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The Physical Disability Service

Supporting children with physical disabilities to join in and learn at school

This information sheet outlines the physiotherapy and occupational therapy that might be available for your child at school/kura if they have a physical disability. It outlines who can get this support, how to apply, what's involved and who provides it.

About the Physical Disability Service

The Ministry of Education, Special Education funds the Physical Disability Service to provide physiotherapists and occupational therapists to work with children and teachers at school. They support children with a physical disability to participate and learn alongside their peers. The service is funded by the Government and is free.

Can my child get this support?

To receive support from this service your child is likely to have difficulty with:

- ▶ moving around the classroom and moving safely around other areas of the school, as well as with using playground equipment

- ▶ taking part in learning activities, particularly physical ones, or being able to use technology, such as computers
- ▶ using pencils, pens and other tools and materials, especially if their disability is causing difficulties with their handwriting
- ▶ managing tasks, such as changing their clothes when they go swimming, pulling up or fastening clothes when going to the toilet, or with eating their morning tea or lunch.

If your child has a severe physical disability, or several disabilities, it might be better to apply to the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS). Discuss this with the school and the health or education specialists who are working with your child.

What the Physical Disability Service *does not* cover:

- ▶ support if your child is under six years old and not at school. In this case they might be able to get occupational and/or physiotherapy services through the public health service
- ▶ support if your child is already getting help through ORS
- ▶ funding for a teacher's aide or 'consumables' (small equipment items)
- ▶ speech-language therapy. Other funding is available for this – speak to your school principal or see our information sheet *The Communication Service*.

How to apply

If your child has been receiving support from a therapist from a health service, they might talk to you and the school about a referral to the Physical Disability Service.

You can also talk with your child's school yourself about applying for the service.

The school can then refer your child to our service. You and your child's school will need to fill in an application form together.

The school will have someone to work with you on the application, such as a Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO), classroom teacher or a senior staff member.

Your child's application will be sent to either Special Education or a Specialist Service Provider (SSP), depending on where you live.

Once the school has sent the application form, you and the school will get a letter confirming it has been received.

Someone might phone you or the school if they need more information.

manages tasks, such as writing and Physical Education, or how they manage in the playground

- ▶ talking about your child's needs with their teacher, you and other family members and whānau, other specialist teachers and maybe other physiotherapists or occupational therapists
- ▶ looking at any relevant records the school holds about your child
- ▶ carrying out assessments that help work out your child's physical abilities.

All the assessment information will be discussed with you. It will be used to decide what kind of therapy support, and how much, your child gets.

If you're unclear about any of the assessment process, please ask. You're entitled to know what's happening with your child and to feel comfortable with it.

About Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

Most children receiving the Physical Disability Service will have an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

You and those working with your child will meet to develop your child's IEP. Talk with your child's school about who you want at IEP meetings – you can have as few or as many people there as you wish. You'll play a very important part in this team because you're the person who knows your child best and what's happening in their life.

During this meeting you will be able to talk with the team about your child's strengths so that you can set short- and long-term goals together. The team will develop a written plan for your child. This will outline

If your child's disability is the result of an accident they might be able to get support from the Physical Disability Service if they are not already getting occupational therapy or physiotherapy through the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC). ACC and the Ministry of Education might work together to provide support.

What happens next

- ▶ A therapist from the Physical Disability Service will contact you. They will explain how the service works and arrange to visit the school and to meet with you and your child.
- ▶ You will be asked to sign a consent form that gives permission for Ministry staff to work with your child. The consent form explains how private information about your

child will be protected. It also has information on what to do if you want to make a complaint.

- ▶ A therapist will do an assessment of your child's needs, based on the information provided in your application.
- ▶ There might also be a service agreement that identifies the goals and priorities for the support your child will receive, the resources that are needed and timeframes and responsibilities of everyone involved.

Working out what support your child needs

A physiotherapist and/or occupational therapist will assess your child's needs. They might do this by:

- ▶ watching your child doing everyday school activities. They might look at how your child

their goals and what the therapist/s, you, and your child's teachers need to do to support your child to reach those goals. The plan will include information on the time it's likely to take for your child to reach their goals and any resources or special equipment your child needs.

Your child's IEP should be reviewed at least twice a year as the support team around the child agrees, but must be current and reflect ongoing planning. This should be done in a meeting between you and those working with your child. This meeting will record your child's learning progress and what their next goals will be. You will receive a copy of the updated plan after each meeting.

Support available through the service

Depending on your child's needs, they might get occupational therapy and/or physiotherapy.

Therapists use a number of different approaches. They will talk with everyone involved and use the strategies and programmes which best fit your child's needs.

This could mean providing training and ideas to everyone working with your child about ways to make sure your child is included in all class activities.

The therapist might also talk with you and the school about changes that might need to be made to buildings, such as classrooms and the library. For example, doorways might need to be widened or ramps and handrails built so that your child is able to get to all the areas of the school.

Questions you might have

Q: What if my child already gets support through the Health Service?

A: The work of education and health specialists often overlaps. They will work together to look at the best way to meet your child's needs. Your child might be able to receive support from both. Therapists working for the Health Service might have a different focus on your child and how they develop their physical abilities.

Q: If my child has a private therapist can they still get support from this service?

A: Yes, they might – if the private therapist is helping with a different aspect of your child's needs and not working on the same area as the Physical Disability Service therapist.

Q: What role do parents and teachers have?

A: When you apply for support, you and the teachers will need to provide information on how each of you see your child's physical difficulties getting in the way of their ability to join in and learn along with other children. You will both need to be prepared to work on the goals set by the team and to provide opportunities for your child to practise new skills at school and at home.

The best results will come when everyone works together to support your child to reach their goals.

Q: Will my child get teacher's aide support?

A: The Physical Disability Service does not pay for teacher's

aide support. However, when your school applies for this service, they agree to support the programme the therapist/s suggests. All schools get a Special Education Grant to spend on supporting students with moderate special education needs. The school might use this grant to pay a teacher's aide to support your child's programme.

Funding for a teacher's aide might also be available through the Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTL) cluster.

Q: What's the difference between a physiotherapist and an occupational therapist?

A: A physiotherapist works on your child's ability to stand and sit, move within the school, play in the playground and take part in the physical education programme. They might suggest ways activities or equipment might be changed so your child can take part. They can also recommend special equipment, such as walking frames, to help your child move around more freely.

Occupational therapists are involved when a physical disability affects writing and the use of tools, such as scissors, access to technology and personal care skills such as eating, dressing and toileting. They can also recommend or provide special equipment or changes that will help your child with these activities.

Q: What if my child's application is turned down?

A: You can talk to your child's teacher or principal about what

other forms of support the school can offer.

Schools receive a Special Education Grant that they can use to support children with special education needs. They can spend this in a variety of ways – on resources, teacher training and teacher's aide time and on individual students or groups of students.

Your school can also talk to you about a referral to Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) who are employed by groups of schools. RTLB are trained teachers who work with children experiencing learning or behaviour difficulties. They can work with teachers, giving them

special training or they can work with individual children or groups of children.

If your child has a *severe* physical disability or several disabilities, it might be better to apply to the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (see our information sheet *The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme*).

Q: How long does the support continue?

A: Your child will have been given a certain amount of support from the Physical Disability Service. This will have been agreed with you and the school and recorded in the Service Agreement.

The therapist will review your child's progress and will discuss this with you and their teachers to decide if their support needs to continue.

Children grow and develop differently. At various times in their life your child might need more support than at other times. The school can re-apply for support if you and the teachers feel your child needs further help or if their situation changes.

If you re-apply you will only need to provide information about what has changed or is new since the last application.

Contact us

If you're unclear about any part of our service or have questions about the support your child receives, please ask. Start by talking with those who work most closely with your child. You can also talk with staff at your local Special Education office or call the Special Education information line on 0800 622 222.

You can get more detailed special education information on our website: www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/YourChild/SupportForYourChild/ExtraSupport.

If you're deaf or have a hearing impairment, you can also contact Special Education through the New Zealand Relay Service on 0800 4 711 711 or go to www.nzrelay.co.nz.

Your feedback is important. By letting us know what's going well – and what we can do better – we can improve what we do to support all children with special education needs.

Contact details for the people supporting my child:

My local Special Education office:

New Zealand Government

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