

Co-Convenors Report to AGM November 2011

This was another busy year for the Inclusive Education Action Group (IEAG), as the education and disability sector digested the Review of Special Education released by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in late 2010. During the year IEAG also expanded delivery of its highly successful programme of inclusive education workshops.

IEAG is fortunate to have many enthusiastic members supporting the development of inclusive education in New Zealand. IEAG has this year strengthened its financial position thanks to successful fundraising activities, but still relies significantly on the commitment and voluntary work of its members. We would like to extend our thanks to all of those people in IEAG who have kept the inclusion flag flying over the past year.

Review of Special Education

The long awaited report on the Review of Special Education was finally delivered in October 2010. IEAG was unsurprised but disappointed that the report, though containing the rhetoric of inclusion, failed to recommend the replacement of our current dual system of regular and special education with a truly inclusive education system. Of particular concern is the continued lack of a MoE inclusive education policy and the prominent role given to special education providers of “outreach” services to regular schools. In the absence of a clear inclusive education policy, it is likely that the special school outreach providers will merely offer the same services they have been offering for years – “special” education and segregation.

IEAG issued a Review of Special Education statement and press release:

“There is little evidence that the substantial issues raised in submissions have influenced the Review, and, in the end, we are left with a document that does not seem to be about inclusion at all. The Review is a missed opportunity to transform New Zealand education into one inclusive education system that supports teachers and schools to fully include and teach all students. This is the vision of IEAG, and until inclusion is understood by Minister Hide and the Ministry of Education, we are unconvinced that the Review will be able to deliver the inclusive education system that many students, families and schools are looking for.”

Strategic Planning

A Strategic Planning workshop was held in March 2011 and our strategy for 2011 was updated accordingly. Priority goals for IEAG are:

- To **promote** the concept of inclusive education so that it will be understood by all New Zealanders.
- To be an acknowledged **expert group** and first port of call on inclusive education research, implementation, knowledge, support and advocacy.
- To **engage** with the education sector on inclusive education for all students, and to support family, whanau and students to realise their educational rights
- To ensure that **knowledge**, attitudes, policies and practises that facilitate inclusive education will be well recognised and understood by professionals and the NZ public.

In 2011 we continued to support progress toward inclusion through further regional workshops, regular newsletters and advocacy activities.

IEAG Governing Committee and Coordinator

This year's Governing Committee was Ian Armstrong and Dr. Jude MacArthur (Co-Convenors), Nancy Higgins (Secretary), Marguerite Vanderkolk (Treasurer to March 2011), Alex Smith (Treasurer from April 2011) and committee members Andrea Ford, Matt Frost, Trish Grant, Bernadette Macartney, Hazel Phillips, Dr. Gill Rutherford, and Vivienne Thompson. Special thanks are due to Marguerite who stepped down from the Treasurer role and from the Committee this year. Marguerite did sterling work waving the IEAG flag for us in Auckland – sometimes in the teeth of hostility from the strong Auckland special school lobby.

With only a single paid employee, managing workload is a huge challenge for IEAG. This year the role of the Coordinator was reviewed and upgraded to an Executive Officer position with increased responsibility and increased hours from 15 – 25 hours per week.

Sarah Berman, IEAG Executive Officer, continues to provide wonderful support to the Governing Committee and has achieved an enormous amount for IEAG this year. She has improved our income sources through very successful fund-raising efforts, successfully applying for and obtaining many grants which have enabled IEAG to operate on a much more stable financial platform. Sarah has also continued to manage IEAG accounts, the website, correspondence, workshop support, and all aspects of IEAG administration. She has also taken a more active role as spokesperson and front person for IEAG. This has freed up the Governing Committee considerably to concentrate on strategy and advocacy. The Governing Committee extends special thanks to Sarah for her efforts and commitment to our organisation.

School Trustees Association Conference

IEAG attended the July 2010 School Trustees Association conference in Auckland hosting a most successful trade stand for the duration of the 3 day conference. There

were 650 school trustee attendees including principals and teacher representatives. Most delegates came to our stand and were given IEAG resources including a “Self-Review Set of Questions on Inclusion” for Boards of Trustees. Some have subsequently attended workshop.

Submissions

IEAG continued to provide written submissions to Government on inclusive education matters. Submissions provided in 2011 include a submission to the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Taskforce Report and to the Draft Cabinet Paper on Special Education Complaints and Resolution process.

Bernadette McCarthy and Matt Frost presented an IEAG perspective at a Ministry of Education Governance Hui.

‘Education for All’ group

The Education for All group of disability organisations established in May 2010 and led by Ross Brereton of DPA continued to meet, albeit on a fairly occasional basis. The Christchurch earthquake affected the ability of both DPA and MoE to devote time to the group.

Nevertheless, the group met with Minister Hide soon after this appointment as Associate Education Minister in October 2010 and also met with Ministry of Education in June 2011 and with ERO in July. At these meetings the group was briefed on progress implementing “Success for All” (the MoE’s implementation of the Special Education Review) and continued to press for a more inclusive education system.

It is hoped the Education for All group will continue to function and have the ear of MoE and ERO. There remains much to do to fulfil the group’s promise as we work towards the initial goals:

- Recognising schools demonstrating outstanding inclusive practice
- Providing advice to ERO on indicators of effective inclusive education practice that might be part of their regular review framework
- Having input to attitude change / professional learning opportunities for school leadership, BOT and teacher groups

Membership Survey

A survey of IEAG members was held in March 2011 receiving a 32% response rate from approximately 200 invitations. It was pleasing to note support for core IEAG activities such as being a collective voice to advocate for change, and providing inclusive education information and support.

While recognising constraints on IEAG, a number of responses called for more advocacy and a stronger public presence, opportunities to get involved in IEAG activities, and better access to information. This feedback is informing our planning for 2010 and beyond.

Media

IEAG issued newsletters to members in December 2010 and May 2011 and covered items of interest to members on its website. IEAG also issued press releases following the release of the Special Education Review and Auckland Grammars decision to abandon NCEA. Various IEAG members were interviewed in the national press and radio for their views on educational matters.

Education workshops

IEAG continued to offer workshops focused on advancing thinking and action in the area of inclusive education.

In collaboration with Children's Autism Foundation, a workshop on "Narrative Assessment" was held in Auckland in October 2010 led by Annie Guerin. 31 people, mostly teachers, attended. 85% of respondents stated that they will use what they have learned at the workshop.

A seminar on "Inclusive Education in Early Childhood Education" was held for 50 kindergarten teachers from the North Auckland Kindergarten Association.

A one day "Inclusive Education Workshop" facilitated by Dr Jude MacArthur and Dr Gill Rutherford has been prepared in collaboration with IHC Advocacy, and made possible with funding from the IHC Foundation. Two workshops have been held so far, one in Dunedin (with support from MoE) with 70 participants and the other in Manukau with 84 participants.

Participants from both workshops included teachers, parents, SENCOS, education specialists, ECE teachers, principals, teacher aides, a whole class from Manukau Institute of Technology of student teacher aides and their lecturers, Board of Trustee members, Ministry of Education staff and disability advocates. Many participants expressed an interest to participate in further networking groups.

Sample comments from the workshops and seminars:

- Seriously worthwhile. My head is brimming with ideas and I can't wait to start using them.
- Has given me lots of food for thought on where I can look at going to meet the needs of students I work with and encouraging change of thoughts by senior management perhaps.
- I enjoyed this workshop and it will help us to reflect on what we are doing now and how we can improve our systems.
- Thank you, learned and given food for thought with examples of possibilities to make changes to how we (school) currently design and implement our IEP processes.
- Information given was awesome, the group work kept me motivated. Thank you (student teacher aide).
- Awesome workshop – has extended my knowledge tremendously, wonderful host, thank you so much (Qualified ECE teacher).
- Get more teachers to attend these seminars! (parent).
- More seminars like this should be addressed at principals, teachers and leaderships, including MOE specialists (parent).
- I think this seminar would be great for more people in my school (SENCO).

It is planned hold another 8 "Inclusive Education Workshops" around the country in 2012.

Branding

With the proposed upgrade of our website, and our increased presence at conferences, events and workshops, it was felt that IEAG's logo and branding was in need of an update to better represent our organisation. The new logo and tag line "*Creating inclusive schools and communities*" is designed to be bright and optimistic; representing diversity, positive interactions and community. Promotional material has also been developed; including a revised brochure, new letterhead and a banner.

Acknowledgements for support given to IEAG

Special thanks are extended to organisations that have supported our work through grants, and to those people who have generously and voluntarily supported our work.

Grants received

We have been very fortunate to receive funding in the past year from the following:

- Todd Foundation
- Lotteries Community Grants Board
- IHC Foundation
- ASB Community Trust
- NZ Post
- COGS - Auckland, Waitakere, Christchurch, Hutt Valley, Wellington, North Shore/Rodney, Manukau City, Dunedin.

We acknowledge with gratitude the funding received from these organisations. This has allowed us to continue our work, to pursue our strategic goals, and to keep our very highly valued Executive Officer, Sarah Berman, working on our behalf.

Voluntary support

IEAG extends its thanks to the following people for their generous, voluntary support:

- Ben Stewart of Goldfish solutions for hosting our website for free.
- Kim O'Hara for preparing our financial accounts.
- IHC Advocacy for many supports, including premises for meetings

This support has been invaluable and is very much appreciated.

Research

IEAG is working to develop a research arm to support a better understanding of inclusive education in New Zealand. Drs Jude MacArthur and Nancy Higgins have applied for funding to undertake a two-year research project entitled *Developing inclusive school communities through community and collegial engagement*. The project looks at how schools and GSE staff can work together, and with their communities, to support their development towards inclusion. We will be advised about the success of our application in December.

In November, 2011, Trish Grant and Jude MacArthur are presenting at the Disability Studies Conference, “Every Body In”. Our presentation, entitled, *A prick in the Minister's side' - Working towards inclusive education in New Zealand through voluntary advocacy*, documents the successes of and challenges faced by the Inclusive Education Group (IEAG), and highlights the need for commitment and changes at the level of education policy and practice to achieve a more democratic approach to schooling in which values such as diversity, equality and caring are a central concern for all.

Looking Ahead

2012 will see a new Government, although the current dual policy of regular and special education is almost certain to continue. With Minister Hide’s departure from Parliament, there will presumably be a new Associate Minister (Special Education). Re-election of a National-led government is likely to herald turbulent times for education as their recently announced education policy has been met with dismay and opposition from the education sector and most other political parties. Tertiary education is becoming increasingly difficult for disabled and other students to access. In this climate, IEAG will need to defend public education, as well as continuing to lobby for a more inclusive education system.

In 2012 IEAG will continue to:

- Voice unequivocal support for the rights of disabled students based on the NZ Disability Strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Advocate for stronger Government and education sector commitment to inclusive education including improvements in teacher education and support, and improved school accountability measures
- Provide grassroots support to families/whanau, students and education professionals via inclusive education workshops, IEAG website and newsletters.

In 2012 IEAG plans to upgrade its website providing more and better information, and plans to set up regional IEAG groups particularly in areas where workshops have been held and networking interests expressed. IEAG will hold a trade stand at “Big Event – Auckland Disability Providers Network”.

IEAG remains an active, enthusiastic and committed organisation with some significant achievements behind it and many challenges ahead. The Co-Conveners wish to thank the IEAG Governing Committee, the IEAG Executive Officer (Sarah Berman) and all IEAG members for their support, for their many hours of voluntary work, and for their commitment to inclusive education.

Co-convenors IEAG

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