CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this review was to outline international trends in the education of students with special educational needs (SWSEN), with the aim of informing the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s current review of special education. It focused on countries other than New Zealand, particularly the UK, the US, Australia, Canada and those in continental Europe. It is noteworthy that developments in special and inclusive education show similar trajectories across countries, especially those in the developed western world.

The review investigated a range of issues, including paradigms of special needs; definitions and categorisation; disproportionality in the populations of those identified as SWSEN, response to intervention; the nature of educational contexts, with particular reference to features arising from educational reforms; funding and resourcing, the trilogy of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy; inclusive and non-inclusive settings, teacher education, parental involvement, and universal design for learning.

It did not include early childhood or post-school sectors, behaviour services, or giftedness, as these fall outside the scope of the current review of special education.

From the international literature surveyed, the following conclusions emerged:

1. *The education of SWSEN is a complex process with many inter-related elements, most of which apply to education in general and some of which are specific to SWSEN.*

2. *Educational provisions for SWSEN should not be primarily designed to fit the student into existing systems, but rather, they should also lead to those systems being reformed so as to better accommodate diversity, i.e., education should fit the student.*

3. *Inclusive education goes far beyond the physical placement of SWSEN in general classrooms, but requires nothing less than transforming regular education by promoting positive school/classroom cultures and structures, together with evidence-based practices.*

4. *New roles for special schools, including converting them into resource centres with a range of functions replacing direct, full-time teaching of SWSEN, should be explored*
5. Educational policies and practices for SWSEN (indeed all students) should be evidence-driven and data-based, and focused on learning outcomes.

6. International trends in the education of SWSEN should be carefully studied and interpreted through the prism of local culture, values and politics to determine their relevance for New Zealand.

7. Issues in the education of SWSEN should be comprehensively researched.

8. Determining valid and reliable ways for measuring learning outcomes for SWSEN should be given high priority.

9. All decisions relating to the education of SWSEN should lead to a high standard of education for such students, as reflected in improved educational outcomes and the best possible quality of life, for example as outlined in the UK’s Every Child Matters outcomes for children and young people.

10. The rights of SWSEN to a quality education and to be treated with respect and dignity should be honoured.

11. National curricula and assessment regimes should be accessible to SWSEN, taking account of the principles of universal design for learning.

12. Educational provisions for SWSEN should emphasise prevention and early intervention prior to referral for more costly special educational services, through such processes as graduated response to intervention.

13. All educational policies should be examined to ensure that any unintended, undesirable consequences for SWSEN are identified and ameliorated.

14. Any disproportionality in groups represented in special education, especially ethnic minorities and males, should be carefully monitored and ameliorated where appropriate.

15. Partnerships with parents of SWSEN should be seen as an essential component of education for such students.

16. Collaborative approaches involving wraparound service integration for SWSEN should be planned for and the respective professionals trained for its implementation.

17. The roles of educational psychologists are going beyond the assessment and classification of SWSEN to incorporate broader pedagogical and systems-related activities, not only with such students, but also in education more generally and in community contexts.

18. Initial teacher education and ongoing professional development for teachers and other educational professionals should take account of the recent emphasis on inclusive education.

19. In order to improve the quality of education for SWSEN, leadership must be exercised throughout the education system, from legislators to school principals.

20. Finally, in order to give expression to the above conclusions, it is vital that a comprehensive national policy document, along the lines of the UK’s Code of Practice, be developed.