

\$90 Million Investment For Specialist Schools Only Supports 0.6 Percent Disabled Learners

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Press Release: [IHC New Zealand](#)

IHC New Zealand says today's announcement to invest \$90 million into specialist schools is a win for them and the students they serve, however it's funding that could be utilised to fix a broken system for the 99.4 percent of disabled students who attend their local mainstream school.

Education Minister Erica Stanford says this money will increase choice and meet increased demand from families for specialist education provision.

However, IHC Inclusive Education Lead Trish Grant says this targeted investment will only further increase the funding inequity between education settings rather than address it.

"There is no question that many of the schools and units are in a shocking state, with mushrooms and mould growing in rooms where children with fragile health are being taught," says Trish. "Let's be clear

– the increased demand for specialist schools has grown out of family frustration and lack of confidence that the local school can provide what their child needs to learn and be at school.

“It’s not easy for disabled students when they can only attend school for two hours a day, have to wait for months for help from a communication, occupational or behaviour therapist or have a teacher who doesn’t understand or have access to what they need to learn.

“Families and whānau are having to beg for support within a broken system.

“And teachers and schools are struggling because they can't access the support and resources so badly needed.”

IHC has long advocated for mainstream first, but Trish says now’s not the time to get hung up on special schools versus mainstream schools.

“Polarising mainstream versus special schools doesn’t take us forward,” says Trish. “Let’s build a system where all disabled students and their schools are supported at the political and systems level to have what they need for a world-class education and a real chance at a good life.”

Today’s announcement comes a day after ERO released a report on education at specialist schools, *Built in, not bolted on*.

The report includes comments from grateful families about finally getting what their child needs after a grim time achieving that at the

local mainstream school. It recommends greater support from specialist schools to mainstream schools – a network of provision that ERO says will do the trick.

“I saw this in action in a meeting at a Levin school last week with the specialist school working with the local school and Ministry of Education staff to meet the needs of a student.

“The \$90 million investment and the \$153 million being invested in charter schools would be far better spent on this work.

“At the moment, \$243 million is being sucked away from the bulk of disabled students who need more from the current system.

“Frustration aside, there is both an equity and economic issue here that has caught the attention of the international productivity research guru, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

“Its May 2024 OECD report on New Zealand’s economic growth had some chilling commentary on education – that “declining school performance and ongoing inequity” are a serious threat to the country’s prosperity.

“New Zealand needs an education system that works for all learners, creates great outcomes for individuals and prosperity for the country.”

