

The Impact of NZSL@School: Raising Deaf Learners' achievement through bilingual/bicultural teaching practices.

The inclusion of deaf learners who use New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), in the mainstream presents serious challenges to schools to cater for these students' learning, communication and cultural needs. A major concern for these learners is the lack of daily, ongoing and fluent NZSL services enjoyed by learners enrolled in the Deaf Education Centres (DECs) particularly given the ratification of the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 and the release of 'A New Era in the Right to Sign' by the Human Rights Commission in 2013, highlighting the challenges deaf learners face. The Ministry of Education and the Combined Board of Kelston DEC and van Asch DEC has addressed some of the challenges inherent in the report, by launching the NZSL@School Initiative in mid 2014 with the government announcing \$11m of new funding for a package of NZSL programmes for 2014-2018. The stated purpose of NZSL@School is to support schools in the creation of learning environments so that deaf children, whose primary face-to-face language is NZSL, achieve educationally at the same level as their hearing peers and are confident and secure in who they are as a deaf person. This presentation examines the impact that NZSL@School has had on deaf learners since its inception. By exploring the experiences of deaf students, their whanau, and the staff involved in this initiative, we aim to document the range of support that is being provided, the challenges that still exist and our plans for the future of NZSL@School to continue to grow and evolve to meet the needs of deaf students, their whanau, and their schools.

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