- Years 9 and 10 are seen as the foundation years for preparing students for NCEA and schools implement interventions to 'catch up' students with Low LNS.

- Schools use a wide range of strategies and interventions with 16 and 17 year olds to maximise achievement and ease transitions: this includes flexible, creative strategies to achieve NCEA Level 2 credits – however, schools do not appear to monitor or evaluate the effectiveness or impact of these strategies.

Significant issues with the terminology

Our interviews revealed that there is no shared or consistent understanding of the target group that lay at the heart of this research: students with moderate special education needs. This proved to be an ongoing challenge for the research with schools continually asking who the

research was focusing on and who they were meant to be talking to us about. Despite clear, consistent communications being developed to mitigate the confusion, schools continued to express confusion and frustration through both phases of the research.
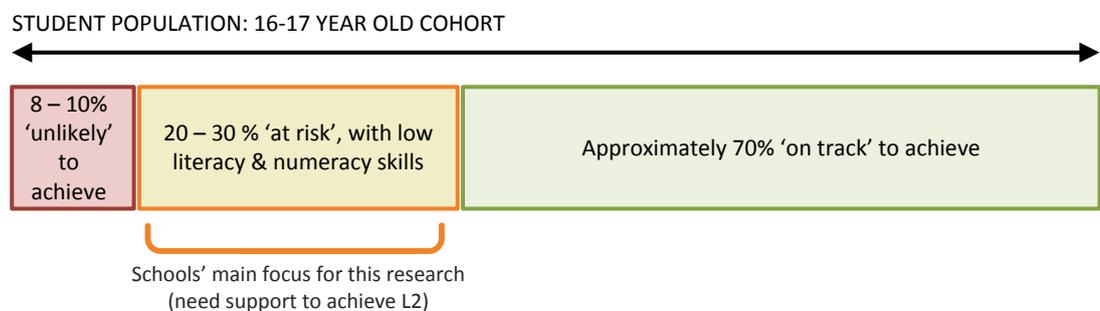
Given the ongoing frustration and confusion expressed by the schools about the research focus, clarifying the focus was an important first step in undertaking the case study interviews. Key school staff (including principals) were asked to identify the group of interest to them through the following question:

> When thinking about achieving NCEA Level 2, is there a group that needs additional support to get the qualification and to make a successful transition? [Interview question]

In response to this question, six out of the seven schools clearly and consistently identified students with Low LNS as being 'at risk' of not achieving good qualifications and/or transitions, and therefore the target group of interest for the school. This is supported by the feedback in the initial questionnaire where reading, numeracy and behavioural issues were the most commonly identified issues. The schools we talked to estimated that approximately 20-30% of 16 and 17 year olds fall into this 'at risk' group.

> Quite a lot of them will struggle to get NCEA Level 2. Some have struggled to get Level 1 ... the way the curriculum is structured, there are some frustrated students and frustrated teachers, these are the kids with [Low LNS] and it is like teaching to a brick wall. [Principal]

Figure 1: Schools' focus on 'at risk' students with low literacy and numeracy skills

STUDENT POPULATION: 16-17 YEAR OLD COHORT

| 8 – 10% 'unlikely' to achieve | 20 – 30 % 'at risk', with low literacy & numeracy skills | Approximately 70% 'on track' to achieve |

Schools' main focus for this research
(need support to achieve L2)

In light of this, it is easy to understand why schools had difficulty with the term 'moderate special education needs':

• it is not a concept or term used by the case study schools

• the term 'moderate special education needs' is not commonly used by the Ministry when communicating with schools – as a result the schools interpreted it based on their own experience and knowledge, resulting in significant variability across schools

• the use of the words 'special education' appears to indicate a relationship or connection to students who receive Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) funding and/or students with identifiable/diagnosable conditions/needs

- schools were unsure how to differentiate between 'moderate' and 'high' special education needs particularly in instances where there was no ORS funding

- the term was seen as potentially stigmatising or negative.

Only one school was comfortable with the use of the phrase 'special education' – this school identified their key group as those having underlying, identifiable conditions (including dyslexia, autism, global development delay, dyspraxia and processing disorder). In addition to this group, the school also identified a significant group of students who had 'reading difficulties'.

The six schools who saw students with Low LNS as their key focus also identified students with specific learning disorders and/or identifiable conditions as needing support to achieve NCEA Level 2. They saw these students as discrete and individual cases quite separate to the larger group with Low LNS. On the whole, students with specific learning disorders and/or identifiable conditions were supported alongside students who received ORS funding or through the use of specific supports (such as teacher aides, reader-writers or technological aides) associated with that particular student.

Schools confident about their ability to identify students 'at risk' of poor outcomes

All seven schools felt confident in identifying students with Low LNS who were 'at risk' of poor achievement or transitions, though the ways they did this varied.

'At risk' students were primarily identified at entry to the school in Year 9 through one or a number of standardised tests (including PAT, STAR and asTTle tests). Through these tests, schools identified students with lower than average literacy and numeracy skills. Some schools identify students with Low LNS in relation to national averages, while others look to identify those falling behind the achievement levels of their cohort.

The group identified as being 'at risk' was not static or fixed – some schools kept a formal register that would be updated regularly, while other schools relied on individual teachers identifying students at risk in each classroom. Formal testing tended to be repeated (at the end of Year 9 and/or at the start of Year 10), and many schools had a population of transient students who were identified during enrolment. In addition, test results were supplemented by other types of information including:

- information from feeder schools (including previous test results or school reports, information about family background and upbringing)

- information and feedback from parents (gained during formal and informal interactions)

- students who identified themselves as having difficulties

- information from pastoral services/care (including health issues and problems identified through counselling).

The initial questionnaire also showed that individual teachers used their 'best judgement' to identify 'at risk' students alongside standardised testing.

When identifying 'at risk' students, some schools also focus on students who are disengaged or exhibiting poor behaviour, in addition to those who perform poorly in standardised tests.

Students with Low LNS are seen as a complex, multifaceted problem

Schools reported a range of reasons or drivers for students' low literacy and numeracy. On the whole, the reasons were understood to co-exist and interact with each other in a variety of ways to generate Low LNS. Students' low skill levels were thought to be driven by a range of factors, often reinforcing each other. Drivers and reasons given by the schools for low literacy and numeracy included:

• low socio-economic environments (manifesting in a wide range of ways including inadequate clothing and school materials, drug and alcohol issues, unstable family relationships, poor nutrition, limited access to healthcare)

• students coming from non-English speaking backgrounds and having insufficient English language skills to fully participate in the classroom

• low levels of motivation and aspiration, and poor engagement with the school, teachers or learning environment

• lack of family support or value for education (including lack of books in the home, inability to do/lack of support for homework and study)

• behavioural issues (including disruptive behaviour and inability to concentrate)

• diagnosed and undiagnosed learning disorders, sensory conditions/disabilities and underlying health issues.

Importantly, schools did not know the relative importance of the drivers or how they interacted for individual students (eg poor behaviour could be due to an attention deficit disorder, poor nutrition/inadequate sleep, and/or undiagnosed dyslexia). In addition, the complex and interacting nature of the students' issues, home situations and backgrounds meant that the schools did not see students with low literacy and numeracy as a cohesive group. Rather, they were seen as a complex collection of individuals requiring complex strategies.

A particular area of concern for schools (in both the initial questionnaire and the in depth interviews) was their limited ability to identify students with undiagnosed learning disorders, sensory disabilities or underlying health issues. Students with undiagnosed conditions were likely to be within the group of students with Low LNS, but with limited resources, diagnosis and specialist assistance was not possible. Larger schools with comprehensive pastoral care

centres were able to use on-site doctors and nurses to identify sensory and health issues during routine check-ups.

Where students had a labelled or diagnosed condition (eg dyslexia or Aspergers), they tended to be seen as separate to the wider group of students with Low LNS, as outlined above. In many cases, these students had specific strategies or supports in place, often accessed through parental payment or specialised Learning Support Centres.

During the interviews we were told that the cost of testing for specific learning disorders (eg dyslexia) was prohibitive. Identifying these students was reliant on an existing diagnosis when the student was younger or the costs being met by the family. In addition, particular students may not come to the attention of teachers without their families 'pushing' for additional attention or assistance. This appeared to be a particular issue for Māori and Pasifika students who tended to be under-represented where schools had specific registers of 'at risk' students. Responses to the initial questionnaire provided limited data on this issue but indicated:

- Māori were under represented amongst 'at risk' students in two schools, while being over represented in three schools

- Pasifika were under represented in two schools and over represented in one school.

Approaches used to maximise outcomes for students, including 'at risk' students

The Ministry provides funding for 'moderate to high needs' students directly to schools through a Special Education Grant (SEG).[4] Schools have flexibility over how they spend their SEG, based on the needs of their students. The schools that we talked to saw the SEG as a small contributor to how they cater for students with Low LNS:

- five out of the seven schools primarily used their SEG to fund teacher aides within mainstream classrooms for Low LNS students across all year levels, but mainly concentrated in Years 9 and 10

- other uses of the SEG were listed as: funding for vocational programmes (two schools); professional development for staff (two schools); materials, books and transport (one school).

Schools operate in a flexible environment, delivering the curriculum under the direction of a Board of Trustees. This allows schools to mix and match a range of responses and interventions developed to meet the needs of their students and community. The types of

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[4]   There are two funding streams for students with special needs, the SEG for students with moderate and the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme for students with high needs (this funding is provided differently, it is provided for individual students' needs).

responses and interventions used by the schools were a complex mix that changed over time. Responses and interventions were dependent on:

- school leadership and their aims and aspirations for staff and students

- the location and profile of the school and its population (including the wider resources it had access to, eg tertiary training institutions, employers, health and social services)

- level of infrastructure and resourcing within the school

- motivation, skill and experience of teaching and pastoral staff

- nature of the student cohort from year to year.

Each of the seven case study schools had a unique approach and mix of interventions, but common themes can be identified across the schools. This section outlines common approaches across the schools, designed to support students to achieve throughout their schooling. Subsequent sections detail interventions specific to junior and senior students.

Common themes were:

- preference for mainstream teaching with additional support as required

    – most schools offered withdrawal groups for 'core' subjects (such as literacy and numeracy), or individual student support programmes

    – teacher aides were used in mainstream classrooms to provide additional support to students

    – six schools had a specialised Learning Support Centre on site (primarily for high or very high needs students), some students with Low LNS would attend specific classes there; staff from the Centres would provide support and advice to teachers and teacher aides within mainstream classes

- high expectations for achievement

    – school leadership (principal and deans) were expected to give consistent messages about the need to gain NCEA qualifications

    – individual class room teachers and pastoral staff had a key role to play in day to day interactions with students; disengaged students were seen as being particularly challenging to inspire

    – most of the schools saw NCEA Level 2 as necessary and achievable for their students, including those with Low LNS (with the exception of students with high levels of special needs, eg ORS funded students)

        o although the schools expressed high expectations for achievement, most also said they had 16 and 17 year old students (that were not ORS-funded) who would struggle to achieve NCEA Level 2 and some that would find NCEA Level 1 a challenge

..1. one principal felt that Level 1 was a more realistic goal for a large number of students (due to their very low literacy and numeracy skills); despite this, the principal expected the teaching staff to support the students to achieve Level 2 (or higher) wherever possible

- use of academic mentoring models and/or individualised learning plans: requiring students, staff (and families) to identify goals and learning pathways from the beginning of high school

- increased focus on literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum

- increasing ability and desire to use student management system data and test results to monitor and plan teaching programmes

- offering a wide and creative range of course options (including unrelated courses primarily provided to allow students to earn extra credits, rather than for the value of the course content)

- professional learning and development for staff (focusing on literacy and numeracy teaching, goal setting, use of data, standardised testing and the development individualised interventions)

- pastoral support (extensive support was available in the larger schools, through to more limited options in the smaller schools).

Years 9 and 10: preparing for NCEA and 'catching up'

All of the schools described the junior years of high school as being critical for laying the foundations for students to be able to achieve NCEA qualifications. As described above, 'at risk' students with Low LNS are typically identified when they enter schools in Year 9. The junior years are important years for these students: it is their last opportunity to improve basic literacy and numeracy skills before they enter the NCEA system and begin to think about their future career options.

Junior years provide an important opportunity to 'catch students up' and to set high expectations for their students' futures. While the details of what each school did at this junior level varied, the overall approaches were similar.

Two of the schools had an internal 'graduation' system requiring minimum achievement levels in order to move up to the next year level. The intention of this was to introduce students to the idea of choosing and gaining credits, and the need to value achievement.

Schools also typically introduced specific interventions targeted at students with Low LNS in order to 'catch them up'. This was most commonly done through streaming students and teaching those with the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy separately.

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Methods included:

- different teaching styles, eg having students with Low LNS stay in one classroom and have the teachers come to them

- different teachers:

  – one school had started to use more senior, skilled teachers for students with Low LNS

  – one school had employed a primary school teacher specifically to teach reading and writing skills

  – a number of schools were providing professional development for teachers of students with Low LNS to help them incorporate literacy and numeracy lessons across the curriculum

  – access to additional support such as teacher aides, the Positive Behaviour for Learning programme and referrals to Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs, note that very little mention was made by schools of RTLBs)

- academic mentoring to encourage early conversations between teachers, parents and students and to clarify expectations of the possible pathways for gaining qualifications.

Years 11-13: interventions to maximise achievement and support transitions

The approach for senior students differs to that for the more junior students as the stakes are higher. Once students have reached Year 11 they have the opportunity to gain NCEA qualifications, and once they turn 16 they are no longer required to attend school.

Although approaches differ from those at Years 9 and 10, schools were clear that senior level interventions were a continuation of earlier interventions. Schools are aware of who has Low LNS well before the senior years, and they do not wait until the student enters the NCEA system to begin to address problems.

The exception to this are the students who 'fly beneath the radar'. Many interventions are demand driven – disruptive students, students with particularly bad results, and students with parents pushing for assistance are the most likely ones to receive attention. The fact that NCEA is a national system external to schools, means that a small number of additional students are likely to be identified as 'at risk' as they end Year 11 with few NCEA credits.

On the whole, schools tended to conceptualise students at the senior level as falling into one of two broad groups:

- academic students – a sub-set of the 70% of 'on-track' students; students likely to continue on to some form of higher study (eg university)
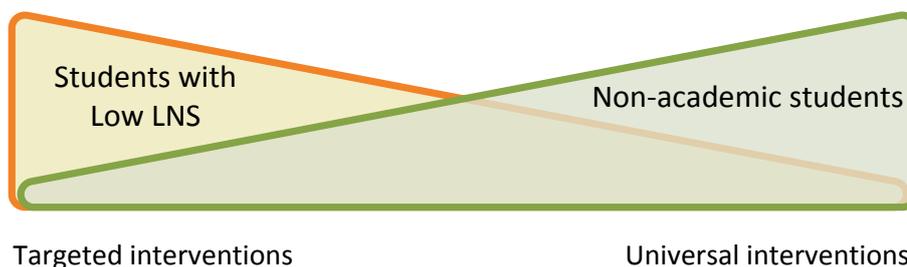
- non-academic/vocational students – including those at the focus of this research with Low LNS, and some of the 'on-track' students (those looking to move into employment or trades/practical training).

Figure 2: Senior students – non-academic/vocational vs academic
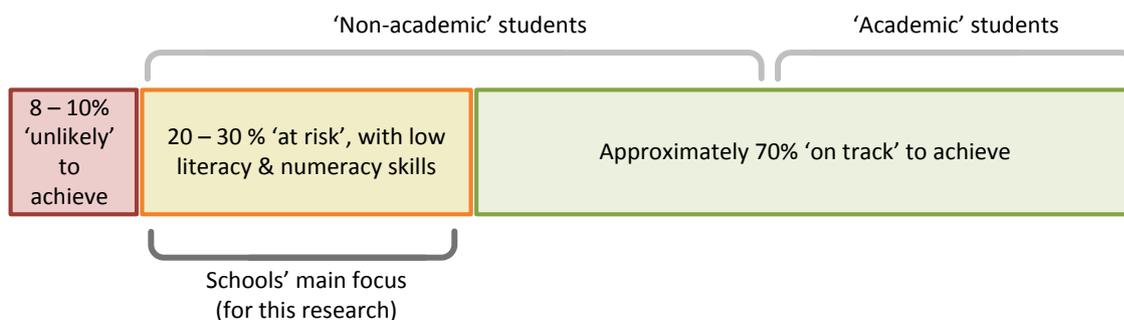
Because there is an overlap between the 'at risk' students and those 'on track' (ie the non-academic/vocational stream), many specific interventions at this level are available to a wide group and are not limited to the 'at risk' group. Figure 3 shows the overlap between interventions for the two groups of students, showing that students with Low LNS are likely to access both targeted and 'universal'/more general interventions. By way of example, STAR courses may be targeted mainly at students with Low LNS but may also be accessed by a small number of non-academic/vocational students; while universal careers advice provision will be accessed by all students, with general careers advice being most suited to the more capable non-academic/vocational students.

Figure 3: Overlap in focus – students with Low LNS and non-academic/vocational students

In addition, many interventions at this level focus on both increasing academic achievement while simultaneously preparing students for transitioning out of school. Examples of

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interventions aimed at non-academic/vocational students with a dual focus on achievement and transition include:

- different learning environments with a focus on practical, applied learning

  – various Trades Academies (internal and external to schools), Service Academies and other types of in-school academies including sports and performing arts – learning applied within a particular discipline or trade

  – Gateway and STAR courses – learning with a strong connection to employers and workplace learning

  – participation in the Rural Education Activities Programme (REAP)

- wide range of general interest, accessible study options

  – courses with a clear link to specific employment options (eg hair dressing, fork lift driving)

  – courses of general use in the workforce (eg health and safety, first aid)

  – ability to gain literacy and numeracy credits across the curriculum.

The schools were divided on the practice of helping students to gain as many unrelated credits as possible to allow them to attain a qualification. Some schools admitted to 'working the system' to gain additional credits for students who would not otherwise succeed in a system they believe is biased towards academic students. In these cases students would be offered the chance to participate in courses that offered relatively high numbers of credits in short periods of time (eg first aid and fork lift driving). Such courses were not primarily offered for their value, rather they were offered to enable the students to earn extra credits. This results in qualifications that are not useful or coherent. Other schools believed that students should only take courses that are likely to contribute to students' career aspirations, and that actually matched their interests.

All schools also allowed non-academic students to study at multiple year levels and endeavoured to provide flexible timetable options so students could continue to study at school while attending external courses. Many students with Low LNS would take up to two years to complete NCEA Level 1 and another two years to complete Level 2. Some students would take up to three years to complete a single level.

Specific interventions primarily targeted at the 'at risk' group with Low LNS included:

- intensive, short-term interventions

  – teacher aide or specialised teaching for an identified group

  – additional 'make-up' classes held at year end to enable additional credits to be earned

- non-mainstream teaching environments (eg classes within Learning Support Centres, part or full time).

Specialist transition support

The seven case study schools saw the successful transition of students as a primary responsibility of the school. In practice however, specific transition support tended to be the responsibility of transitions or careers staff, separate to the school's leadership and teaching staff. This meant that it tended to be viewed as a separate 'service', not completely integrated with the school's core business of teaching.

Different schools (and different staff within a school) held different views on when students should make the transition out of school:

- some schools focused on providing flexible in-school options (eg in-school academies) that were designed to retain students; this was based on the belief that students who remained at school for as long as possible had the best chances of achieving and making a good post-school transition

- other schools saw external education provision (particularly the range of Youth Guarantee courses) as legitimate and effective options for students on a non-academic/vocational pathway who are disengaged from the traditional school teaching environment.

On the whole, schools did not have additional support options or structures for students with Low LNS, and the support they received was designed for all non-academic students. While all schools provided support in slightly different ways, key commonalities were:

- specialist staff being well linked to local academies, Gateway and STAR courses resulting in good networks and knowledge of local employment and training opportunities

- all schools required students to have some interactions with specialist transitions staff, increasing in regularity as the student approached Y13.

Some schools also had transition/vocational class at Years 12 and 13. These were for students who would find work placements offered through Gateway too difficult, and required 'work readiness' skills and more tailored, individualised support for making an effective transition. For these students (who were often the same students the school said would struggle to achieve NCEA Level 1), the school had a more intentioned focus on facilitating a successful transition than on gaining credits.

One school had a poor transitions infrastructure because of recent staff turn-over and a higher focus on achievement over transitions; the principal recognised the importance of transition support and was temporarily providing transitions advice to give some support to students.

No school had a system for tracking the outcomes of students once they had left school, however some schools had some knowledge of some students' outcomes:

- anecdotal feedback was the most common way of receiving feedback, this was usually gained through informal catch-ups

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- some schools had highly motivated transitions staff who made particular effort to continue to support students who they had worked closely with (including students with Low LNS); one individual scheduled regular email or text 'check ins' for months after students had left the school.

Student and whānau experiences

We talked to a wide range of students (22) and whānau (13), from six of the seven schools. All of the students and whānau were selected for us by the schools. Despite the use of consistent communications the schools interpreted who we wanted to talk to in different ways.[5] As a result, the students and whānau represented a wide range of characteristics:

- students included:

  - those with identifiable learning disorders (eg dyslexia) and students with Low LNS but no specific or identified problem

  - a mix of those who had attended Learning Support Centres, those who had attended mainstream classes with teacher aide support, and those who had only ever attended mainstream classes

  - students from Years 11 and 12, all were currently studying at both Level 1 and Level 2; one student had recently left school and begun studying fulltime at a local polytechnic

- whānau included:

  - mothers and/or fathers of the students, some were interviewed with their children, some alone, and some in a group with other parents

  - a mix of motivated, educated parents with high aspirations for their children, and parents with low levels of education and low career aspirations for their children.

Each student and whānau was dealing with a unique set of circumstances: differing reasons for the student's low level of achievement, different backgrounds and different aspirations for the future. Despite this, some key themes emerged:

- a number of the families had multiple children with Low LNS and/or identified conditions and so had experienced a wide range of teaching strategies and interventions

  - the most valued approaches were those tailored to the individual needs and circumstances of the student and where the parents were kept informed and could see progress being made

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[5]   See page 32 in Appendix 2 for a full discussion.

- parents felt able to compare the efforts of various schools – feeling 'listened to' and 'provided for' at some schools but not at others

- students and families with identifiable needs and conditions (eg dyslexia, global development delay) usually had clear supports in place that they were happy with

  - most had had to push for diagnosis and some had had to pay for this themselves (and found it expensive)

  - parents talked of the importance of having a 'champion' or key contact at school (eg SENCO) who understood the student's needs and helped communicate information to other teachers

  - on the whole parents found schools to be supportive and greatly appreciated the care and effort of individual staff, while expressing frustration with the system as a whole (funding difficulties, ineligibility for ORS funding, having to fill in endless forms)

- most of the students we talked to had clear aspirations and goals for the future, though a number had goals that were not realistic (eg occupations requiring university level qualifications)

  - the students identified their goals in a range of ways: some had had assistance from specialist careers staff, some had their own ideas, some had identified goals with family members

  - a number of the students we talked to planned to be at school for at least two more years, most were clear about the need to achieve NCEA qualifications but couldn't necessarily articulate why it was important

- students appreciated the opportunity to study at multiple levels and were happy to work at their own pace earning credits over two or more years

  - a number could see that they were falling behind their peers, this provided a degree of motivation as they didn't wish to be left too far behind

- most students had experienced a range of targeted interventions (eg participating in non-mainstream classes and having special learning aids or teacher aide support), demonstrating the fluid nature of support and various strategies used as short term interventions

  - neither students or parents mentioned any stigma attached to these special interventions

- students and families from the school with poor transition infrastructure expressed dissatisfaction with the support they had received from the school

  - this included poor communication, both students and families were unclear about the system and options for the future and felt frustrated and disempowered.

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Conclusions

The research found that schools have a clear focus on the needs of students who are likely to struggle to get NCEA Level 2, and that they take a strengths-based approach to maximise student outcomes.

The research revealed that schools do not focus on students with 'moderate special education needs' when trying to maximise achievement for NCEA Level 2: this term did not resonate with schools or align with their practices. Rather, schools told us that their primary focus is on raising the achievement of students with low literacy and numeracy skills. In practice, the students that schools focus on, and the way they define and conceptualise the group, differs from school to school. For example:

• some schools identify students with Low LNS in relation to national averages, others look to identify those falling behind the achievement levels of their cohort

• some schools use broad definitions and focus on students who are disengaged or exhibiting poor behaviour, while others tend to focus on those who perform poorly in standardised tests

• some schools design targeted interventions to raise the basic skills of students with Low LNS while other schools conceptualise interventions as helping those who are struggling to pass NCEA.

This means that while the *concept* of focusing on students with Low LNS resonates with schools, students with Low LNS are not a clearly defined or fixed group, comparable from school to school.

Schools tend to identify students' with Low LNS (primarily through standardised testing) early in their high school career, and schools focus effort and resource on the group from the junior years – both specific, targeted interventions as well as more general efforts aimed at all students.

By the time they reach the age of 16 to 17 years, interventions for students with Low LNS tend to overlap with the larger group of students on non-academic/vocational pathways. This larger group of 'non-academic' students is a concept commonly used by schools. It is important to note that the group includes a wide range of students from the highly capable, through to those with Low LNS. By the age of 16 to 17, non-academic students with Low LNS will include:

• students with sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to successfully transition into further vocational education or training at a polytechnic (to continue study at Level 2 or at a higher level)

• students who are able to achieve Level 2 (but over multiple years) and transition into employment

- students with lower literacy and numeracy skills (including those with other barriers such as behavioural issues or difficult home lives); this group poses the greatest challenge for schools – they require the highest level of individualised support to help them transition successfully.

The reasons for the very low skills levels of this last group are complex and because of this, schools try a wide range of approaches and interventions. Many of these appear to be ad-hoc and are not necessarily targeted to address a specific, identified need. The research shows that schools' efforts and interventions are well intentioned and creative – however some of their actions (eg creation of new courses to facilitate credit acquisition) may result in qualifications that are not coherent or particularly useful.

The research also revealed some tension for schools with having to weigh up the benefits of retaining students (to maintain roll size and to provide continuity of care and instruction to students) with the benefits of students moving to alternative education or training providers (which may provide a more relevant way for students to gain NCEA credits). A number of schools talked of their high expectations for the continuing development of vocational pathways for students – seeing this as an opportunity for schools and students alike.

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Appendix 1   Research context

The Government has set ten challenging results for the public sector to achieve over the next five years under the Better Public Services programme. The result area that directly relates to this research is to boost skills and employment across the population through increasing the proportion of young people who achieve a NCEA Level 2 qualification (or equivalent) to 85% by 2017.

The Ministry is the lead agency responsible for this result area. While performance needs to be lifted across all students, three groups have been identified for particular focus: Māori students, Pasifika students, and students with special education needs. The purpose of this research was to improve the Ministry's understanding of the latter: students with special education needs (noting that the group will include a number of students from Māori and Pasifika backgrounds). In particular, the Ministry requires in depth qualitative information about students with **moderate** special education needs (as distinct from students with high special education needs).

Special Education

Special Education within the Ministry provides funding for extra assistance, adapted programmes or learning environments, and specialised equipment or materials to support students to access the curriculum and achieve. Funding is provided in a variety of ways to support students with a range of needs including: behavioural (including emotional), sensory, cognitive (learning) and physical. The work of Special Education is guided by a number of principles designed to ensure equitable outcomes for students with special needs. The following principles are of particular relevance to the current research:

- students with special education needs have the same rights to a high quality education as people of the same age who do not have special education needs

- students with special education needs will have access to a seamless education from the time that their needs are identified through to post-school options.

Learners with moderate needs

'Education needs' refers to how much help a student needs to join in and learn alongside others, and does not relate to their medical diagnosis or disability. The Ministry differentiates between students with high needs and those with moderate needs. While there is no agreed definition of moderate needs, a student with moderate needs will need less help than students with high or very high needs – and importantly, their needs will be met by their schools.[6]

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[6] This is in contrast with students with high education needs who will have funding or services allocated directly to them.

Learners with moderate needs may require different teaching strategies, specific adaptations or individualised support in order to achieve at or above curriculum expectations.

The exact numbers of students with moderate needs is not known. The Ministry provides funding for 'moderate to high needs' to cover approximately 4% of the student population (40-60,000 students), a figure that schools believe to be an underestimate. Much of this funding is provided directly to schools through the Special Education Grant (SEG). The funding amount each school receives is based on the total number of enrolments and the school's decile ranking. Schools have flexibility over how they spend their SEG, based on the needs of their students. In practice students will have many of their needs met by their classroom teacher and the SEG is used for purchasing additional:

- resources and materials

- training for teachers on issues relevant to children with special education needs

- specialist services (eg hands on help from psychologists, behaviour consultants, physiotherapists and other specialists)

- additional teacher or teacher's aide time.

Recent research by the Education Review Office[7] illustrates the difficulty of accurately measuring the numbers of special needs students in the absence of an agreed definition. In response to a questionnaire about students with special needs, some schools included gifted and talented students, English language students and boys within their definition of special needs. Schools are also likely to **underestimate** the numbers of certain types of needs. For example Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs, eg dyslexia and dyspraxia) have only been recognised in New Zealand for a comparatively short time and parents of children with a SpLD frequently report difficulties getting these needs identified and met.[8]

The Education Review Office research showed that the majority of schools have a Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO).[9] SENCOs typically work with students, their teachers and their parents to manage and coordinate special education resources. Despite the presence of SENCOs within schools, anecdotal feedback indicates that many classroom teachers lack the requisite knowledge to confidently and capably identify students with moderate needs and match them to available resources. In order to meet student needs successfully, both SENCOs and classroom teachers require ongoing professional development to keep them abreast of current assessment methods and the resources and opportunities that exist for students.

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[7] *Including Students with Special Needs: School Questionnaire Responses*, April 2012.

[8] This feedback comes from Elizabeth Lynch's work with students and parents in both New Zealand and the UK.

[9] The research found that 93% of responding secondary schools had a SENCO.

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The Ministry developed an operationally based definition of students with moderate needs for the purposes of this research. Learners with moderate needs **include** (but are not limited to) students who receive support for the following needs:

- learning and behaviour (Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour [RTLBs] available to students until year 10)

- vision support (itinerant services from Resource Teachers: Vision)

- hearing support (itinerant services from Resource Teachers: Deaf)

- physical disabilities (Physical Disability Service, including occupational therapy and physiotherapy support)

- psychological, psycho-social or chronic mental health (through Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu: The Correspondence School or Regional Health Schools).

For the purposes of this research, students with moderate needs specifically excludes any students identified as having high needs (including students who receive Ongoing Resourcing Scheme [ORS] funding).

Increasing the achievement of students with moderate needs

Special Education aims to ensure all students achieve to their full potential – for students with moderate learning needs this means identifying any necessary supports that will help them achieve their learning goals, and removing any barriers that prevent success. This research focuses on older students (16 and 17 year olds), and the barriers and opportunities they experience in achieving NCEA Level 2 and transitioning to further study or work.

The Youth Guarantee is an important initiative aimed at 16 and 17 year-olds focusing on raising achievement and successful transitions. It provides young students with opportunities to participate in a range of vocational courses and seeks to improve transitions between school, tertiary education and work. Vocational Pathways is part of the Youth Guarantee scheme but have only recently been finalised. In practice schools access and/or provide a range of services for moderate needs students, in a variety of ways. The research aims to investigate a range of approaches including the provision of flexible options to meet students' needs such as access to Trades Academies and other tertiary institutions, on-site Learning Support Units and alternatives to mainstream learning such as Service Academies.

Appendix 2 Characteristics of the case study schools

Table 1:   Key characteristics of the seven case study schools[10]

School	Roll	Decile	NCEA Level 2 pass rates[11]
National pass rates			68% overall • Māori: 50%, Pasifika: 60%
Urban # 1	1000+	Low	62% overall • Māori: 40%, Pasifika 63%
Urban # 2	1000+	Low	59% overall • Māori: 34%, Pasifika 59%
Urban # 3	300-900	Low	50% overall • Māori: 48%, Pasifika: 59%
Urban # 4	1000+	Mid	Not available
Urban # 5	300-900	Mid	57% overall • Māori: 48%, Pasifika: 59%
Secondary urban # 1	300-900	Low	45% overall • Māori: 41%, Pasifika: N/A
Secondary urban # 2	1000+	Mid	71% overall • Māori 59%, Pasifika: N/A

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[10] Eight schools were originally selected but only seven participated.

[11] 2011 data supplied by the Ministry.

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Appendix 3   Research methodology

Phase 1: Selecting 'exemplar' schools and understanding their approach

Key steps of this phase were:

- selection of the case study schools

- development and deployment of a questionnaire for the schools

- telephone interviews with the schools.

Selection of the case study schools

The case study schools were selected in collaboration with the Ministry. A sampling framework was constructed outlining key variables of interest. It was designed to ensure a diverse range of schools were selected, with a focus on schools with high numbers of priority learners. The agreed variables were:

- location – two urban locations and a secondary urban location

- size – large (1000+ learners) and medium

- decile – low (1-3) and mid (4-6)

- high proportions of Maori and/or Pasifika learners.

In addition, the sampling framework was overlaid by an intention to learn from 'exemplar' schools, to achieve this we purposively selected schools where there was an indication that they had:

- an awareness of moderate special education needs (MSEN) and/or an identifiable group of 16-17 year old learners with MSEN (noting that different schools define MSEN differently)

- a commitment to raising NCEA achievement levels

- active support for transitions and flexible learning options.

Identified schools were provided with information about the research and a letter of introduction from the Ministry, and invited to participate. Schools were under no obligation to participate in the research and a small number of schools declined.

Development and deployment of a questionnaire for schools

In order to reduce potential confusion or complication, the questionnaire asked schools to provide responses for learners with MSEN in Y12 only.

The questionnaire covered the following key areas:

- identifying Year 12 learners with MSEN (including numbers, demographics, tests and resources used)

- providing for Year 12 learners with MSEN (including supports and special classes)

- transitions (vocational learning and transition supports)

- school planning and decision making for learners with MSEN (use of the Special Education Grant [SEG], staff involvement, rating of school's approach).

An early version of the questionnaire was pre-tested with a contact from the Special Education Sector. The Ministry provided comments on an updated version and a final version was pre-tested with two more people active in the Special Education Sector.

Completing the questionnaire – 7 out of 8 completed

With such a small sample size (eight schools) it was important that we received completed questionnaires from as many schools as possible. A number of strategies were employed to maximise the response rate:

- design:

    - the questionnaire was designed to be quick and easy to complete (tick boxes, tables and opportunities for comment)

    - where specific percentages or numbers were asked for, schools were encouraged to give indicative feedback if they did not have easy access to accurate data

- deployment:

    - schools' responses were to be analysed to maintain anonymity (as some of the question areas were potentially sensitive)

    - the questionnaire was sent out at a relatively quiet time of year (while senior students were completing exams) and schools had two (or more) weeks to complete the questionnaire

    - schools were encouraged to discuss responses with a range of staff members, as required

    - reminders to complete the questionnaire were sent via email and by telephone.

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These strategies resulted in seven questionnaires being returned. One school felt unable to complete the questionnaire as the staff member with the most knowledge of MSEN had recently retired.

Telephone interviews with schools

Once the questionnaires were completed and returned, a brief telephone interview (between 30 and 45 minutes) was conducted with the school's nominated contact. Five out of the seven schools who completed the questionnaire were interviewed (two schools were not able to be interviewed: one was not able to make the time and the other had a key staff member on annual leave).

The key areas covered in the telephone interview were:

* discussion of answers given to check clarity and our interpretation

* particular areas of interest raised by their responses (eg difficulties accessing information or contrasts to other schools' responses, potential inaccuracies) – exploration of underlying factors or reasons

* identification of particular questions that were difficult to answer or questions that made them think about things in a new way

* discussion of their rating of the school's own approach.

The interviews were recorded and notes taken.

Phase 2: Case studies with 'exemplar' schools, Term 1 2013

The second phase of the research was designed to build on the initial responses given by the schools in the survey and telephone interviews. A group of three researchers visited each of the seven schools and spent a day talking to key school staff and, where possible, students and whānau, in order to get a deep understanding of each schools' approach.

Prior to the visit to each school, the school was asked to provide any relevant information (including school plans and staff charts), only one school provided information. The schools' responses to the initial phase and other available information (eg ERO reports and supplied information) was reviewed prior to the interviews.

Topic guides were prepared to guide semi-structured interviews. Interviewees were provided with full information prior to the interviews and informed consent was sought. Where recommended by the school, parents and whānau were offered a koha and food and drink was made available for student and whānau interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and/or full notes taken.

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The topic guides for the research are attached as Appendix 4. Key question areas were:

- the school's approach (including drivers and expectations for student achievement and transitions)

- understanding of the research and students that the school focuses on

- staff capabilities and skills, professional development

- specific initiatives and examples (including specific barriers and good/not so good outcomes)

    - students and whānau were asked to reflect on current achievements, future aspirations and specific support that the school was (or wasn't) providing

- external providers and linkages (for both ongoing achievement and transitions).

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Table 2:   Summary of interviewees

School	Interviewees
Urban # 1	**Good range of staff; no students:** Deputy Principal, Associate Principal, SENCO, HoD Careers and Careers Teacher, Gateway Teacher, School Counsellor, Y9 and Y13 Deans, 2 parents
Urban # 2	**Good range of staff; no whānau:** Principal, Deputy Principal, 2 Gateway Coordinators, Learning Centre Coordinator, 4 students
Urban # 3	**Principal only**
Urban # 4	**Good range of staff, students and whānau:** Principal, HoD Learning Services, HoD Careers, Academy Class Teacher, Y12 and Y13 Deans, 5 students, 4 parents
Urban # 5	**Good range of staff; no whānau:** Principal, Y9 and Y13 Deans, HoD Careers, Teacher in Charge - Learning Support, Guidance Counsellor, 5 students
Secondary urban # 1	**Limited range of staff; good range of students and whānau:** Principal, Deputy Principal, 3 students and 3 parents
Secondary urban # 2	**Good range of staff, students and whānau:** Principal, Y12 Dean, Careers Advisor, Gateway Coordinator, 5 students and 4 parents
Other interviewees (identified by the Ministry)	2 Transition Advisors (Ministry), 1 Workbridge representative

Research challenges and limitations

The original intention was to conduct comprehensive case study research with a group of schools to understand their approaches for students with moderate special education needs, the experiences of students and whānau, and gain insights into transitions beyond school.

Our ability to achieve this was limited by:

- difficulty recruiting and retaining schools: schools found the research aims and purpose difficult to understand – one school withdrew from the research; two schools did not participate in the telephone interviews; one school only partially participated in the in depth interviews); feedback from the schools indicated that this was because:

    - the research focus did not resonate with schools (this is a key finding, discussed on page 8, in the main body of the report)

    - the research was not associated with any clear initiative, policy or funding stream (meaning that schools did not prioritise the research or wish to spend unnecessary time on the research)

- the need to identify and recruit interviewees through the schools: schools decided who would participate in the interviews and in several schools we did not interview a wide range of stakeholders[12]

    - three (of the seven) schools identified a range of staff, students and whānau for us to talk to

    - in two schools we interviewed staff and students, but not whānau

    - in one school we interviewed staff and whānau, but students

    - one school only allowed us to talk to the principal

- schools supplying incomplete information or context about their approach, prior to the interviews

- lack of contact with wider community stakeholders prevented us from exploring transition issues fully

    - although schools were asked to identify key community stakeholders (involved in student transitions for further interviews) they did not do this

    - the Ministry identified a small number of national level stakeholders for interview.

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[12]   Table 2 on page 19 gives a summary of the interviewees in each school.

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Appendix 4   Case study topic guides

All interviewees were sent background information and a consent form prior to the interview.

Introduction to the interview

This research is being conducted for the Ministry of Education, it is about 16 and 17 year old students with moderate needs: their **ACHIEVEMENTS** and **TRANSITIONS** out of school.

The purpose of the research is to understand how seven different schools identify students with moderate needs, what the schools' approaches are, and the experiences of the students (and their families). For instance every school has a mix of students who will achieve NCEA level 2 and 3 and go down an academic path. Equally there are likely to be students that are likely to find it challenging to achieve even level 2. We are interested in talking about those students – to understand how schools are identifying and supporting them, so that we can share this more widely with other schools.

Before we begin, you'll need to sign the consent form. If you agree, we'll tape the interview. This is to help us remember and understand everything you say. What you say will be confidential and anonymous, we won't share any direct feedback with the Ministry or the school without your prior permission. When we have finished this project, we will delete your interview and all our notes.

The research and the questions focus on a particular group of students:

- 16 and 17 year olds with moderate special education needs

- this may include students at NCEA Level 1, 2 or 3

- students who receive ORS funding are excluded from the definition.

Questions for principal/school leadership

Recap what we know from initial questionnaire, interview, information: check understanding and seek additional clarification/information.

SCHOOL'S APPROACH

1   Can you summarise your approach for me?

- Why do you/don't you have specific Plans for this group? (eg Special Education Plan)

- What is the priority of your approach/Plans compared to other school initiatives/Plans?

- Do you have specifically resourced roles/responsibilities/leadership expectations of staff?

- Do you specifically allocate a portion of your SEG budget to this group?

- Do you have tangible supports/services for these students, such as careers advice, specific transition support?

2   What are the drivers for your approach?

- Curriculum principles: high expectations and inclusion

- Experience, knowledge, ideas of particular school staff

- Ministry expectations or direction, eg increasing NCEA pass rates

- Regional Ministry support

- External providers influence/ideas/availability eg Trades Academies

- Student or family expectation

- Academic or international research, information on best practice

3   Why did you give the rating you did for your school's approach?

4   What are your expectations for these students:

- Achievement? (NCEA level? Credits or unit standards?)

- Transitions? (Further study – NCEA L3, ITO [brokers], Polytech, PTEs, Trades Academy (school based, tertiary based); employment); Gateway or vocational courses?

- Do you think your expectations align with those of the students and families?

- How confident are you that your school is set up to fulfil the expectations of these students? What changes do you think are needed to support the achievement of these expectations? Who needs to make these changes?

TEACHING STAFF CAPABILITY AND SKILL

5   Do you think your staff have the right skills and experience to support these students?

- Do you staff have the right skills to identify these students? Work with these students? Refer these students?

- Do any of your staff receive Professional Development to identify/work with these students?

REAL LIFE EXAMPLES

6   Can you give me examples of successful transitions or achievements?

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- What was good/successful?

- What contributed to the success? (school systems/supports, staff members, student or family drive, external provider)

- How do you know it was successful? From who's perspective?

6.1 Can you give me examples of **less successful** transitions or achievements?

- What went wrong? What barriers were there?

7 Do you keep a track of student and achievements and the outcomes of transitions? (ie where they end up?)

- Do you know whether your approach leads to positive longer term outcomes?

EXTERNAL PROVIDERS, THE WIDER COMMUNITY

8 How well connected is the school to external providers and opportunities for students? (eg support organisations, ITOs, polytechs, Trades Academies, employers)

- Who leads the development and maintenance of networks – the school or others?

- Are the networks purposeful or 'organic'?

- Do you pass information to external providers about students?

9 Thinking of the providers and opportunities across your wider community, do you think the right supports are available to meet the needs of these students?

- Specific gaps or duplications.

CONCLUSIONS (if not already covered)

10 Drawing on all your experiences with MSEN students, what lessons or best practice in relation to achievement and transitions could you identify for other schools or the Ministry to learn from?

- What works really well?

- What doesn't work well?

11 Are there any particular contextual considerations which affect your students or your approach?

- Location – rural v urban

- Ethnicity – in particular Māori and Pasifika

- Size of school

- Availability of external opportunities/support

- Student/family involvement/motivation

- Other.

12   Can you think of any improvements your school should or could make to your approach?

- Are there any barriers preventing you making improvements?

13   Is there anything else?

Questions for other key school staff

SCHOOL'S APPROACH

1   Can you tell what your role is in relation to MSEN students?

2   What supports does the school offers this group?

- Support in mainstream classrooms

- Specialist support or classes

- Services such as pastoral care, careers advice and transition support

- Specialist staff roles eg SENCO, HoD, Special Education

- Linkages and networks with external providers.

3   What are your expectations for MSEN students:

- Achievement? (NCEA level? Unit standards?)

- Transitions? (Further study – NCEA L3, ITO, Polytech, Trades Academy; employment)

- Do you think your expectations align with those of the students and families?

4   What feedback or input do you get from students when setting goals? From families?

- Setting achievement goals

- Setting transition goals

- Feedback on successes and problems.

TEACHING STAFF CAPABILITY AND SKILL

5   Do you feel you have the right skills and experience to identify and support these students to achieve and make successful transitions?

- What skills and experience do you have?

- Does the school provide ongoing Professional Development in this area? Do you feel you need Professional Development?

6 Overall, do you think the school staff have the right mix/level of skills and experience to support these students?

REAL LIFE EXAMPLES

7 Does your school have good transition opportunities for students?

- How well connected is the school to external providers and opportunities for students? (eg support organisations, ITOs, polytechs, Trades Academies, employers)

- Are there any gaps?

8 Can you give me examples of students making successful transitions or achieving well?

- what was good/successful?

- What contributed to the success? (school systems/supports, staff members, student or family drive, external provider)

- How do you know it was successful? From who's perspective?

- Do you think your definition of success aligns with those of the students and families?

9 Can you give me examples of **less successful** transitions or achievements?

- What went wrong? What barriers were there?

[FOR STAFF WHO WORK IN THIS AREA] EXTERNAL PROVIDERS, THE WIDER COMMUNITY

10 How well connected is the school to external providers and opportunities for students? (eg support organisations, ITOs, polytechs, Trades Academies, employers)

- Who leads the development and maintenance of networks – the school or the provider?

- Are the networks purposeful or 'organic'?

- Do you pass information to external providers about students?

11 Thinking of the providers and opportunities across your wider community, do you think the right supports are available to meet the needs of these students?

- Specific gaps or duplications.

CONCLUSIONS

12   Drawing on all your experiences with MSEN students, what lessons or best practice could you identify for other schools or the Ministry to learn from?

- What works really well?

- What doesn't work well?

- Is there anything different about your students/context which need to be taken into consideration? (location, ethnicity – Māori and Pasifika, families, school size, external opportunities)

13   Overall, thinking about everything you have said, how well do you think your school supports MSEN students?

Questions for students

ABOUT YOU

1   What are your plans for this year?

- Achievement: NCEA, unit standards, further study

- Transition: further study outside of school, training, employment

2   The school/your teacher chose you to talk to me because we want to learn about the experiences of students with different types of learning needs.

- Can you tell what your learning need is, or why you need support or help?

- What type of support or help do you get from the school?

- What support or help do you get from your family?

- Do you get any other support or help? Eg Service Academy, Kip McGrath, polytech, counsellor?

3   How did you make these plans?

- Your own plans/ideas/motivation

- Input/ideas from your family

- Input/ideas from teachers

- Input/ideas from others.

SUPPORTS THAT YOU NEED AND GET – WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS

4   Thinking about studying and passing exams or getting NCEA credits, what help has the school given you in the past?

- Have they given you enough help? What difference did this help make?

- What do you think was the best, or most valuable thing the school did?

- Is there anything else that the school doesn't do or have, that you think would be helpful?

- Was there anything at school that made it hard to study or get credits?

THE FUTURE

5   If you are continuing study: what help are you getting now? Do you think you'll achieve your goals? Is there any help that you need but aren't getting?

6   Thinking about leaving school, what help is the school giving you or going to give you?

- Careers advice, counselling, information about courses or jobs, introductions

- Do you think you will [achieve your plans]?

- Is there anything that you think might be helpful, but you isn't available/you don't know how to get?

Questions for family/whānau

We are talking to you and your child because we want to learn about the experiences of students with different types of learning needs. We are really interested in your thoughts and experiences on how the school:

- Supports your child to get qualifications

- Is preparing them for the future (more study, training or employment).

If we have already talked to the student we will confirm/discuss their answers, otherwise we will go through the same questions.

Check for alignment/difference between student and whānau feedback on:

- Plans for the coming year, expectations for the future

- Help and support from the school – in the recent past and currently

  - specific support

  - general attitudes towards the student

- unmet needs, problems, barriers

- knowledge about leaving school – transition support.

MARTIN'JENKINS