

Children experiencing hearing loss: new entrants



- hearing failure rates have decreased over each of the last three years, while ethnic disparities have also reduced

Indicator description

New school entrants (Year 1 students) failing hearing tests during their first year of school.

Rationale

The best evidence synthesis has identified a major negative and ongoing impact on learning for children who experience hearing loss in the early years. Hearing loss in early childhood has a significant effect on emotional, social and educational development. When a child cannot hear properly they cannot access one of the primary ways of making sense of their world.

Fluctuating hearing loss is not always easy to identify in young children. Its early detection is essential to ensure optimal development of speech and language and to minimise the longer-term effects on educational performance (Public Health Commission 1995).

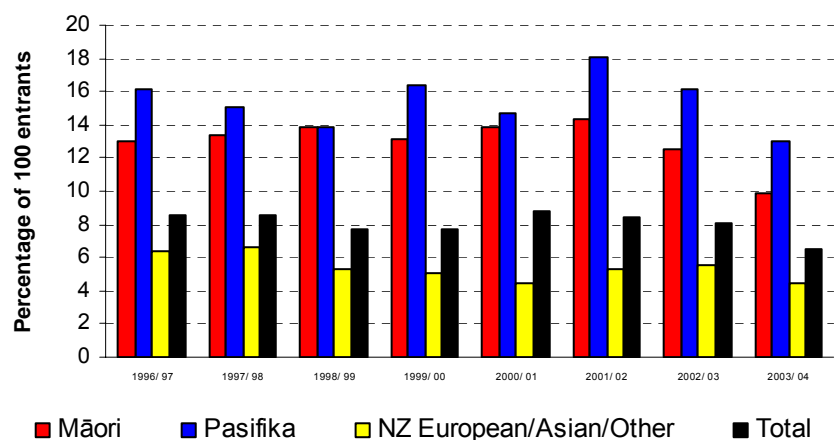
This indicator provides one context for disparities in education performance at schools between different ethnic groups.

Analysis and Discussion

Nearly all children have hearing and vision tests some time shortly after they enter primary school. Between 1991/92 and 1999/00 the national prevalence of hearing loss among new school entrants fell from 10.5% to 7.7%. Most of this decrease occurred in the early 1990s, and levels have tended to plateau in the latter part of the decade.

Latest data show that although there was an increase to 8.8% in 2000/01, rates have decreased over each of the last three years, with a national average of 6.8% in 2003/04. From 2000/01 to 2003/04, the rate for Māori children has fallen by 4 percentage points, from 13.9% to 9.9%, while the rate for Pasifika children also decreased from 14.7% to 13.1%. In contrast, there was negligible change in the rate for NZ European/Asian/Other children over the same period.

Hearing failure rates for new entrants, by ethnic group (1996/97 to 2003/04)



Note: NZ European/Other includes Asian new entrants.

In 2003/04, Māori children were more than twice as likely to fail hearing tests than NZ European/Asian/Other children, although the disparity between the rates for Māori and NZ European/Asian/Other has reduced noticeably since 2000/01. The failure rate for Pasifika children was almost 3 times that of NZ European/Asian/Other children, while this difference has also decreased over the last three years.

Earlier years comparisons led the Ministry of Health (1998, 2001) to identify the need for targeted ear health education and improved access to appropriate health services for Māori and Pasifika children, as higher risk groups.

References

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