

## **Press Release**

### **Inclusive Education Action Group**

**19 December 2012**

#### **Salisbury case a step backwards for inclusive education and disabled people's rights.**

"Maintaining segregated schooling is a step backwards for inclusive education and the rights of disabled people," says Dr Bernadette Macartney, co-convenor of the Inclusive Education Action Group (IEAG), in response to Justice Dobson's decision that closing Salisbury Residential School is unlawful.

"The New Zealand Disability Strategy and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities commits New Zealand to developing an inclusive society and education system. Residential Special Schools are an anomaly within this context", said Dr Macartney.

IEAG believes that it is inappropriate to have a dual education system that segregates some children and young people from their peers and communities. Students struggle to learn to be part of the community when they are excluded from it, and segregation breeds prejudice, fear and misunderstanding.

"IEAG supports the Ministry of Education's initial proposal to close New Zealand's four remaining Residential Special Schools for young people with intellectual disabilities and to focus attention on building a new wrap-around service for children and young people with complex needs in the community", says Dr Macartney.

Those opposing the Ministry's proposal to develop supports for students with complex needs in their local schools could be reminded that New Zealand's policy to build an inclusive education system has been successfully implemented in many other countries including Canada, Italy, Norway, and many parts of the United States and the U.K.

"When New Zealand closed residential institutions for adults with disabilities there was opposition from those who did not understand the need for change. Two decades later we have come a long way towards recognizing and supporting the right of disabled adults to exercise choice over where and who they live with. This is no different."

“Young people with high and complex needs have the right to be supported to live and be educated alongside their families and peers in local communities. The Ministry of Education has set an important goal for all schools to be inclusive by 2014, and the closure of ‘special’, segregated schools is a step in the journey to a fair and equitable education for all New Zealand young people and their families” Dr Macartney said.

“What the Ministry of Education and New Zealand society needs to be focusing on is improving support for diverse groups of students to learn and achieve success alongside each other in their local early childhood centres, schools and tertiary institutions.”

It is sad and unfortunate that the good work that the Ministry of Education has been doing in this area has now been stymied and slowed down by the judicial process. The reputations of a group of boys with intellectual disabilities have also been damaged in the process.

It is ironic that the Ministry of Education’s decision to close all four remaining residential special schools was actually addressing the concerns of many families about their children with disabilities not being physically and emotionally safe and properly taught and included within their local school.

Residential, and other, special schools are an historic barrier to students accessing an inclusive education and the same learning opportunities as their peers. The closure of the residential schools is a step in the right direction.

IEAG’s main concern is that schools, communities and agencies are fully supported to improve their capacities for teaching and including all children and young people within their local community. We will continue to advocate for people with intellectual disabilities to be respected and accorded their rights as full citizens. It is not possible to participate fully in education and society when you are not welcome or physically present.

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