

## **Press Release**

### **Inclusive Education Action Group**

**09 December 2011**

#### **Charter schools could discriminate against disabled students**

The Inclusive Education Action Group (IEAG) is deeply concerned at the National Government's proposal to introduce charter schools, as such a move is likely to result in discrimination against disabled students.

IEAG Co-Conveners Ian Armstrong and Jude MacArthur pointed to evidence from countries where charter schools have been implemented that shows charter schools have a poor record of including disabled students.\*

Charter schools tend to cherry-pick high-achieving students leaving other students, including disabled students to be catered for by an increasingly stretched public education system. The National / Act Confidence and Supply Agreement appendix outlines a typical charter school mission with a "rigorous academic focus" and a "traditional curriculum". Such a narrow focus is unlikely to be student-centered, aligned with the New Zealand Curriculum, or designed to meet the needs of a diverse student group.

Where charter schools do accept disabled students, these students are generally congregated together and segregated from other students in special schools or special classes. Such an approach in New Zealand would be completely inconsistent with the Government and Ministry of Education "Success For All" target of 100% of schools demonstrating inclusive practices by 2014. Any schools that reject disabled students would also be contradicting the Government's own policy document, the New Zealand Disability Strategy, which aims for an inclusive society and inclusive schools.

IEAG supports the call from NZEI and other education and community groups to oppose the introduction of charter schools. IEAG also endorses IHC's concerns that the charter school proposal will impact adversely on students with disabilities, and has been introduced without community consultation or a proper select committee process.

IEAG is particularly dismayed that charter schools have been proposed without any consultation with the disability and education sector. Furthermore, the Government's flagship Review of Special Education 2010 did not mention the option of charter schools, and public submissions to the review did not request charter schools. The Government should remember that the New Zealand Disability Strategy obliges it to involve disabled people in decision-making, "ensuring that disabled people have a meaningful partnership" with Government.

The educational rights of disabled students should not be jeopardized by introducing a charter school model which is highly likely to exclude or ghettoize them. Disabled students will be much better served if the Government honours its community responsibility, and its obligation under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Article 24, to build a well-resourced, inclusive public education system at all levels that meets the needs of all students.

\*(For further information about the impact of charter schools on disabled students, refer to Stanford University's CREDO research <http://credo.stanford.edu/research-reports.html> and US researcher Diane Ravitch)

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