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**Special Education 2000**  
**The Implementation Experience**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Social Policy  
at Massey University.

**Roderick Wills**  
**2003**

For the parents of children with special educational needs who want the right  
to an inclusive education to become a reality.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Olive and Cliff.

## **Abstract**

Since 1877 the state has provided free, secular and compulsory education for most of the children of school age in New Zealand. In 1989 legislation was passed that gave the right to enrol and attend at the local school to all children. For more than one hundred years children with disabilities and special educational needs were supported in a piecemeal fashion. The influences and practices from the medical discourse often dominated their education and services when they were available.

With the passage into law of a right to an education in the mainstream for all children the state accepted the responsibility for the full range of students with special educational needs. At the same time as passing into law the opportunities for these children the Fourth Labour Government was initiating major reforms in education administration. The Education Act 1989 made provision for the governance of schools by locally elected Boards of Trustees. In 1995 after a hiatus with no special education policy for an interval of almost six years the policy Special Education 2000 was announced. This policy programme was to complete the work of education reform commenced under *Tomorrow's Schools*. The feature of this was to be the shift in responsibility for the education of students with special educational needs from the Ministry of Education to local school Boards of Trustees.

This study examines the experiences of a small group of stakeholders as they implement the policies of Special Education 2000. Four secondary school principals participated in interviews that complemented policy analysis as part of this study. The outcomes of implementation varied for the participants. For two of them the policies appeared to offer continuity and opportunity to extend school services for students with high and very high special educational needs. For the other two this was not the case and a redirection or cessation of services appeared to be the outcome of the new policies.

The findings of this study pinpoint the issues arising from the selection of policy instruments to implement and achieve policy goals, difficulties are identified due to a mismatch between the two.

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