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**MAKING DECISIONS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF
FACTORS AFFECTING DECISION MAKING PROCESSES
FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS OF STUDENTS WITH
SPECIAL NEEDS**

A thesis submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education (Special Education) Massey University
Palmerston North
New Zealand

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1998

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Karen McLachlan

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the experiences and perspectives of parents and caregivers and professionals in the education of students with special needs. Special education is reviewed and the move towards parent-professional partnerships is examined. In the past, there has been little critical evaluation of the role of parents in educational decision-making. This study recognises the difficulties encountered by parents, caregivers and professionals in creating efficient partnerships. Without documenting the experiences of the people significantly concerned in the education of children with special needs, many erroneous assumptions may be made.

The study involves using semi-structured interview questions to record the narratives of 21 parents and caregivers of children with special needs and 7 professionals. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with each person. The findings suggested that whilst professionals considered their open approach enabled parents and caregivers to be fully informed, comments made by parents contradicted this view. Many parents expressed feelings of isolation and neglect as they remained ignorant of educational decisions and starved of information. Comments by participants are used to illustrate significant themes which emerged from the interviews.

A participant questionnaire summarises relevant issues derived from the interview questions and provides the data presented in computer generated charts. In most cases, the responses indicated agreement with the statements.

An analysis of the data shows many parents and caregivers have not been included in significant aspects of their child's education. Although there are compelling reasons for their non-participation, if recent educational policy aims to include students and their families in educational decision-making, there is much work to be done by educators to foster effective parent/professional partnerships.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

i)	Declaration	i
ii)	Abstract	ii
iii)	Acknowledgements	iii
iv)	Table of Contents	iv
x)	List of Tables	x
 CHAPTER ONE – Introduction		 1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Background to the Study	3
1.3	Organisation of the Thesis	5
 CHAPTER TWO – Literature Review		 6
2.1	Introduction	6
2.2	Special Education	8
2.3	Partnership and Parents	12
2.4	Implications for the Present Research	18
2.5	Research Questions	20
 CHAPTER THREE – Methodology		 21
3.1	Introduction	21
3.2	Ethical Requirements	21
3.3.	Recruitment of Participants	22

3.4	Data Gathering	23
3.5	In-depth Individual Interviews	25
3.6	The Purpose of Individual Interviews	26
3.7	Agenda of Topics	27
3.8	The Interview Environment	27
3.9	Interview Structure, Content and Process	27
3.10	Analysis of Narrative Data	29
3.11	Summary	30
CHAPTER FOUR – Results		31
4.1	Introduction	31
4.2	Section 1: Results of Parent Interviews and Questionnaires	32
4.2.1	Statement 1: I feel that I take an effective part in my child's education	32
4.2.2	Statement 2: I am fully involved in making decisions about educational programmes for my child	32
4.2.3	Statement 3: I have been told about a variety of educational options and choices for my child	33
4.2.4	Statement 4: I have made decisions based on the information I have been given	33
4.2.5	Statement 5: My expectations about my child's education have been met	34
4.2.6	Statement 6: I have helped my child achieve success at school	34
4.2.7	Statement 7: Special education provides the best educational opportunities available for my child	35
4.2.8	Statement 8: I have a positive relationship with teachers	36
4.2.9	Statement 9: Teachers communicate with me mainly when there are problems with my child at school	36

4.2.10	Statement 10: I am satisfied with the level of involvement in my child's education	37
4.2.11	Statement 11: I am actively involved in the IEP process	37
4.2.12	Statement 12: The advice given by teachers has been helpful	38
4.3	Section 2: Results of Professional Interviews and Questionnaires	39
4.3.1	Statement 1: The parents of the students with whom I am involved take an active part in their child's education	39
4.3.2	Statement 2: I fully involve parents when making educational decisions about their child	39
4.3.3	Statement 3: I inform parents about a variety of educational options and choices available for their child	40
4.3.4	Statement 4: Parents have made decisions based on the information I have given them	40
4.3.5	Statement 5: I feel that I am aware of parental expectations regarding their child's education	41
4.3.6	Statement 6: I feel that I meet parental expectations regarding their child's education	41
4.3.7	Statement 7: Parental participation helps their child to achieve success at school	42
4.3.8	Statement 8: For students with special needs, the 'advantages' of special education outweigh the 'disadvantages'	42
4.3.9	Statement 9: I have a positive relationship with parents	43
4.3.10	Statement 10: I communicate with parents mainly when there are problems with their child at school	44
4.3.11	Statement 11: I am satisfied with the extent of parents' participation in their child's education	44
4.3.12	Statement 12: I actively involve parents in meetings to discuss the progress of their child	45

4.3.13	Statement 13: Parents fulfil the expectations I have of them regarding the education of their child	45
CHAPTER FIVE – Interviews		47
5.1	Introduction	47
5.2	Research Questions for and Comments by Parents	47
5.2.1	How did you and your child become involved in special education?	47
5.2.2	In what ways do you think that special education provides the best educational opportunities for your child?	53
5.2.3	What have been the benefits of special education for you/your son/your daughter?	55
5.2.4	Would you have considered a regular class placement for your child? Why?/Why not?	56
5.2.5	What do you consider to be the ‘disadvantages’ of special education?	59
5.2.6	On what occasions do teachers contact you regarding school and your child?	61
5.2.7	How do you view your relationship with teachers	63
5.2.8	What information have you been given about educational options and choices for (your child)?	68
5.2.9	What have been/are your expectations/goals for your son/daughter?	77
5.3	Research Questions for and Comments by Professionals	81
5.3.1	To what extent do you think parents should be involved in their child’s education?	81
5.3.2	How are parents approached to become involved in school-based activities?	83
5.3.3	In what way(s) do you involve parents when making educational decisions about their children?	84

5.3.4	What do you consider to be the reason(s) for parents' participation or their non-participation in the education of their children?	86
5.3.5	How and for what reasons do you communicate with parents?	88
5.3.6	Do you consider parents to be well-informed about the options and choices available to them?	90
5.3.7	In what way(s) do parents fulfil the expectations you have of them regarding the education of their child?	92
5.3.8	What do you consider to be critical factors in establishing positive relationships with parents?	94
5.3.9	For students with special needs, what do you consider to be the 'advantages' of special education?	95
5.3.10	How do you view your role as a teacher of students with special needs?	101
5.3.11	In what way(s) do you support the parents of your students?	102
5.3.12	What would you consider to be the major concerns of parents?	102
CHAPTER SIX – Discussion		104
6.1	Introduction	104
6.2	Interpretation of Themes	104
6.2.1	Reasons for placing children in special education	104
6.2.2	Parents' concerns about teachers	107
6.2.3	Teachers' concerns about parents	109
6.2.4	Why don't parents come to school?	111
6.2.5	Supporting parents	114
6.2.6	Supporting teachers	117
6.2.7	Family relationships and personal adjustment	118
6.2.8	Battles with bureaucracy	121

6.2.9	Culture and ethnicity	122
6.2.10	Listening to parents	125
6.3	Summary	126
CHAPTER SEVEN – Conclusion and Personal Reflective Evaluation		129
7.1	Introduction	129
7.2	The Aim of the Research	129
7.3	Conclusion	130
7.4	Personal Reflective Evaluation	132
REFERENCES		138
APPENDICES		144
A	Information Sheet for Parents and Caregivers	144
B	Information Sheet for Professionals	146
C	Invitation to Parents and Caregivers to Participate	148
D	Invitation to Professionals to Participate	149
E	Thank-you and Reminder Note	150
F	Confidentiality Agreement Between Participant and Interpreter	151
G	Consent Form for Participants	152
H	Interview Questions for Parents and Caregivers	153
I	Interview Questions for Professionals	154
J	Questionnaire for Parents and Caregivers	155
K	Questionnaire for Professionals	156

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER FOUR

Table 1	Parent Survey Statement 1: I feel that I take an effective part in my child's education	32
Table 2	Parent Survey Statement 2: I am fully involved in making decisions about educational programmes for my child	33
Table 3	Parent Survey Statement 3: I have been told about a variety of educational options and choices for my child	33
Table 4	Parent Survey Statement 4: I have made decisions based on the information I have been given	34
Table 5	Parent Survey Statement 5: My expectations about my child's education have been met	34
Table 6	Parent Survey Statement 6: I have helped my child achieve success at school	35
Table 7	Parent Survey Statement 7: Special education provides the best educational opportunities available for my child	35
Table 8	Parent Survey Statement 8: I have a positive relationship with teachers	36
Table 9	Parent Survey Statement 9: Teachers communicate with me mainly when there are problems with my child at school	37
Table 10	Parent Survey Statement 10: I am satisfied with the level of involvement in my child's education	37
Table 11	Parent Survey Statement 11: I am actively involved in the IEP process	38
Table 12	Parent Survey Statement 12: The advice given by teachers has been helpful	38
Table 13	Teacher Survey Statement 1: The parents of the students with whom I am involved take an active part in their child's education	39

Table 14	Teacher Survey Statement 2: I fully involve parents when making educational decisions about their child	40
Table 15	Teacher Survey Statement 3: I inform parents about a variety of educational options and choices available for their child	40
Table 16	Teacher Survey Statement 4: Parents have made decisions based on the information I have given them	41
Table 17	Teacher Survey Statement 5: I feel that I am aware of parental expectations regarding their child's education	41
Table 18	Teacher Survey Statement 6: I feel that I meet parental expectations regarding their child's education	42
Table 19	Teacher Survey Statement 7: Parental participation helps their child to achieve success at school	42
Table 20	Teacher Survey Statement 8: For students with special needs, the 'advantages' of special education outweigh the 'disadvantages'	43
Table 21	Teacher Survey Statement 9: I have a positive relationship with parents	43
Table 22	Teacher Survey Statement 10: I communicate with parents mainly when there are problems with their child at school	44
Table 23	Teacher Survey Statement 11: I am satisfied with the extent of parents' participation in their child's education	45
Table 24	Teacher Survey Statement 12: I actively involve parents in meetings to discuss the progress of their child	45
Table 25	Professional Survey Statement 13: Parents fulfil the expectations I have of them regarding the education of their child	46

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Special education has traditionally been viewed as a system which catered for the needs of children with disabilities more effectively than did the established form of education. Children with disabilities were isolated and routinely segregated from their peers to provide them with educational and related services directed at enhancing their schooling. Efforts were made to cater for individual characteristics and need by adapting and designing appropriate alternatives and it was this regard for individual difference which made it 'special' education.

The process of educating students with disabilities has evolved from being distinctively separate, characterised by classification and labelling, to an increasing concern that different educational requirements do not justify exclusion from ordinary classrooms. A changing focus on instructional planning and teaching to cater more effectively for individual learning characteristics have implications for understanding the process of learning and for improving educational practices (Fraser, 1995).

Disenchantment with overseas educational practices led to an investigation into prevailing educational practices. There were increasing demands for children with

disabilities to be included with their peers to the greatest extent possible. In New Zealand a liberal interpretation of integrated schooling was characterised by a variety of educational settings. Since 1986, there have been increasing demands to end the segregated nature of education and to include all students in the mainstream of regular education. Recent policies in New Zealand have continued to work towards a more equitable form of education and, although opinions differ about the merits of segregated and inclusive education, have made it possible for students to attend a state school of their choice within their local area. Although legislation allows them to do otherwise, the Ministry of Education continues to give parents the choice of special or regular education.

Previously, parents of children with disabilities were encouraged to place them in institutions at an early age. Parents were seldom included in any form of decision-making. Over recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the role of parents as partners in their child's education. More recently, the New Zealand Ministry of Education has expressed its intention that one of the major aims in *Special Education 2000* (1996a) is to include families and, wherever possible, the student in a partnership with teachers and other professionals to enable all parties to make informed choices and decisions.

One of the main principles of *Special Education 2000* (1996a), is the importance placed on effective partnerships between parents, teachers and schools. Despite the intentions of this document however, there remains some crucial issues about the meanings of "partnership" and the desire of parents to actively participate in educational decision making. The Ministry of Education recognises the right of parents to choose regular education or special education placement. Moreover, some parents may choose not to be involved in educational partnerships to the extent that current policies intend. Accordingly, the present study was undertaken with the aim of examining the experiences and perceptions of parents whose children had been educated in a separate special education unit.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This study was designed to explore the perspectives and experiences of parents and the teachers of their children with disabilities who attend a special educational facility within the confines of a large co-educational secondary school in South Auckland.

The researcher's interest in the study stems from a professional background as a teacher with experience in working with students with special needs from predominantly minority groups at primary, intermediate and secondary level. The initial interest in working with students with special needs arose from being given the opportunity to work in an area of education about which there was minimal knowledge and understanding on the part of the researcher. Greater exposure, by way of professional development, to the notions such as the least restrictive environment, human rights, mainstreaming, inclusion, action research and research as stories led to a desire to investigate the perspectives of parents of students with special needs and of the professionals who teach them.

There was a desire to study the beliefs and practices of parents and teachers, to ascertain that parents are informed of the choices and options available, to regard the involvement of minority groups in special education and to consider the factors involved in parent/teacher relationships.

The intention of this study was to understand, by a process of reflection and critical analysis, more about the involvement of parents and caregivers and the decisions made by them with regard to the education of their children with special needs.

From a total school population of 1145 students, the 63 students within the special education facility at the college selected for the study, comprise one of the largest facilities for secondary school students with special needs in New Zealand. Each of the 63 students has a Section 9 agreement with the Ministry of Education which entitles them to resources based on their individual need as determined by previous psychological assessments carried out by the Specialist Education Services (SES).

The students come from multi-racial community which includes Samoan, Asian, Indian, New Zealand Maori, Tongan, Cook Island Maori, New Zealand European, Niuean, Fijian, Bosnian and Chilean families. The students are included in age-appropriate Year levels as they are throughout the school. Year 9 is the first year at secondary school and Year 13 is the equivalent of Form 7. For a maximum of 8 hours a week, the students attend 'Option' classes (e.g. home economics, art, music, metal work), physical education and Maori with students from the wider school. The students attend these classes with the support of one teacher aide for approximately 3-4 people. The core subjects of English, mathematics, science and social studies are taught within the department for approximately 16 hours a week at each level.

The department is staffed by 2 teachers at a teacher/student ratio of 1:15, 3 teachers at 1:9 and 8 teacher aides. Other students are added to the roll as 'grace and favour' students as space allows. The grace and favour students include those identified within the school with behavioural and/or academic difficulties and those awaiting a psychological assessment.

As some of the research reviewed in this thesis suggests, there are issues concerning the extent to which parents and caregivers are listened to, considered or consulted by teachers when educational programming and/or planning decisions are made about their child(ren). Many parents and caregivers may also lack information about the options which are available to them and rely on the expertise of professionals to determine the most appropriate placement for their child(ren). It was the intention of this study to listen to and to document the experiences of parents and caregivers in the education of their children. It was also the intention of this study to interview teachers and professionals involved with these students and to document their experiences.

As Ballard (1995) points out, disability is a community issue and therefore an issue for all people. "We can either try to be part of the solution or remain part of the problem" (p.2). It was a decision to try to be part of the solution that underpinned this research.

1.3 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

A brief description of the contents of each chapter is presented below.

Chapter 1 describes the significance of the topic and provides an introduction and the background to the study.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review which briefly traces the development of segregated special education to the notion of full inclusion. The literature includes information on the development of the role of parents in the education of their children and the difficulties faced by people of minority groups.

The rationale for selection of the research perspective used in the present study is outlined along with a statement of the overall aim and specific research objectives.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the method and procedures used throughout the data collection.

Chapter 4 presents the quantitative results of the study obtained from questionnaires completed by parents and professionals.

Chapter 5 presents comments taken from parent and professional interviews organised under several major themes as interpreted by the researcher. The comments serve to present thoughts, feelings and experiences to highlight some of the issues which concerned the participants.

Chapter 6 discusses the main findings in relation to the research questions

Chapter 7 reviews the extent to which the thesis was successful in achieving its aim and realising the specific research objectives. This chapter discusses the adequacy of the research method and the limitations of the study and concludes with a personal and reflective evaluation by the researcher.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The New Zealand Ministry of Education implemented new policies known as *Special Education 2000* (Ministry of Education, 1996a) and *Special Education 2000: The Special Education Grant* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) in recognition of international trends toward more inclusive schooling. The development of this new policy recognises different levels of education and support needs and the crucial role of parents and caregivers in education.

Recognising the need to increase parental involvement in education, the aim of *Special Education 2000* was to achieve “improved educational outcomes”, by offering “information, education and specialist support to assist families, schools and teachers achieve the best possible learning environment for all students with special education needs” (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p.5). Although parents have long been considered vital components in supporting their child’s education, there is now increasing appreciation that families are diverse in nature, comprising one or more parents with varying degrees of nuclear through extended family structure. There are interactions between siblings and, in many cases, the additional children of blended families. Often both parents are working and school-aged children may be cared for by grandparents, aunts or uncles.

By making resourcing transferable, *Special Education 2000* (Ministry of Education, 1996a) aims to provide families with opportunities to choose schools which offer appropriate educational facilities; to promote greater family involvement through the IEP process; to assure access to appropriate advice and support; and to include children with disabilities in decisions affecting his or her education.

Special Education 2000 (Ministry of Education, 1996a), acknowledges that, in the past, many parents lacked an understanding of their rights to choose an educational placement for their child. The new policy aims to provide adequate resourcing to enable every school to offer an appropriate education for all students.

Significant features of both publications recognise the importance of the child and his or her family in the decision-making process and the critical nature of effective parent/teacher partnerships to ensure effective education.

The literature in this section is chosen to explore the following propositions:

- * That inclusive education in a regular classroom rather than segregated special education is the preferred option.
- * That legislation has enabled parents to be active in choosing and influencing their child's education,
- * That partnerships between parents and professionals enhance the education of children with disabilities

2.2 SPECIAL EDUCATION

Special education is dynamic, evolving and controversial. It has grown from an initial assumption that some children required an education different to that being provided in ordinary classes to legislation which enables parents to choose an education best suited to the needs of their son or daughter.

In the early 1900s, those children not in special education classes and able to cope in their community, were in isolated segregated institutions, died from lack of care or were hidden away by their families to avoid discrimination and prejudice. By 1948, only 12% of all children with disabilities in the United States received special education and by 1962, only 16 states required 'educable mentally retarded' children to attend school. In most states, children with disabilities were not allowed to attend school and those with more severe disabilities were routinely excluded until the 1970s. "Children without disabilities were required to attend school under compulsory attendance laws; children *with* disabilities were *prevented* from attending school." (Smith & Luckasson, 1995, p.21).

Towards the end of the 1960s, Bent Nirje introduced the philosophical principle of normalisation which advocated the same educational opportunities for everyone. Based on the principle of equality of human rights, normalisation advocated justice, tolerance and acceptance. Normalisation emphasised respect for the individual and the right to be different. A later interpretation of the normalisation principle by Wolfensberger and Thomas (1983), suggested that people with disabilities should somehow be made to conform to an imposed standard of values in order to appear 'normal'. A major impact of this approach looked at environmental factors which denied some people full participation in the social and economic life of their community rather than by seeking out so-called deficits within the person as reasons for their segregation (Mitchell & Mitchell, 1987).

During the 1970s, educational practices for children with disabilities were challenged by parents (and their lawyers) who maintained that such children were denied 'equal treatment' (Minow, 1990, p. 20). There were objections to the continued exclusion of

students from regular classrooms and mounting pressure sought their integration into mainstream classrooms. However, New Zealand legislation appeared to totally ignore the issue of integration. Mitchell and Mitchell (1987) note that the Education Act of 1964 did not require the state to provide an education for children with disabilities, let alone include them in any form of education with their peers.

With the development of normalisation, increased dissatisfaction with separate systems of education in the United States, culminated in the passing of PL94-142, The Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA - now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). EHA established the right of all children to receive an appropriate education and became the underlying theme of the least restrictive environment (LRE). The concept of LRE suggested the integration of children with disabilities with their peers and inclusion in the mainstream of society.

Controversy surrounded the implementation of the LRE. Suggestions for students with disabilities ranged from full integration in regular classrooms, to a mixture of inclusion and separate schooling, to entirely separate education (Smith & Luckasson, 1995). Minow (1990) spoke of the “dilemma of difference” (p.20). On one hand, special education was the legal solution to the question of equality and its proponents clamoured for inclusion. On the other hand, pullout and/or enrichment programmes enabled gifted and talented students to be with a homogeneous group. As Minow (1990) asks, “when does treating people differently emphasis their differences and stigmatise or hinder them on that basis? and when does treating people the same become insensitive to their differences and likely to stigmatise them or hinder them on *that* basis?” (p.20).

Although not mentioned in PL94-142, the greatest influence of normalisation and the LRE was the promotion of mainstreaming. In spite of the fact that the law did not mention ‘mainstreaming’, the term became synonymous with the legal requirement that students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (Skrtic, 1995).

In New Zealand, mainstreaming has been the subject of continuing debate. The *Draft Review of Special Education* (Department of Education, 1987) made a statement concerning non-categorical assessment – yet proposed three alternative categories of segregation – locational, functional and social. However, there was no indication of change to the organisational structure of schools and classrooms to achieve this. In 1988, a supplement to the Education Gazette (Department of Education), defined mainstreaming as being education in a regular school setting – although not necessarily in a regular classroom.

Since 1989, special education in New Zealand has undergone dramatic change. The basis of educational reforms contained in the government document, ‘*Tomorrow’s Schools*’ (Lange, 1988) and outlined in the *Picot Report* (Picot, 1988), focussed on principles of equity, economy, efficiency, effectiveness and quality. The Picot Taskforce abolished the Department of Education and district Education Boards and established a small group of policy makers – the Ministry of Education. Schools, through their Boards of Trustees, became responsible for controlling resources within guidelines set out by the Ministry of Education. Partnerships were established between teachers and their schools’ communities which enabled schools to establish their own objectives to reflect community needs.

In the United States, the Regular Education Initiative (REI) evolved from the mainstreaming activities of the 1980s and suggested a merger between special and regular education into one system. Theoretically, all children would gain equal access and opportunities for academic success in a system which took account of individual difference and provided educational programmes suitable for their needs. Widespread controversy continues to fuel the debate. Andrews and Lupart (1993) point out that although a separate system of education was introduced to cater for students who had ‘failed’ in regular education, Forest and Lusthaus (1989) insist there is no rationale for the continued exclusion of students with special needs from regular classrooms.

Minow (1990) asserts that special needs are a direct result of difference which may be posed “as a choice between integration and separation, as a choice between similar treatment and special treatment or as a choice between neutrality and accommodation”

(pp. 20-21). Minow (1990) questions whether schools fulfil their obligations to provide equal opportunities by including all students in the same classroom, or by offering some students special programmes adapted to accommodate their individual needs. It appears to be not the different programmes which complicate matters, but the way in which society assigns labels and categories to people and uses them as a rationale for inclusion or exclusion. Perhaps it is because activities have been designed with the included participants in mind which appears to exclude those because of something to do with their innate characteristics (Minow, 1990).

Until recently, attention focused on differences between students rather than on similarities among them. Society determines the desirable and prestigious qualities it deems valuable. People who apparently lack certain attributes are devalued and become the focus of negative attitudes. However, their difference is a socially created concept (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988). Inclusive education rejects the discriminatory notion that there are two classes of students, one labelled 'disabled', the other labelled 'normal'. Cole and Chan (1990), maintain that an education which is inclusive, rejects all forms of discriminatory educational practice and aims to create an atmosphere of mutual respect.

As Lipsky and Gartner (1996) assert, inclusive education is not common practice. Most students with disabilities continue to be educated in separate settings. Proponents of inclusion are not indicative of universal support as some people remain committed to separate settings. There are fears that the needs of some particular groups will not be met, that inclusion is a money-saving strategy and that teachers will not be provided adequate resources to make the regular education setting appropriate for students with disabilities. Gerber (1996) points out that once parents and schools are in agreement with an educational programme, the LRE requires schools to provide that programme in an environment that is different from regular classrooms only to the degree necessary. In essence this is what inclusionists propose – the opportunity to learn in the same classroom as students without disabilities (Gerber, 1996).

Although Falvey (1995) recognises that inclusive education “simultaneously reflects and pushes forward human rights and personalised educational philosophy and practice for everyone” (p. 3), not every parent wishes their child in a regular classroom (Cole &

Chan, 1990). For some parents, an inclusive education would return their child to a system of education which had failed to address their individual need. Why should they return to a system which had previously failed them? However, Lipsky and Gartner (1996) maintain that fully inclusive settings, with appropriate aids and support services is the “*necessary* requirement for equity for students with disabilities.” (p. 154).

2.3 PARTNERSHIP AND PARENTS

It has become important that parents are informed of the choices and options available regarding special and regular education as over the past decade, there has been much serious debate, both within New Zealand and overseas about the separatist practices of regular and special education. In the past, parents were viewed as “passive consumers” (Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart, 1996, p. 42) of educational services. They may have been involved in decisions about appropriate placement and suitable programmes, but generally parents were “receivers of information” (Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart, 1996, p. 42). In some cases parents were told about decisions made for and about their children. In other cases, they remained ignorant.

As Fraser (1995) asserts, the main purpose of partnerships in education is for parents, teachers and other professionals to work together for the benefit of the student. In order to achieve this, there must be feelings of trust, respect and honesty on the part of all concerned. With the rapidly changing structure of society, and the effects on families and schools, it is becoming increasingly important to provide stability and support for students to enable them to achieve the best results possible. Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart (1996), assert that it is the responsibility of educators to encourage parents to offer information and ideas.

Russell (1996) traces various phases in the evolution in the parent/professional relationship from “the professional as expert”, to “the transplant method”, followed by “the consumer model” (p.238). Where the professional was regarded as the expert, parents were seen as problems, as adversaries, in need of treatment themselves, or as causing their child’s difficulties. Parents needed to be kept at a distance while professionals used their expertise to take control over what needed to be done.

The 'transplant' method, which evolved during the 1970s, had professionals attempting to extend their skills and expertise into the home by informing parents as to methods of instruction which would support school programmes. Parents were told what to do rather than have their opinions considered. The development of the consumer model marked the beginning of true partnership. There was a shift in power from the professional to the parent and the relationship was characterised by a shared sense of purpose, a willingness to negotiate, a sharing of information, decision-making and responsibility.

In addition to the provision of a free and appropriate education for children with disabilities, the EHA recognised the critical role that parents played in determining relevant programmes for their children (Thousand, Villa & Nevin, 1994). In the United States, parental demands and litigation (PL94-142) resulted in the "revised and reauthorized" Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 which extended the right to parents to be involved in their child's education (Christensen & Rizvi, 1996, p.166). IDEA specifically provides parents the right to make decisions about placement and programming and a specific procedure where they can present concerns or complaints (Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart, 1996). Although the major intent of the law may be consultation and meaningful involvement of parents, the development of effective partnerships is not always easy.

The philosophy of parents as partners was promoted by the Warnock Report of 1978 and became a central feature of the Education Act of 1981 (Galloway, Armstrong & Tomlinson, 1994). However, members of the committee who formulated the Warnock Report demonstrated the dominance of professional views on the education of students with disabilities. Although parents might be welcome as partners, they could not be expected to have the necessary knowledge or experience to make any significant contribution. The professionals knew best (Galloway, Armstrong & Tomlinson, 1994). In some cases, the contributions of parents are deemed by teachers to be "inappropriate, inadequate or deficient" (Beveridge, 1993, p.115). All too often, parents have felt themselves excluded or left in the dark (Galloway, Armstrong & Tomlinson, 1994). Parents are seen to be part of the problem rather than as being supportive in encouraging their child's progress.

Regardless of legislation which enables parents and caregivers of children with special needs to select an appropriate educational placement for their child(ren), some parents remain largely uninvolved in the process. Safran and Safran (as cited in Rainforth, York, & Macdonald, 1992) noted several factors which may contribute to parental hesitancy in taking a role in their child's education. Some of the reasons included;

- i) negative personal experiences at school.
- ii) an unfamiliarity with the school culture.
- iii) the high levels of energy expended in caring for their child with disabilities and other children may leave little desire to become further involved.
- iv) parents consider their child is in the hands of a competent professional and that they lack the expertise to make significant decisions.
- v) they do not wish to.

Effective communication is the precursor for developing a positive relationship between parents and teachers. Although the telephone is the most often used form of communication, all too often it is used to report negative aspects of children's behaviour and/or activities. Conveying positive aspects will maintain a more productive communication and parents will be more likely to ring if the teacher has set the tone with regular calls home (Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart, 1996).

Too often, the most common form of written communication in schools is directed from the teacher. This allows little feedback and is perhaps the least beneficial method for parents who may lack an educational background or familiarity with English (Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart, 1996) Alternative practical suggestions to written weekly/monthly newsletters or messages include home visits, parent support groups, taped home/school diaries, folders of completed work and family events. School initiatives should reach beyond those who respond to the 'ordinary' invitations, especially those who are not fluent speakers of English and those who fear or are unfamiliar with the school environment (Carpenter, Ashdown & Bovair, 1996).

The main purpose for establishing partnerships in education is to provide effective programmes for students. Parents know their child better than anyone else and it must become the responsibility of teachers to "actively listen" to parents and to respect their

experiences and values (Fraser, 1995, p.81). Fraser (1995) suggests that, although it takes time to reach an empathetic understanding of the requirements of each family, listening can “enrich a teacher’s understanding and make the teacher more effective in forming partnerships with parents” (p.89). Parents’ willingness to work with the school will be greatly influenced by their relationships with the staff and also by the manner in which they were initially approached to discuss possible causes for concern (Beveridge, 1993).

Although the presentation of an IEP is not a legal requirement in New Zealand, it is unlikely that the financial support requested from the Ministry of Education deemed necessary to carry out individualised programmes would be granted without one. Parents are invited to attend the IEP process to become part of the team in noting their child’s achievements, determining goals and planning a programme to reach the stated goals. The IEP meeting provides at least an annual opportunity to develop a home/school partnership. As effective partnerships are characterised by “parity and equity” (Villa, Udis & Thousand, 1994, p.380), these, and any other meetings must be an occasion for parents to share their expertise and knowledge. It is for professionals to listen as many parents are talked “at” rather than “with”. If parents are involved in collaboration with professionals to determine their child’s education they would not be in the unenviable position described by Reynolds and Lakin (1987) of arriving at an IEP ‘meeting’ to find the planning already completed by professionals.

If parents think their views are not listened to or that they are covertly criticised it is hardly surprising that they fail to display any interest in being involved with either teachers or the school (Beveridge, 1993). It is, perhaps, the responsibility of teachers to be open, to show that they value the parents’ views and observations, and to respect the contribution parents make to their child’s education – no matter if there are differences in what teachers think parents should or could be doing.

As well as support for students, consideration needs to be given not only to parents but to the shape and structure of their families. There are families headed by solo parents; families who face unemployment and families comprising children from other relationships. Gearheart, Weishahn and Gearheart (1996) suggest that not only must

families include the immediate mother/father, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, but also day caregivers, baby sitters, foster parents, and blended families. In many cases, families have become isolated from those who traditionally provided support. In rural communities the same people interact in a variety of ways whereas, in an urban setting, there are fewer opportunities for them to do so.

A feature of *Special Education 2000* (Ministry of Education, 1996a), is the emphasis which is placed on the importance of family involvement in making decisions regarding the education of students with special needs. The Ministry (1996b) asserts that “partnership between parents/caregivers and education providers is essential in overcoming barriers to learning” (p. 7). For educational resources to be used effectively and efficiently, the Ministry maintains it is crucial for parents and caregivers to have the opportunity to express their opinions, to consider and to reflect upon their decisions regarding the education of their child(ren).

In many cases, the decisions that parents and families make may not be those that others think should be made. However, it is the responsibility of professionals to ensure that parents and families make informed choices then to support those decisions, regardless of whether or not anyone else agrees with that choice. If there is mutual trust and respect and genuine two-way communication, parent/teacher collaboration, with an emphasis on student achievement, can only foster positive relationships

It has been established that parents play a significant role in the education of their children. Their rights and responsibilities have been the focus of legislation and policy statements to ensure that parents have the opportunity to be included in making decisions about their children’s education. While *Special Education 2000* (Ministry of Education, 1996a) enables parents to choose special education or placement in a regular class setting, there is also the recommendation that the choice best meets the special educational needs of the student.

In its recent policy statement on special education, the New Zealand Ministry of Education (1996a) promotes the importance of family involvement in making decisions regarding the education of students with special needs. The Ministry (1996b) asserts

that “partnership between parents/caregivers and education providers is essential in overcoming barriers to learning” (p. 7). As one of the main aims of special education policy is to provide resourcing for all students with special education needs wherever they attend school, for these resources to be used effectively and efficiently, it is crucial for parents and caregivers to have the opportunity to express their opinions, to consider and to reflect upon their decisions regarding the education of their child(ren).

Until recently, attention focused on differences between students rather than on similarities among them. Their difference is created and fostered by those who determine so-called desirable and prestigious qualities society deems valuable and thus people who appear to lack certain attributes are devalued and become the focus of negative attitudes (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988).

The mainstreaming focus of the 1980s is being replaced by calls for an education system which recognises diversity and effectively caters for individual need in regular classrooms. How we educate students to help them to gain the most benefit from their school years must be determined in collaboration with students and parents and educators. How we best achieve this goal creates many and varied responses but little agreement. As Ballard (1995) points out, there is an eternal struggle between effectively meeting the needs of individual students as there is in meeting the needs of groups of students.

Well-established separate educational facilities act to perpetuate the need for their existence and thus foster segregated settings. As Andrews and Lupart (1993) iterate, educational reform comes about through the efforts of parents, professional reformers and thinkers, legislation and litigation. It may well be that including all students in regular classrooms will go a long way towards changing pervasive attitudes. However, there is no easy road to ensure that students with disabilities become participants instead of spectators. A unified educational system would include all students and present a source of enrichment and challenge but the element of choice which now exists may offer realistic alternatives for many parents.

2.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Given the factors outlined above, it is intended that this research will increase the understanding in the partnership between parents and caregivers and teachers. Although it is the responsibility of educators to ensure quality programmes are offered to students. As Fraser (1995) suggests, it is with the parents and families that education begins. For the purpose of this study, it is proposed that, by listening to and documenting the experiences of parents, there will be a better understanding of their needs in an education system that values diversity and caters effectively for the needs of all students. The perspective of this thesis is that for many parents and caregivers educational decisions are often made without an in-depth knowledge of the choices and options available.

It is hoped that this research will create an awareness of the issues and conditions which exist for parents, caregivers and teachers and lead to a greater understanding of the difficulties involved in providing an environment in which the needs of students, parents and teachers are realised in an atmosphere of mutual benefit.

As Ballard (1990) points out, progress in New Zealand education requires partnerships in three arenas: parents and professionals; pakeha and Maori (and other minority cultures); the community and its members who have disabilities. There must be active listening and consultation and collaboration. Inclusion cannot be one right answer, one right placement, one right curriculum. Active listening, consultation collaboration are necessary ingredients if all are to share in solving the problems Ballard (1990).

Education in the 1990s has become more complex as there are students of many diverse cultures, ethnic groups and economic backgrounds. The challenge to address these issues must begin with collaboration between families to determine the individual needs of their children and how best these needs can be met. Falvey (1995), asserts that "all key stakeholders need to be involved in the planning...of educational programmes if they are to be effective" (p.4).

Recent legislation on education *has* begun to empower parents. The onus is now on professionals to meet parents on an equal footing so that “educational philosophy and practice promotes integration, rather than separation, in our schools and communities” (Ballard, 1990, p, 121) .

In summary, it is the aim of this study to present the experiences of parents and caregivers of children with special needs and of the teachers and professionals who work with them. This chapter outlined a justification for the study based on the debate between regular and special education, on the perspectives of parents and teachers of children with disabilities, and the notion of parent/teacher partnerships.

2.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What do professionals consider to be the most effective way(s) of approaching parents and involving them in their children's education?
2. What are the views of professionals regarding parental involvement in making educational decisions about their children?
3. In what ways do professionals involve parents in discussions concerning the progress of their children?
4. How do professionals view their relationship with parents?
5. What do professionals perceive to be the major concerns/expectations of parents concerning the education of their children?
6. What are the views of professionals concerning inclusive education for students with special needs?
7. What have been the experiences of parents with professionals in special education?
8. What information/choices have parents been offered concerning their children's education?
9. What are the expectations of parents regarding their children's education?
10. What are the preferences of parents regarding the educational placement of their children?
11. How do parents view their relationship with educational professionals?
12. To what extent are parents satisfied with the level of involvement they have in their children's education?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The study was undertaken to explore the perspectives of parents of students with special needs and those of the educators who teach them in a large co-educational secondary school. The study was carried out with individual interviews which were essentially exploratory as the aim was to determine the important aspects of education which affected parents and teachers.

The general boundaries established for exploration were the parents' and teachers' involvement with special education and their experiences associated with special education.

The preliminary steps taken to meet the ethical requirements are outlined before a description of the methods used in the study are presented. These are followed by the methods of analysis.

3.2 ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS

Prior to beginning the research, ethical approval was gained from the Human Ethics Committee of Massey University. An application was granted with the proviso that

approval also be gained from the Inter-Ethnic Committee. This condition was designed to ensure that the necessary procedures were in place and understood by the researcher as it was expected that many of the participants in the study would be from minority groups.

3.3 RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Several meetings were held with the teachers of the special education unit and with the deputy principal of the College. The purpose of these meetings enabled the researcher to present the aims of the study, to discuss recruitment strategies, to establish methods of contact between the participants and the researcher and to answer any questions pertaining to the study. The assistance of the staff was central to the recruitment process as they were the people who would liaise between the parents and the researcher.

The only criterion for participants to meet was to be the parent or caregiver or a professional involved in the education of a student with special needs. For the purposes of recruitment, the teaching staff within the department were provided with sealed letters containing a standard letter of information addressed to every parent or caregiver of the 56 students enrolled in the unit. (APPENDIX A – Information Sheet for Parents and Caregivers). These letters, which included a stamped addressed envelope, were given to each student to take home. The individuals who received the information on the study were then free to consent to participate by signing the consent form and returning it to the school. The five teachers within the department and the two educational psychologists who visited the school were each given or posted an information sheet (APPENDIX B – Information Sheet for Professionals).

All teachers and the psychologists agreed to participate. After two weeks there had been 16 replies. Of these, 4 parents did not wish to participate; 2 parents returned forms indicating a willingness to take part – one later withdrew and the other had a telephone which had been disconnected and there was no reply to a letter sent home. A simplified version of the information sheet (APPENDIX C – Invitation to Participate) was then sent home, again with a stamped addressed envelope. Two people responded to the

second sheet. Two weeks later, a thank you/reminder note (APPENDIX E – Thank you Note) was sent home. To this sheet, there were 3 responses.

Over the next two weeks, the staff in the special education unit contacted every parent or caregiver who had not replied to any of the written messages and explained the purpose of the study. This resulted in a further 6 responses.

All of the respondents elected to have the interviews conducted in English which obviated the need for interpreters (APPENDIX F – Confidentiality Agreement Between Participant and Interpreter). All parents and caregivers who had returned a consent form (APPENDIX G) were then telephoned by the researcher. The first contact provided an opportunity to talk with the people who had replied. The initial conversation enabled the researcher to begin the process of building trust and confidence. The people were thanked for offering to participate, the research topic and the process of data collection were fully explained, any questions were answered and interviews were arranged at a time and a date convenient for the participants.

All five teachers in the special education unit were invited to participate (APPENDIX D) and subsequently signed the consent form and agreed to participate. Likewise, the two educational psychologists who worked with the parents, students and staff at the school agreed to participate.

3.4 DATA GATHERING

According to Anderson (1990), interviews are probably the most widely used method of data collection in educational research. For this research, 28 individual, in-depth interviews of approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours each were conducted with each participant. Twenty of the parents chose to be interviewed in their own homes while one preferred a classroom at the school. The five teachers were interviewed at school and the two psychologists were interviewed in their offices. The first interview took place on 18th June and the last was held on 18th September.

In order to facilitate an informal style of interaction, the researcher was familiar with the agenda of topics for the interviews (APPENDIX H – Interview Questions for Parents and Caregivers; APPENDIX I – Interview Questions for Professionals) as it was felt that a written schedule may distract or inhibit conversation. Consistent with this interview style, no written notes were recorded during the interviews. Without a written record of the dialogue, the researcher was reliant on quality cassette tape audio recordings for all interviews.

An *elite* (Anderson, 1990) approach to interviewing was taken by the researcher. The focus of elite interviewing is to explore the views of a number of individuals for the purpose of eliciting personal experiences from which to build understanding and pursue new directions.

The researcher maintained a reflexive approach to interviewing. Reflexivity refers to the self-critical and self-reflective nature of the researcher. All research is a series of interactions and, as Delamont (1992) asserts, “It is essential to be self-conscious.... about the process of interviewing” (p. 9).

An example of reflexivity is that, prior to beginning the interviews, the researcher felt that in-depth interviewing was intrusion into the private aspect of people’s lives. There was a significant level of anxiety felt about gaining access to their experiences, thoughts and opinions. However, on reflection, the researcher reinterpreted her thinking; all parents and professionals had voluntarily consented to participate and the information given by each person would be respected. These interpretations were subsequently supported by the knowledge that all participants talked willingly about their experiences and feelings. Most people commented that they had found the opportunity to talk honestly and openly about their experiences enabled them to better understand the issues which were discussed.

At the conclusion of the interview, every parent and caregiver (APPENDIX J – Questionnaire for Parents and Caregivers) and every professional (APPENDIX K - Questionnaire for Professionals) was given a brief questionnaire requiring them to rate their perceptions of the major topics covered in the interview. It was decided to include

the questionnaire at the end of the interview to clarify parents' perspectives following discussion of the main topics and issues. These data formed the basis of the quantitative results presented in Chapter 5.

A verbatim transcription of the narrative data was typed on to several floppy discs by the researcher. Each interview took between 4 and 10 hours to transcribe. During one parental interview nothing had been recorded and at one professional interview extraneous sounds made the interview difficult to hear. These events necessitated return visits to record interviews.

The verbatim transcripts were then printed and participants were telephoned to arrange a time and date suitable for them to allow them to read and discuss their interviews to ensure the accuracy of the information. With the participant's consent, this information was then edited to remove repetitive phrases and hesitations. The edited versions were then printed out as the researcher considered it beneficial to have a printed form from which to use relevant comments.

In order to protect their anonymity all participants were asked to choose pseudonyms for themselves, their children and any other people named in the interview.

3.5 IN-DEPTH INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

In-depth interviews were conducted with 21 parents and 7 professionals. In the course of her work, the researcher had previously met 14 of the parents or caregivers who had chosen to participate. For the 7 parents and caregivers unknown to the researcher, it was essential to establish a good rapport with them also. To ensure that each person felt valued as individuals and empowered within the interview process, they were given control over the location, the day of the week and the time for the interview. The factors that influenced the time of the interview were work, school holidays and family commitments. Out of consideration for the researcher, one parent who lived nearby offered to come to the school at a time when the researcher was present.

All interviews were conducted during weekdays. Most people opted to hold the family was awake and before she went to work. One person elected an early evening after she had arrived home from work.

The time allowed for each interview was approximately 3 hours. This included approximately 45 minutes travelling time, informal discussions, explanations about the research, setting up equipment and form filling.

3.6 THE PURPOSE OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The method of individual interview was selected as compatible with the constructivist paradigm. To explore the experiences of parents whose children have disabilities, a unstructured interview format was adopted. This enabled an agenda of topics to be investigated whilst allowing each participant to freely interact with the researcher (Reinhartz, 1992).

In order to gain an understanding of the experiences in education of parents of children with disabilities, the researcher explored how the participants were introduced to special education, their interactions with teachers and their feelings related to coping with a child with a disability. Of equal importance in gaining an appreciation of the difficulties and triumphs experienced by parents, was the aim of the researcher to actively listen to the thoughts being expressed. "Active listening goes beyond passivity; it demands checking one's understandings of the other person's ideas and feelings by rephrasing them and asking for confirmation or clarification. It recognizes how limited each of us is by our own experience, life-style, and values. Every effort is made to avoid projecting one's beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes onto other persons." (Reynolds & Birch, 1988, p. 119).

3.7 AGENDA OF TOPICS

The agenda of topics inherent in the Interview Questions encompassed the general boundaries of education and the effects on parents and caregivers, students and teachers.

3.8 THE INTERVIEW ENVIRONMENT

Apart from one interview with parents, and the interviews with psychologists and teachers, all were conducted within the participants' homes. Although this was from choice, it was believed that the use of the home environment would promote a feeling of trust within the research relationship. While the home environment was one of familiarity for the participants, it served to create an element of uncertainty and apprehension for the researcher. The researcher had no control over distracters, such as telephones, television, pets, interruptions by other family members, over the place of the interview or over the quality of the recording environment. Rooms that were uncarpeted and those that were not insulated from extraneous noises resulted in poorer audio recordings. However, all the recordings were of an acceptable level for transcription.

The uncertainty and apprehension for the researcher was caused by an unfamiliarity with other family members and cultural difference. These feelings were quickly dispelled by the warmth of the greeting, the invitation to enter the home and a genuine desire to help as much as possible.

3.9 INTERVIEW STRUCTURE, CONTENT AND PROCESS

Although the researcher had previously met many of the participants and had spoken to each participant to arrange an interview, this was the first time she had visited parents at their homes.

After the initial welcome and informal dialogue, the researcher was invited inside and, in most cases, asked where she would like to hold the interview. As the interview was

being taped and participants needed a surface on which to write, the dining room table was usually the most suitable. Over a cup of tea or coffee, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and the interview. The researcher outlined the interview process and read through the Information Sheet for Parents and Caregivers, (APPENDIX A), and the Consent Form for Participants, (APPENDIX F), with each participant. Each participant was assured that any information given would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

The interview was described as being an opportunity for participants to tell their stories and that the researcher would ask questions to clarify certain aspects or to gather certain information.

As the tape was turned on, the interview opened with a non-threatening statement by asking, "Tell me about your experiences with (son's or daughter's name) since he or she started school." Whenever necessary, the content and direction of the conversation was used to explore particular aspects related to the study. More direct questioning was used to elicit specific information. To reduce the threat of asking many questions, the researcher at times used information from other interviews or from her personal experiences, such as "some families felt that.....how did you and your family cope in that situation?"

Although the interviews were of a relatively unstructured format, the researcher had a brief list of topics, such as 'information,' 'support,' 'work,' 'family' and associated questions to ensure that all topics had been covered during the interview.

The interview ended when all topics had been covered to a level appropriate for the study and when the participant was satisfied with the discussion. When the researcher felt the interview was in the final stages, the participant was asked, "Is there anything else you would like to say?" For many of the participants it was the first opportunity they had had to recount their experiences in coping with a child with a disability and his or her education.

After the audio cassette was turned off, the participants were given a brief questionnaire and asked to rate a set of items using a questionnaire (APPENDIX I), as a means of summarising the major themes explored in the interview.

The researcher explained that she would produce a printed copy of the taped interview and return at a time and date suitable for the participant, or that the copy be posted out. This was to enable the participant to read through the interview and to add or delete statements and for the researcher to clarify sections which had been muffled by extraneous sounds. The time and date was usually determined before the researcher left.

In several cases, the participant chose to have a copy posted out. This was done and a stamped addressed envelope enclosed. Of four copies posted, two were returned.

In acknowledgment of their willingness to contribute to the study, all participants were thanked and assured that a summary of the findings would be mailed to them.

The interview process was similar for professionals except that each participant was interviewed during his or her lunchtime.

3.10 ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE DATA

The follow-up questionnaire data was entered in Microsoft Excel for analysis and presentation in the form of tables which are presented in the following results section.

From the edited transcripts, responses were thematically analysed and sorted according to the main themes which emerged. Comments and statements were selected from the transcripts to reflect the perspectives and voices of the participants.

3.11 SUMMARY

This chapter has described the methods used in the process of conducting the study. The steps in gaining approval for the study were outlined. This was followed by an explanation of the way in which 21 parents and 7 professionals chose to participate. The data gathering procedures were described and the subsequent presentation of the information as interpreted by the researcher was detailed. The following chapters present the results of the quantitative data and a qualitative analysis of interview comments and statements related to the major themes which emerged from the interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

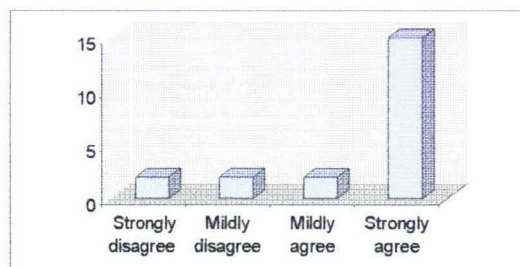
This chapter presents the results of the qualitative and quantitative analysis of data and information gathered during the course of the project. The research questions provide a framework for presenting the interview data. The results are divided into two main sections. The first section provides quantitative data from the survey given to parents ($n=21$) and presents the findings from the interviews conducted with parents. The second section provides quantitative data from the survey given to teachers and other professionals ($n=7$), and combines this with the findings from the interviews conducted with teachers and other professionals. At the end of each interview, participants were asked to indicate how accurately the statements reflected their opinions and to circle one number in each line to indicate their preference – strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The questionnaires were given to the participants in the research to provide a summary of significant features raised in the individual interviews.

4.2 SECTION 1: Results of Parent Interviews and Questionnaires

4.2.1 Statement 1: I feel that I take an effective part in my child's education.

A majority of the parents (15/21) reported that in their view they participated in their child's education. The effective roles parents identified took the form of attending meetings and report afternoons to discuss progress and concerns, using a notebook system in which comments and questions were written, helping with homework, attending classes at school, attending sporting and cultural events, attending medical appointments, making their homes available for meetings, providing money for stationery, clothing and trips. Several parents who did not consider themselves to take an effective part in their child's education had experienced situations where their concerns had been ignored or where they had received negative comments from teachers.

Table 1
Parent Survey - Statement 1

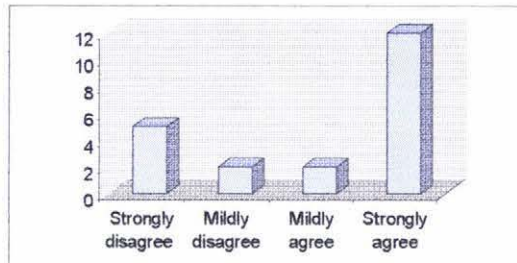


“I feel that I take an effective part in my child's education.”

4.2.2 Statement 2: I am fully involved in making decisions about educational programmes for my child.

The majority of parents (12/21) attended report afternoons and IEP meetings held annually and were aware of the progress their children were making. Some parents had attended meetings, had been told about the programmes at school and had been given suggestions as to how they could support the school's programme. One parent had become disillusioned as she had followed the advice given but as there had been no follow-up from the school, she was unaware of the effectiveness of her support. Other parents told of the difficulties of attending meetings to discuss their child's progress because of a lack of transport, shift work and the responsibility of caring for younger children at home.

Table 2
Parent Survey - Statement 2

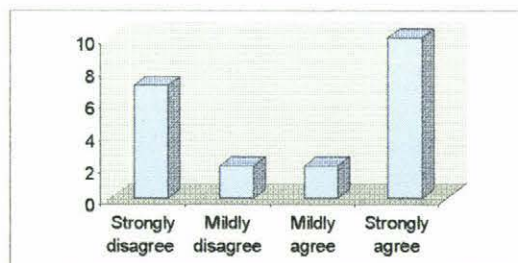


“I am fully involved in making decisions about educational programmes for my child.”

4.2.3 Statement 3: I have been told about a variety of educational options and choices available for my child.

Although most parents (12/21) were satisfied with the information regarding the options available, almost as many (9/21) had been told nothing or given minimal information. Several told of their efforts to explain difficulties either they or their child were experiencing. Their concerns were either ignored or brushed aside. One parent was told that her suggestions would be acted on, only to find later that nothing had been done.

Table 3
Parent Survey – Statement 3



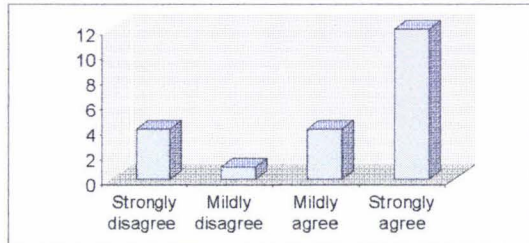
“I have been told about a variety of educational options and choices available for my child.”

4.2.4 Statement 4: I have made decisions based on the information I have been given.

For many parents (12/21), decisions about educational placements had been ‘automatic’. For the most part, their children had attended pre-schools or day care centres under the

auspices of the IHC which preceded their enrolment in special schools or special classes. A minority of parents (9/21) were dissatisfied about the information they had been given. Several parents had not been involved in any decision-making process.

Table 4
Parent Survey – Statement 4

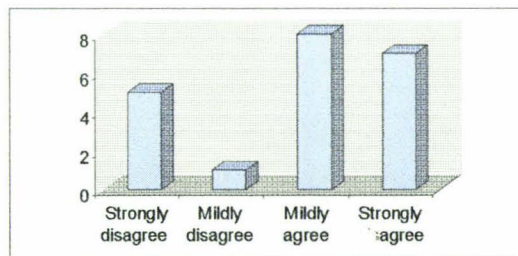


“I have made my decisions about my child’s education based on the information I have been given by teachers and other professionals.”

4.2.5 Statement 5: My expectations about my child’s education have been met.

The parents who disagreed with this statement (5/21), considered some of the school programmes to be inappropriate, that teachers did not have either the strategies or the knowledge to enable them to cope successfully with in-class difficulties, that teachers’ expectations of their students were unreasonable, or that teachers did not follow-up concerns the parents had expressed. The majority of parents (15/21) considered themselves satisfied with their child’s achievements and content to have things carry on in a similar manner.

Table 5
Parent Survey – Statement 5



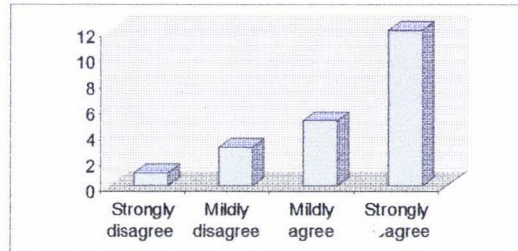
“My expectations about my child’s education have been met.”

4.2.6 Statement 6: I have helped my child achieve success at school.

Several parents (4/21) felt that anything their child had achieved had been without their help. Most parents (17/21) agreed that they had helped their children by attending

meetings and special occasions at school and in being supportive of their children at home.

Table 6
Parent Survey – Statement 6

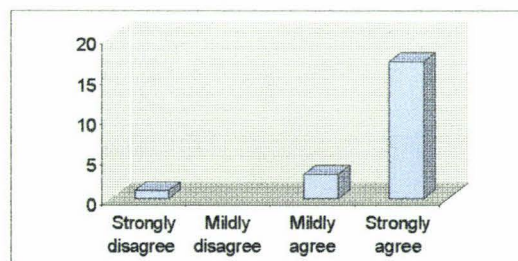


“I have helped my child achieve success at school.”

4.2.7 Statement 7: Special education provides the best educational opportunities available for my child.

With the exception of one person, all parents agreed that special education provided the best form of education. Among the reasons parents gave to support their preference for special education were smaller classes, individual programmes, students being of similar ability, the inability of students to cope with the academic demands of a regular class, the amount of in-class support offered by teachers and teacher aides and the additional help given by teachers. One parent disagreed with the nature of special education as it meant that her children attended different schools and the stigma attached to being in a special class heightened the awareness of being different.

Table 7
Parent Survey – Statement 7

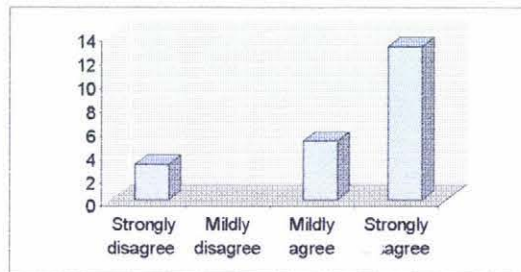


“Special education provides the best educational opportunities available for my child.”

4.2.8 Statement 8: I have a positive relationship with teachers.

Only three parents did not consider they had a positive relationship with teachers. One parent felt confused when speaking with teachers and felt she was considered a nuisance by them. Two other parents wondered why teachers had not said anything about their daughters' lack of academic progress during her primary and intermediate school years. Parents who felt their relationship with teachers was a positive one described teachers who made after-school visits, cared at school for students who were unwell, made themselves available for discussions at times convenient for parents, established a rapport and made parents feel welcome at school and who kept parents well-informed.

Table 8
Parent Survey – Statement 8

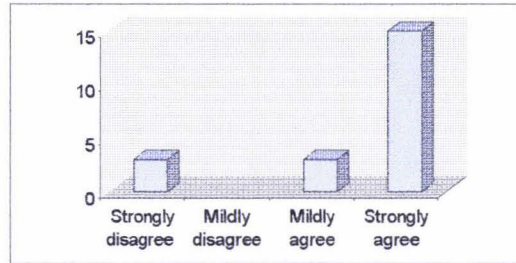


“I have a positive relationship with teachers and other professionals.”

4.2.9 Statement 9: Teachers communicate with me mainly when there are problems with my child at school.

Most parents (15/21) agreed that the only times teachers contacted them was to inform them of problems. Several identified misbehaviour as a major concern. Lateness, absenteeism, truanting and fighting were other reasons given for teachers contacting home. Several parents spoke of occasions when they were telephoned to ask permission for their son or daughter to take part in an extra-curricular activity when students had either lost or forgotten to return the notice required.

Table 9
Parent Survey – Statement 9

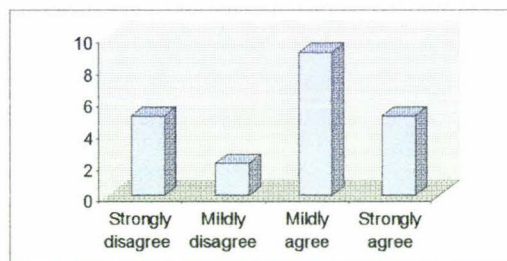


“Teachers contact me only when there are problems with my child at school.”

4.2.10 Statement 10: I am satisfied with the level of involvement in my child’s education.

Many parents considered themselves content with the amount of involvement they had. Among the reasons given were that several parents considered their involvement to cease once their child arrived at school, that they (the parents) were unfamiliar with the school environment and relied on teachers to maintain discipline and to educate their child.

Table 10
Parent Survey – Statement 10

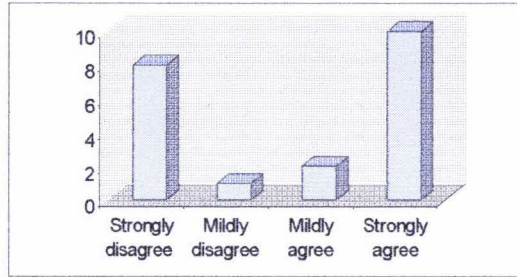


“I am satisfied with my level of involvement in my child’s education.”

4.2.11 Statement 11: I am actively involved in the IEP process.

Most parents agreed with this statement, explaining that they attended IEP meetings and were encouraged to put forward their suggestions for improving their child’s academic, social and/or behavioural goals. Some of the parents who did not participate in IEP meetings were unaware that such meetings were held. Others were satisfied with the manner in which their child’s needs were being catered for.

Table 11
Parent Survey – Statement 11

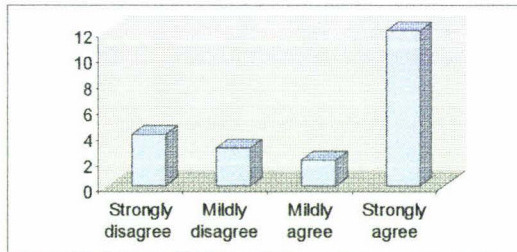


“I am actively involved in the IEP process.”

4.2.12 Statement 12: The advice given by teachers has been helpful.

The majority of parents (14/21) considered the advice of teachers to have been helpful when making decisions about the content of existing programmes and options for subsequent years. A third of the parents were dissatisfied with the lack of advice or information they had been given. In some instances, parents were unaware of a lack of academic progress or of any difficulties their children were experiencing.

Table 12
Parent Survey – Statement 12



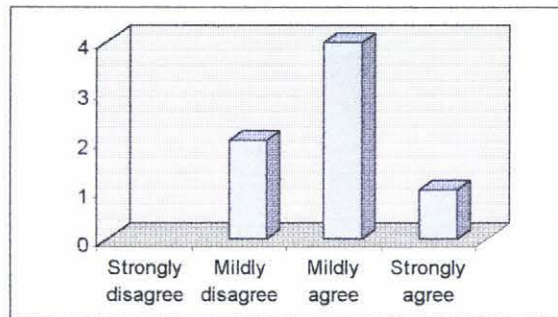
“The advice given by teachers has been helpful.”

4.3 SECTION 2: Results of Teacher Interviews and Questionnaires

4.3.1 Statement 1: The parents of the students with whom I am involved take an active part in their child's education.

Two of the seven teachers who disagreed with this statement identified some of the factors which, in their opinion, prevented parents being actively involved with school-based activities. These teachers believed that some parents were unfamiliar with the school environment, some did not wish to do anything, and others believed it was the school's responsibility to educate their children. The five teachers who agreed with this statement considered the parents of their students to be caring and attentive to their needs, who took part at a level with which they could manage.

Table 13
Teacher Survey – Statement 1

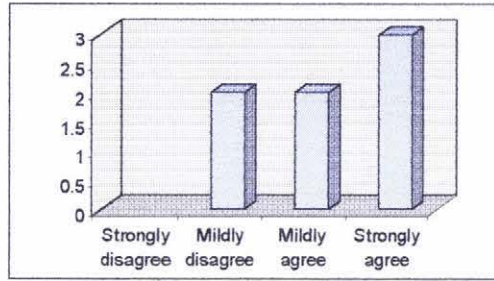


“The parents of the students with whom I am involved take an active part in their child's education.”

4.3.2 Statement 2: I fully involve parents when making educational decisions about their child.

The two teachers who disagreed with this statement felt that they were in a position to know what was best for the student, that some parents did not want to be part of anything to do with the school, or that parents were satisfied that any decisions made would be in the best interests of their children. The majority of teachers ensured that all parents were given the opportunity to be a part of any decisions.

Table 14
Teacher Survey – Statement 2

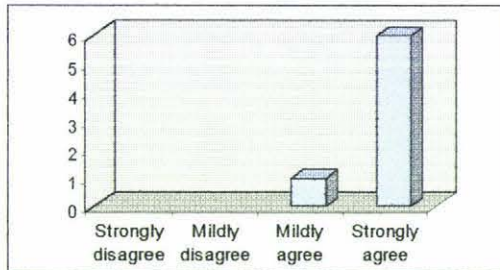


“I fully involve parents when making educational decisions about their child.”

4.3.3 Statement 3: I inform parents about a variety of educational options and choices available for their child.

For most teachers (5/7) it was important to discuss educational programmes with parents. Several recalled concerns expressed by students at home which provided valuable feedback. Others considered some parents to have unrealistic expectations of the level of their child’s academic ability.

Table 15
Teacher Survey – Statement 3

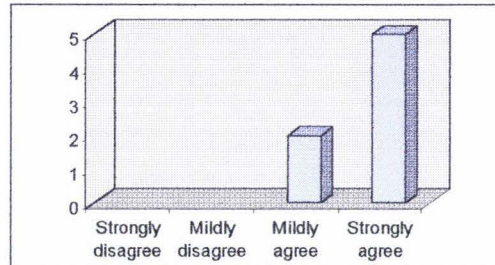


“I inform parents about a variety of educational options and choices available for their child.”

4.3.4 Statement 4: Parents have made decisions based on the information I have given them.

All teachers agreed that the information they had given to parents regarding educational placements, school programmes and work-based training opportunities had been acted upon.

Table 16
Teacher Survey – Statement 4

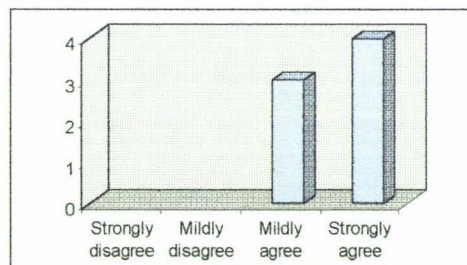


“Parents have made decisions based on the information I have given them.”

4.3.5 Statement 5: I feel that I am aware of parental expectations regarding their child’s education.

All teachers agreed that they were aware of the expectations parents had for their children. Several people considered that some parents set unrealistic goals for their children as, for example, when parents had paid School Certificate examination fees or had applied for tertiary courses for which the entry criteria excluded their children.

Table 17
Teacher Survey- Statement 5



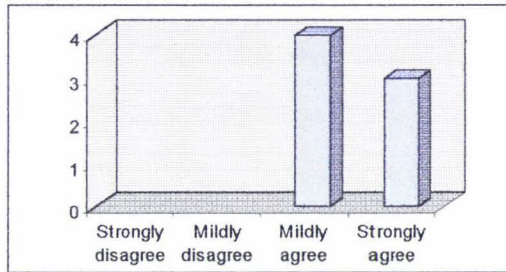
“I feel that I am aware of parental expectations regarding their child’s education.”

4.3.6 Statement 6: I feel that I meet parental expectations regarding their child’s education.

All teachers agreed that parents were in agreement with the content of educational programmes and school-based activities. All teachers tried to inform parents of coming

events such as report afternoons and IEP meetings which provided opportunities for discussion.

Table 18
Teacher Survey- Statement 6

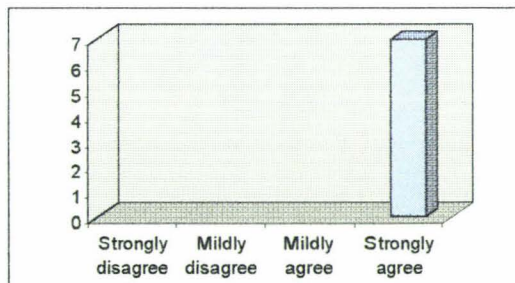


“I feel that I meet parental expectations regarding the education of their children.”

4.3.7 Statement 7: Parental participation helps their child to achieve success at school.

All teachers agreed strongly that parental participation was crucial to support the activities carried out at school. Most also recognised the difficulties for many parents in being unable to attend meetings or to supervise homework because of the nature of their employment and the demands of other family members.

Table 19
Teacher Survey- Statement 7



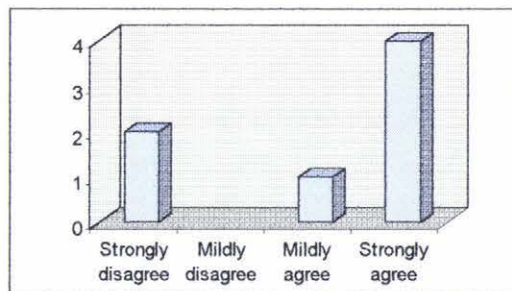
“Parental participation helps their child achieve success at school.”

4.3.8 Statement 8: For students with special needs, the ‘advantages’ of special education outweigh the ‘disadvantages’.

Five of the seven teachers agreed with this statement. Among the reasons were: (1) the ability to provide one-to-one support and attention; (2) the adaptation of lessons to meet individual need, small classes; and, (3) regular class teachers who were focussed on

their students passing exams, who lacked the skills to cope with students who were ‘different’, or who did not want students with special needs in their classes. One person felt it important to offer parents and students a choice between regular and special classes. The teachers who disagreed that special education was preferable to regular education believed that it was beneficial for students with disabilities to have more contact with their peers in classroom situations. These teachers also believed that for students to succeed in regular classes, there needed to be adequate support in place.

Table 20
Teacher Survey- Statement 8

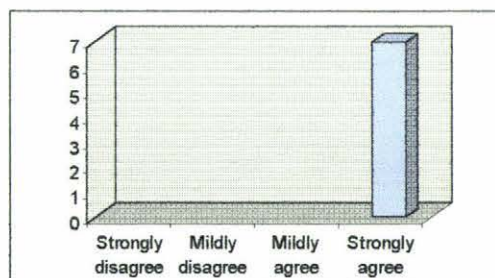


“For students with special needs, the ‘advantages’ of special education outweigh the ‘disadvantages’.”

4.3.9 Statement 9: I have a positive relationship with parents.

All teachers believed their relationship with parent to be a positive one. All felt that they could contact parents and discuss concerns or offer advice in an empathetic and supportive manner.

Table 21
Teacher Survey- Statement 9

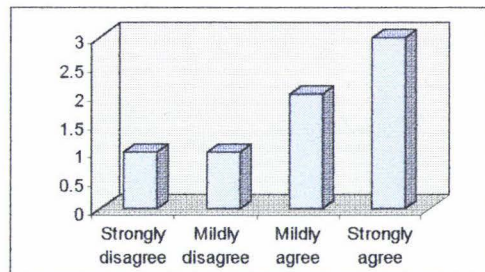


“I have a positive relationship with parents.”

4.3.10 Statement 10: I communicate with parents mainly when there are problems with their child at school.

Most teachers (5/7) agreed that they contacted parents mainly when there were problems at school. These teachers cited instances of a lack of attendance, inappropriate behaviour and a failure to complete assignments and/or homework. Some teachers contacted home when they needed information or permission for the student to take part in activities outside the school.

Table 22
Teacher Survey- Statement 10

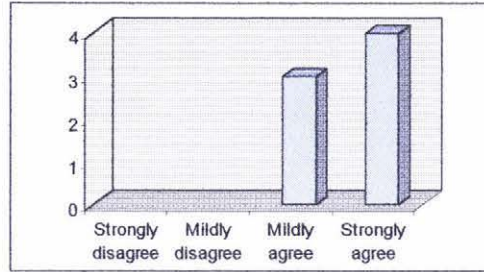


“I communicate with parents mainly when there are problems with their child at school.”

4.3.11 Statement 11. I am satisfied with the extent of parents’ participation in their child’s education.

Three teachers expressed mild disagreement with this statement. One person thought a lack of familiarity with the New Zealand education system made parents loath to take any part in their children’s activities. Another person suggested that it was a cultural belief in the expertise of teachers and a feeling of inferiority on the part of parents which kept them apart from teachers. Another teacher suggested that although parents were very well intentioned, they seldom followed up any advice given. Four teachers agreed that parents participated to the extent they were able given the constraints of jobs, transport and family commitments.

Table 23
Teacher Survey- Statement 11

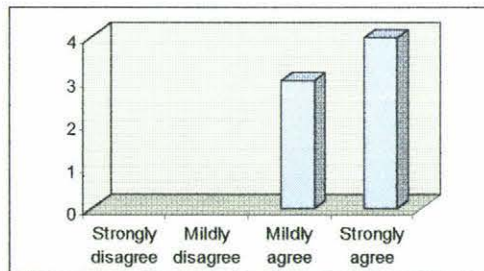


“I am satisfied with the extent of parents’ participation in their child’s education.”

4.3.12 Statement 12: I actively involve parents in meetings to discuss the progress of their child.

All teachers agreed that they tried to involve parents in meetings to discuss their child’s progress. Most teachers identified some of the difficulties parents faced in attending meetings as being a lack of transport, an inability to speak English, or an inability to get time off work. Some teachers felt that all decisions should be made by them as they were the ones with the necessary expertise.

Table 24
Teacher Survey- Statement 12



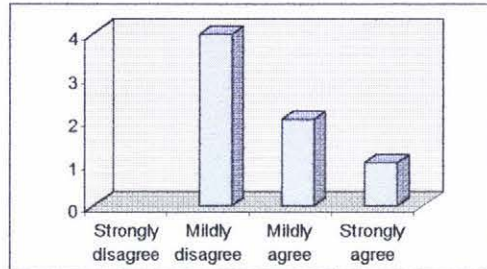
“I actively involve parents in meetings to discuss the progress of their child.”

4.3.13 Statement 13: Parents fulfil the expectations I have of them regarding the education of their child.

Several (4/7) teachers felt that parents made little attempt to support their efforts. They considered that some students were inadequately fed, did not wear school uniforms, or

did not have the necessary materials, for example, books, pens or paper, to enable them to carry out classroom tasks.

Table 25
Teacher Survey- Statement 13



“Parents fulfil the expectations I have of them regarding the education of their child.”

This chapter presented the results of the qualitative and quantitative analysis of data and information gathered from parents and teachers at the completion of their interview.

The following chapter presents statements made by parents and teachers during their interviews.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERVIEWS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter five presented the results from surveys completed by parents and teachers at the completion of their interview. This chapter presents relevant statements and comments made by parents and teachers in their interviews. The statements on each sheet were similar. However, the wording was altered slightly to reflect the opinion of each person.

The research questions provided a framework for the researcher and marked the direction of the study. While each question had a particular focus, each explored issues of relevance from the perspective of parents and teachers. These comments provide an insight into the perspectives of participants as they explain issues of relevance and of importance for them. The major underlying themes which evolved from the data are arranged into categories as interpreted by the researcher.

5.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR AND COMMENTS BY PARENTS

5.2.1 How did you and (your child) become involved in special education?

For most parents their involvement with special education began when teachers noticed their child did not make the progress expected of them. For some parents, this was at kindergarten. For other parents it was not until their child changed from primary to Intermediate school. Several parents were unaware that their son or daughter had not made

appropriate academic progress and were told when their child was about to enter secondary school.

When he turned 5 and was still at kindergarten, they noticed something about Alfonso's learning activities. They picked it from there. He started school at Whitmore in the special class. Sara

The head teacher noticed that Mandy was maybe not ready to go to school and should stay at kindergarten till she was 6. She stayed on for another year and then went into the New Entrants class where she stayed for about a year. Then the teacher approached me about getting her into the Mapoto Unit because she was struggling with her reading and all of her school work. That sort of started off our whole run of being in the special education system. Jennifer

Hunapo started school when he was 5 but did not make the same progress as his twin brother.

When Hunapo was 5 they picked up that he was quite slow. They tried all sorts of things for him. He stayed behind in the New Entrant's class. His twin brother got moved on because he was a lot brighter. They did everything they could with Hunapo to try and teach him. They had special courses from Wellington. They had another teacher who would take him to the side to help him out with his reading, with his maths, with his writing. They found out that for some reason he couldn't retain a lot of the stuff that he learnt. When he was about 7 he went down to Rangelea Primary School because they had a special place for kids like him that can't learn. A special class. Jan

Ioasa came to New Zealand with his family when he was 7.

The first time he went to school I went and enrolled him at the normal school without knowing there was something happening with Ioasa. At school they could tell there was something happening, something wrong. They said the mature of his body, the mature of his age is not the same with what he is thinking and what he is doing. They told me that he is a slow learner. I know that it is right. He is not reading as well as the other children of his age. He is not writing as well as the other children and then he continued on in the special unit. Martha

Some parents did not know their child was not making academic progress at school for several years.

They didn't tell us that there was anything wrong with him or that he was behind in anything right up until he was in Standard 3. He would have been about 10. They just said, "Oh, he's a little bit backward, but he's there with the other kids." When it came time for him to go to Intermediate, they said, "Oh, well, you'll have to enrol him at Intermediate. So I went and enrolled him at Nevis Intermediate and then they said, "Oh, no. You've got the wrong school. He's supposed to be at Greendale. There's a special needs unit down there for him." This was 2 weeks after I had enrolled him. Laura

When he started Standard 3 he was about 11. They said, "Well, look. He's not up to his age group but we're going to have to put him into Standard 4." After a year in Standard 4 he still wasn't up to the level of the others in his class. They said, " But we can't have him in

primary school any more because he's at Intermediate age." He was about 12 at the time. Then he went into the special class at Greendale Intermediate. June

The only way we found out was through a chap when she changed schools. He told me she had trouble with her reading and her writing and her maths. She would have been about 8. That's when we found out. She did have some one-to-one reading. One woman used to do it all the time but when she left it all stopped. Sam

Regina was 13 at the time and they told us that her mind was only of a 6 year old. They told me that she was slow. She's all right, but she's too slow. In everything at school, she's too slow. Zena

For several parents, it was their perseverance and their insistence that something be done to help their children that placement in special education occurred.

When Michael started school I realised he had a problem. He couldn't write his name and he couldn't count whereas his older brothers and sisters could all do that when they started school. For two years he wasn't getting anywhere. He'd learnt absolutely nothing. Robyn

Michael and his family went to the United States for two years where he was enrolled in an elementary school. Robyn explained that he had problems with reading and counting. She met with the headmaster, a psychiatrist and a psychologist, after which a brief assessment of Michael's skills was carried out. By the end of the week, a decision had been made to send him to another city thirty miles away for two hours each day in a special education facility. On the family's return to New Zealand, Michael was 8 and still unable to read. His mother paid \$130.00 to have an assessment carried out.

They found that he was quite a long way behind academically in reading, writing, perception but his life skills were very good for his age. After that he got about 20 minutes daily of one-to-one help with his reading until the end of primary school. But when he went to Intermediate, all that stopped. He was mainstreamed in an ordinary class and given some help each day. At the end of his Intermediate schooling, Michael was referred to the special education unit at Montrose College. I was a bit concerned when I thought about it. Robyn

Jessie's mother voiced her concerns at Intermediate school.

She's always had trouble at school. She had difficulty with reading, writing, maths. Everything. It got worse when she changed schools in Standard 1. She just went so far behind. In Form 2, I was *really* worried about her going to College. She wouldn't handle it. I didn't *want* her to go to College. Her teacher suggested putting her into special ed. He knew how worried I was. Anne

When David was 7, his parents took him for a hearing test.

We felt there was a hearing problem. We got him a hearing aid. For some reason, they decided to put him into the School for the Deaf. Then they found out that the hearing wasn't the problem. It was concentration/co-ordination blackout. The brain can only take in so much, then it blacks out. Everything's just a jumble. But nothing happened. He'd get the occasional extra help in reading. But generally school just carried on as school's supposed to carry on. He'd been to various schools because I found he wasn't getting anywhere. We shifted and we thought things might be better somewhere else. Tania

One day after school David's mother asked him about his schoolwork and his homework and was told

I don't do any. I draw pictures." I just went ballistic. We found out that he was just being sent to one side most of the time at school. Then he started getting a few extra teacher aide or teacher hours for special reading. Tania

At Intermediate school David had the misfortune to break his leg and was unable to walk. Concerned that he would miss vital school work, David's parents arranged for a taxi to take him to and from school. The receptionist at the taxi company remembered that one of the drivers transported students in the satellite class and suggested to David's parents that he could also call for David.

The driver was brilliant. He came around home and told us he would pick him up and drop him home. David's in a normal class at that stage. That was fine. Then David started mixing in with these satellite kids in the class. They found that he communicated more with the slower kids than what he did with the other kids. Then the teacher called me up and said, "Well, we have assessed David and we have seen him with the kids and he is sort of at their level. How would you feel about him going into the class with them?" I said, "Yeah, fine. Something should be done. He's not getting anywhere. He's going to be leaving school not knowing a thing" So he went into the satellite class. Then I got in touch with the College to see if I wanted to transfer him into the special unit. They assessed David and said, "Yes, he definitely needs the help." So he went straight over to there. Tania

When he entered the third form, Blue became a member of a class at College which had in it a number of students from the special education unit.

I think a lot of it had to do with those IQ tests that they give them. He came home one day and said to me, "Oh, mum, I'm in with the handicapped people." I questioned him on that because I thought it was rather strange. He just said it was the class he had been put into. I just thought, 'Oh, well. Maybe they've picked up on the things he's been slow on and just said "You need this particular thing." Fay

The behaviour of several children had led to their exclusion from regular classes.

He was supposed to be having help with a little bit of reading and things like that but they couldn't cope with him. They said that he wasn't exactly hard to control in the classroom, but because he couldn't do the same work as the other children it was hard to get him to sit there and do anything else. There was no one that could actually sit there and help him do the work. Then he was assessed again and it was suggested that he went into the special needs class at Ruarangi. Carol

He's a very hard boy to control. He's a boy that can stir up all the guys and turn simple things into arguments or into fights. He's been suspended from all his optional classes so when he's supposed to be doing options, he actually does correspondence classes. There's 3 or 4 classes that he's been expelled out of. He's not allowed back there. Peter

Several parents noticed that their child's development was slower than usual.

Her mind is not really fast. She's slow. She's 3 years old and she didn't walk. When she was 3 she started standing up. Zena

At 4 ½ Christopher wasn't talking. He went for speech therapy for 6 months before he went to school. He still wasn't up to a five year old stage in speaking. He was way behind. June

When he was 4 he wasn't saying a lot of words. You couldn't have conversation with him. When he was 5 he started school in an ordinary class. He just carried on in a normal school. He wasn't reading or doing anything else like spelling, reading, maths. Nothing. He didn't do anything very much. He wasn't coping at school so they were going to give him extra reading. June

She was still like a baby at 2 years old. She was still in nappies but I didn't think anything of it. When she was 2, the people at the Daycare Centre said to me that she's a slow learner. I hadn't realised that. I didn't know there was anything wrong with her. I was pretty ignorant. I didn't know that she was just slow. Somebody at the Daycare Centre said to me that she wouldn't be able to handle the normal school with the ordinary children. When she first started school, they said it was best for me to take her to Garus, a school for the intellectually handicapped. So we put her in there. At the time she started school, she still wasn't talking. We couldn't understand what she was saying. She'd point to things that she needed. If she tried to tell you something, she would say it all backwards or all mixed up. It was never the right thing and you'd get all stressed out trying to get her to tell you something. She had to go to speech therapy so she could learn to talk. She started talking properly when she was about 8 years old. Lina

When Betty turned 5, her parents enrolled her in a regular school.

We first put her in at Arimu because of her backwardness. At that stage we just thought she was shy. But she wasn't getting anywhere fast and nothing was getting done as far as her reading and her writing and things like that. So we decided to pull her out of the school. She was at Arimu for about the first two terms. She would have been going towards 6 when we got her in at Lisburn. She was going well there. She moved into the next class. She did reasonably well but her writing wasn't the best still. When it was time to move her up

another notch, into the next class the following year, I got a call to go up to the school. Then I took her up to Ruarangi. She ended up in a class of approximately 8 children. Sam

When Betty was in Standard 4, the principal suggested her enrolment in the special class at the local Intermediate school.

So I went down there and I saw the principal and they said that they would take her into the special class in Form 1. Then at the end of Form 2, they said she would come over here to the special unit at Montrose College. Betty

Sharna was an accident victim who suffered severe head injuries when she was 7.

She had lost her ability in a lot of ways. In her speech, in her walk. She was paralysed. She'd gone from 7 years old to 18 months old. She couldn't feed herself. She couldn't take herself to the toilet. She couldn't bathe herself. She couldn't do anything. We had to re-teach her how to speak, how to do everything. The whole lot. She went through her primary and Intermediate schools in regular classes helped by teacher aides. At College, apart from 2 hours a day, Sharna's support disappeared. People have been thinking, "Well, she's normal now." We decided that the mainstream in College was far too much. She could not cope. So we put her into the special education class. Monica

Several children with an intellectual disability attended pre-school groups. From these groups, the 'natural' progression appeared to be enrolment at a special school. In many cases, the children went 'through the system' of special education.

Eveleen was at pre-school in a special group for the handicapped children. We were going to let her go to Barnado's but that didn't pan out. She went to Garus and then she was in the special needs class at Whitmore. She had two years at Nevis Intermediate because they had a special class there. She went into the unit because her home is near Montrose. My sons went there too. And I used to go there for night school. Marion

John went to Barnado's pre-school for a year until he was 5. From Barnado's he went to Garus and then he went into the satellite class at Whitmore Primary School. When John got to Intermediate school age, the principal at Garus told me we can't get John into a satellite class. He said another option is you'll need to send him to Montrose College to the special education unit. John was young when he went to Montrose College. He should have been at an Intermediate school class but there wasn't one. He was in the College instead of going to Intermediate. Straight from primary school. He was 12. He was the youngest one at Montrose College because there was no satellite class. Alex

Several of the children had been 'diagnosed' as having a disability from an early age.

When he was about 3 he was in Princess Mary for a few months because he kept having these fits. I didn't know they were epileptic fits then. I didn't know anything was wrong. He just had the shakes but I didn't know what they were. He went in there and they told me that he was an epileptic. That's the first time I knew what they were. When he started

school he started down at Garus. He was always fidgeting. Like when you were talking to him or if he was getting excited he would be fidgeting or he would twirl around. He was always doing that. Marie

He started off at an IHC pre-school. I think he was 3 when they took him. He was there about 2 years. He started school at Garus special school and then to the satellite class at Whitmore. Then he carried on to Nevis Intermediate in the special class when he was about 11. He had a couple of extra years at Nevis because he seemed to stay very short and small for so many years. Then all of a sudden he outgrew the class so the following year we had no option. We had to put him into College. He was moved on because of his age. Bonita

5.2.2 In what ways do you think that special education provides the best educational opportunities for your child?

Several parents considered it important that their child was with others of similar ability where there was the opportunity to participate in classroom activities with a reasonable degree of success rather than always being at the bottom.

All of a sudden, instead of being the slowest kid in the class he was one of the better kids. He enjoys coming here with all these other kids. Robyn

I like that special ed. class. It's good. Not all kids are the same. Not all people are the same. There's always going to be one little bad apple somewhere. One different. One slow person. At least she's in a class where she can sometimes feel that she's doing better than another child. That will perk her up. She wouldn't get that in a normal class. She would just be the dummy of the class *all* of the time. In special ed. she's got people that she can relate to. Friends. The reality is she was safer there anyway. Lina

Many parents considered the extra help given by teachers in the special education unit to have been of considerable benefit for their children. The opportunities for providing extra help were linked with fewer numbers in the classes.

It has helped him more. He has had more help because people like him need some attention all the time. Smaller classes have helped him. Alfonso

I think it has helped him a lot. Working on a one-to-one basis. I've noticed they have one or two kids in a class. They're in small groups. I think it's much better than having a whole lot of children all at once. It would be pretty hard for the teacher to work with the kids on all different things. Marie

It's more on one-to-one. He's been given the opportunity to have somebody say, "Well, all right, we'll sit down here and we'll read" and has taken the time to go over words. Jan

With the extra help you could see this big improvement in David. His attitude. Everything in general. The whole lot. June

There are teachers who are able to give them the help like one-to-one or in small groups. Working one-to-one they seem to pick up a lot. In a normal class, they're inclined to stay back. They're inclined to switch themselves off and go back into their shell. The teacher hasn't got the time because they've got 30 or 35 children in their class trying to do the work. Sam

The extra help that he gets. It's not really showing through yet. You can only give it time and hope that it will start to show through. In an ordinary class Tim won't get the help because I've seen it with 30 people in a class. It's not the teacher's fault. You've got a mixture of Samoan, Tongan, Indian, Asian, pakeha and Maori in one class. And you're trying to teach them all something. Peter

Smaller classes also provided a higher ratio of teachers to students.

There's more teachers. I know the ratio is quite high, but not quite as high as a normal school. There are not so many students. You've got a ratio of something like 1 teacher to 4 or 5. He's far better catered for because there are fewer students. Peter

They have more one-to-one because there's fewer in the class. There's more help. Bonita

At the College the teachers there have got so many students. They've got less students in special education to contend with than in an ordinary class. Where teachers have got up to 35 students to look after they couldn't give him the time to do anything. They just couldn't. Alex

The smaller classes and the help she's had. They're really good. Lina

Special education is better for her. The help she gets and the support she gets. She wouldn't get that in an ordinary class where there's only one teacher and about 30 kids. Marion
She's getting one-on-one help. It's only small classes. She's getting the help she needs. Very much so. Anne

He mightn't get the help in a class of 30 or 35. Laura

Several parents considered the teachers to be specialists who could offer appropriate programmes and who, because of the smaller numbers, knew their students well.

Having the teachers who understand. When she did go out to a maths class, that teacher didn't really have the patience to spend on Mandy at her level – or didn't have the time to spend with her and that was not good for her. Being in such a small class and knowing the teacher really well. The teachers know them. The teachers are understanding and know exactly where the children are at and what they can cope with. Jennifer

The teachers are marvellous with the kids. They're really lovely. Her teachers have been really marvellous. Marion

They're really qualified teachers too. They know what to do. Peter

Just taking it very, very slowly and being repetitive. It's not one-on-one because they haven't got that manpower. They don't get lumbered with all of this homework that no way they could cope with. There's no way she could have coped with that. No way. Sam

5.2.3 What have been the benefits of special education (for you/your son/daughter)?

Most parents had noticed positive changes in the behaviour of their child.

It's done him *real* good. He's now coming out of himself. He's more mature now. He's come right out. He has changed completely from the shy little boy he was. He wouldn't talk. He didn't have an opinion about nothing. Now he's more open. He's friendly. He's joking around. He fights more with his brothers and sisters. He's more self-confident now that he's been through special ed. and the teachers have been behind him. He's learned more. He's a complete boy. He's changed with the help he's been given. It's been great. I couldn't see him getting that at a normal college. Laura

It has done such a lot for his self-esteem. Robyn

She loves school. She is doing so well. She has changed. Her whole personality. Everything about her is changed. I feel relieved and happy that she's finally where she needs to be. She's getting all the help she can. She's got friends. She's happy to be there. She loves it. She comes home a totally different person. Before, she'd come home and she was always in a bad mood, always moaning and complaining about something. Now she comes home as happy as Larry. She doesn't complain about anything. She's great. It's changed her whole attitude about school. You just wouldn't recognise her. She is just so different. Anne

Sharna's mother appreciated the help her daughter was getting and was thrilled that, for the first time in her life, her daughter was genuinely happy with a circle of friends.

She's in a class where there's helpers and these helpers are genuine helpers. She has nothing but praise for her helpers. She has nothing but praise for her teachers. Every day is a new day. Every day is a learning day. She's getting stuck into finding out things. She's got friends. She's actually got a group of friends. Friends that are really as concerned about her as she is about them. Sharna's happy. Sharna is absolutely diabolically happy. It is fantastic. Absolutely fantastic. Now I finally feel at peace. Monica

Several parents spoke of the caring nature of the teachers and the interest shown towards their students and their achievements.

The interest the teachers show in those pupils. The teachers seem to be more involved with the children like in helping them to achieve. Special ed. offers just that little bit more. Peter

In a special class, there's special care. Everything is special. The most important thing is the caring. Because under the care they do everything. Like teaching, feeding, ringing if he's sick at school, bringing him home if he's not well. Everything is special care. Martha

She loves it. She's quite happy. Marion

5.2.4. Would you have considered a regular class placement for your child? Why?/ Why not?

Most parents would not have considered a regular-class placement for their child. The inability to cope with the academic demands of a regular classroom was an aspect which concerned most parents.

She wouldn't have been able to cope. I don't think she could have taken it. Marion

I think if he had been he would have left school a lot sooner. He would never have been able to have coped with it. Jan

He is so different from normal children. In my own thinking it is better for him to have a special programme. He wouldn't have a special programme in an ordinary class. Martha

The mainstream doesn't really work for him. He just wouldn't learn anything. It's as simple as that. The doctor at Auckland hospital said he has a devastatingly bad learning disability. There is no way he could get along with the kids socially. He wouldn't be able to. There is no way on earth he could go into a mainstream class. Robyn.

John's not a very good reader and he can't write. I don't think John's capabilities would be good enough for an ordinary class. Alex

That's where I knew Mandy did belong. I knew that she wouldn't cope in a normal class. The level would have been far too high for her. At 13 she was reading like a 5 year old. She wouldn't have coped. She would have just had to stare into space. It just wouldn't have been right for her at all. She would have got lost with 30 or 35 other children in the class. I feel really grateful that Mandy did get into the system otherwise I don't know whether she'd still be at school. She would have left. I would have thought, 'I can't put you through that any more.' Jennifer

He wouldn't be able to cope with normal classes. I don't think he could keep up with what was going on. Marie

It's not fair for the teacher just to be there for Alfonso all the time. Sara.

I wouldn't have wanted John to go to an ordinary class. Not the way he was. he wouldn't have been happy. I think he learned more where he is. He did more than he would do at an ordinary school because with John's capabilities you've got to have a teacher for 5 or 10 students. He loved going to the unit. It has been one of the best things that ever happened to him. He has always liked going. He loves the company and his friends and the sport he is involved in. Alex

He can't read or write. Joan

I'm against putting these kids into classes with ordinary kids. It's too much for them. I don't think they can keep up and learn as much as the ordinary child. They need more in everyday, one-to-one things that they are going to need in everyday life than what they get in an ordinary classroom. You can't expect the teachers today to drop teaching ordinary kids to spend hours and hours with these ones. The stuff doesn't sink in. Half of them can't read what's put in front of them. Half of them can't read what's on the blackboard. I think it's a disadvantage to them. Bonita

Other parents told of their child's behaviour which may not be tolerated in a regular class.

John couldn't have gone to an ordinary class in an ordinary school. Sometimes when he's doing something, he gets up and walks out and then comes back again. He couldn't do that in an ordinary class of 30 or 35 students. Alex

If she was in a normal class, she probably would have been out of school by now. She would have been kicked out because of her bad temper. Lina

He can't read or write so it's no good putting him into another class. In one class we had the situation where there was a ratio of 1 teacher to 24 children. And that's just not fair on the kids. My deaf one was put right at the back of the [regular] classroom and couldn't hear anything anyway because he wasn't noticed as having a disability. If he had been noted for that he would have been right up the front instead of being left. He was quite disruptive and he used to have to sit outside for half the day. So that's just the difference. Joan

For a parent whose daughter had failed miserably throughout primary school, admission to a special unit was all she had hoped for.

Her going into the mainstream at College would have been my worst nightmare. It would have been a miserable disaster for her. It really was scary. I was *really* worried about it. She really couldn't have handled it. I wouldn't have been able to have handled it. But now it's all up, ready to go. It's worked. She loves going to her classes, loves all her teachers. She likes going to school. The sun's finally come out. I've found it is a lot easier managing her now. It makes everybody in the household feel happier. We've got enough problems without having Jessie coming home like she used to. Now she's taking responsibility for a lot of things. Jessie didn't have a lot of friends. She didn't muck around with any kids at school. She's made a lot of friends. She's just come right out of herself. Her self-confidence, her self-esteem have skyrocketed. She's got some lovely friends. We're not going to have any trouble with her. It's really good. Anne

Several parents would have preferred their child to be in a regular class for social interaction. Other parents would have liked their children to be in ordinary classes to avoid the stigma of special education. However, this was tempered by an understanding of the child's level of academic ability and a perception that special education offered more assistance with classroom tasks. All parents wanted what was best for their child.

Only if she could handle it. Not just because I wanted her to go into a normal class. She just can't jump into a normal class just like that. She wouldn't have been able to handle it. I realised she wouldn't be able to handle an ordinary class. I wouldn't have wanted that. She couldn't do the work. A lot of times I have wished that she could go into a normal class but that's being unfair to her so we'll just leave it like that. Lina

I would like him to be with the other children that are not slow learners. But in another way, I don't know whether that teacher will cope with Alfonso as well as 30 or 35 other kids. I think it would be difficult for him. It would be good, but it will be difficult for him. The lessons and everything. Playing with them and being around them would be all right but during lesson times it would be difficult for him. Sara

I don't know. If he picked up he might be able to cope in the mainstream. I think he's too far behind now to go into an ordinary class. I don't think he could cope. He did one of those tests not so long ago. He's 14 and it came out that he was about 6 or 7 or 8 years old. I think it would be too embarrassing for him. His writing is terrible. He writes like a 5 year old. I don't think he could be in an ordinary class. He's lacking quite bad in other areas. His spelling is shocking. Terrible. And he doesn't like to read. Peter

I would like him to be in an ordinary class but there is going to be the problem of him not being able to cope on his own. There would have to be someone there the whole time. If it's going to happen. You really need the teachers to be there helping him. Carol

I would have liked him to be in an ordinary class if he had had a bit more knowledge. Yes. I would have like him to do that. Even now, if he can mix with normal kids, I'd like him to. I don't think he could have made it for the first couple of years in Form 3 and 4. Laura

Only if it's good for him but at the moment I don't think so. Martha

If she hadn't been sick, yes. I think she's got the brains for it. If she wants to do the work. I don't think she plays on that idea of being sick. She wants to do things but it's just that bit of a handicap that she's had. Sam

Several parents considered that mainstreaming had disadvantaged their child.

She ended up in a class of 8 children...in a special class and then I got a call. The headmaster sent a note home to me to go and see him. He said to me, "How would you like it if we tried and mainstreamed her?" I said, "Well, I think she's doing reasonably well at what she can cope with." He said, "That's all right. What we'll do, we'll put her in a class for an hour and then we'll increase it to 2 hours in another room. So he mainstreamed her. I said to him one time, "I think you're going a bit fast." But he didn't think so. Sam

I know they've got to mix with ordinary kids but I think Andrew personally has gone backwards since he's been in with the ordinary kids. When he was at Intermediate he could count money. Now he's forgotten. he can't even put 20 cents into dollar lots now. He doesn't seem to be able to do what he did or as much as he was doing at Nevis. You've got to do the same thing every day. Over and over again. They don't get that at College. The teachers haven't got the time, nor have the aides. I think they should just be together. Just in the teaching, I think College is too much for some of these kids. I think they should be together. I would like them all kept together. I know they've still got to mix with the ordinary kids. Perhaps they could have music together or something like that. They could

join with the other kids in assembly and PE. I like the special class. It's a classroom in amongst all the classrooms. Bonita

Another parent would prefer her son to be in special education and also to be involved in activities with other people.

The mainstreaming is interesting. Edward brings home some magnificent work. Sewing. Pot holders. That sort of thing, I know they have to have help but it doesn't matter. It's being mainstreamed and they're being taught things. Some of the day they're doing the same things that ordinary kids are doing. He lives in a normal environment here. I don't expect him to be in a normal class but I like him to be involved in normal activities. He's always with normal children. At home here, he lives normally in a normal household with ordinary people doing ordinary things. He's part of everyday life. Joan

He felt quite happy getting back into the mainstream. I've often wondered when they did put him back in the mainstream if he didn't feel like a fish out of water because he didn't have that extra support there for him that helped him achieve more. He just became another one of the faces in the class and may have felt he had been left behind. He never really sort of talked about it. Fay

5.2.5 What do you consider to be the 'disadvantages' of special education?

Sometimes she says, "Oh, Mum. I don't want to go to school because the other kids tell me I'm cross eyes." The other day she said to me, "Oh Mum, I have to catch the bus. I don't want to go in the taxi because when the taxi gets to school, the other kids are going to say to me that I'm a handicapped person. But I'm not a handicapped person. The kids say I *am* a handicapped person." They're teasing her at school. Zena

There is probably the stigma with the special class at school no matter where it is or how nice it is. They're still special. They're still different. It's nicer now than it used to be but it's taking a long time. Jennifer

They get a hell of a life from some of the ordinary kids. The name calling. The teasing. The put downs. All that. Bonita

He did take time off school. He found it rather unsettling. He kept wanting to come home and stay home. I never really got him to settle. He got picked on a lot as well. Jan

They lack resources. They lack back-up. All it takes is for one to get out of hand. The type of kids they are dealing with, it could all be over in seconds before anybody got there to help the teacher in that situation. These teachers have to cope with difficult kids, quite violent kids. I'd like to see more resources given to these kind of units so they can give more time to education. Peter

I thought Michael is going to think he's really retarded or something. To begin with he was getting taunted about being a retard and so on. Robyn

She gets into some of these bad tempers. It's hard for her to handle some normal children because they still call her names. I'd like her to go to a normal school. A straight out normal school. I would have liked it but she would have been hounded. She would have been coming home worse than what she does now. She comes home in a bad mood if she's had a bad day but if she was in a normal school. Oh, man. She'd probably come home suicidal. Lina

They came in for quite a lot of name calling and being picked on by the other kids in the school. It made him get his back up and he would become quite aggressive about it. Or he would just say he didn't want to go to school because he had a sore tummy. Carol

One parent recalled the difficulty her daughter experienced with her peers.

When she was going to Wirihana it was, "Oh, you're different. You're not like us." Even though you've grown up with us and gone through school with us, you're different. Even though they had taken these kids from primary through Intermediate into high school to get it right with these kids in particular. The thing was they were now actually wearing makeup, looking at boys, going on with their lives. Sharna was still at primary school level. They didn't think she was interested in makeup and things like that. She was doing it very much slower than them. They've flourished and carried on and taken off. Monica

Because their child did not attend a regular class, several parents had experienced negative comments and a lack of support from family members.

When his father heard about him, he got called 'dumb.' But then he's had that pretty much all of his life because any time if he's a bit slow on the uptake on certain things even now he'll get. "Oh, you're dumb." His father does go on like that at him. He does that to all the boys. He's got no patience. Fay

We went through the reading process here. Getting him to read words. He'd bring home work but I didn't always see it. Working at night didn't allow me a lot of time to spend with him on that sort of thing. They had some little square with words on that he had to learn. I used to say to the kids, "Have you seen these words? Does he come and ask you to help him with them?" They didn't want to know. I said, "Well, you could help your brother out like that. You don't have to behave with him like you do." He never really showed anything because I think he was shied away from doing that. If he stumbles over the word he'd be smacked in. He would never go to the father and say, "Dad, I've got this to do. Can you help me with it?" I felt quite sorry for my kid. He never got any support from the rest of his family. He could never go to his sister or his brother and say, "Look could you help me with this?" He never had that sort of support. They all sort of followed Dad's lead. Hunapo never gave himself a lot of chances. I think he realised himself that he has limitations. At home he doesn't get a lot of support from his family. They all like to call him 'dumb' and all that low ability stuff. That lowers his self-esteem even lower which hasn't helped him. His father doesn't really have anytime for him at all. He'd punch him and hit him and tell him he's dumb. That wouldn't have helped the teachers either at school. Hunapo would get himself all confused. He'd miss days. Jan

It's been hard. My husband doesn't have much to do with her. As soon as he got home I gave him her report and he just gave it to her. He didn't even read it. Anne

5.2.6 On what occasions do teachers contact you regarding school and your child?

For most parents, they were contacted by teachers only when there were problems at school.

The only time I was hearing anything was when he was being naughty. It started making me feel very insecure because I started wondering what on earth has gone wrong with him. He was never this naughty before. I started to get insecure because I was thinking, 'They're going to tell him to leave there soon. What on earth am I going to do with him?' All I was getting was feedback that he was being naughty. I've got letters because he's actually got smart to the teacher. This affects me as well because I feel I'm just here as a battering board when he's naughty. Robyn

Mostly for things that have gone wrong. They're the things they tell me. It's mostly the things that have gone wrong that they let me know. Lina

Only when he when he was naughty. I started getting quite a few phone calls asking where Sebastian was. I'd find out he'd been missing days of schooling. Fay

Mostly for when things have gone wrong. Like when he's wet his pants or something like that. I've sent piles of clothes down there just so they've got clothes for him. Marie

The only time I ever heard from a teacher is if she had been naughty or done something wrong. That's the only time. Anne

Teachers ring me when there's a problem but they won't let me know when there's anything positive. The contact is always something negative. It's never anything positive. Or it's not enlightening me in any way as to how he's actually getting on. Robyn

Any time that Tim plays up she'd ring and let us know. Just this morning Mrs Falkner rang up and said that Tim had been playing up. That normally happens. Peter

Other parents did not expect any contact unless there were problems at school.

They can ring me if they want to. If anything's wrong, they can ring me. Sam

Several parents appreciated the contact with teachers for reasons other than 'problems.'

A teacher said to me that Rebecca had a body odour problem. Some people they just say, "Oh, she's a lovely child, that she's this and that" or "she just needs to learn on her manners a bit more." This lady went right out and said it. You could feel the embarrassment and everything in her voice, but she just went out and said it. And I really took my hat off to her because it makes you tell Ioka that the teacher knows. I know that she's got a body odour problem but I started getting lazy this year and not checking up on her. That was really good. You hardly find a person that's going to be straight up with you. And I felt sorry for her because she wasn't sure if she should have said anything. The expression on her face was, "Should I tell them or not?" But oh, it was good. It was a hard thing for her to say but I don't like people who go around the back saying, "Oh, nice child. Oh, but she's good." And I feel, 'Why don't you tell me what else? It's all right. I'm not going to be able to fix

the problem if you don't tell me. Don't just tell me she's a good kid. Tell me what else.' And then she let me know about this bad temper and some of the rude things she's done at school. I don't think she would have ever told me if I didn't say, "Oh, it's all right. It's no problem. Just let me know." It seems funny if your kid is going to school. They're saying this and that and all you get is, "Oh, she's a good kid. She's learning. She's concentrating." But they don't say, "She smells." So how can you know what to do if they don't tell you anything? She was really good about that. I really take my hat off to that lady. Lina

If she's sick, or if she's left something behind at home they'll give us a ring. Marion

I'll get a phone call about any little thing. They'd give me a phone call and there's nothing I didn't know that happened which I found was very good. Joan

Most parents had never been contacted about positive aspects of their child's schooling. Many parents had become weary of continually hearing about the problems teachers experienced with their children and expressed the desire to be told of the positive things that happened.

I've had nothing positive. I don't get any reports on his progress. No one has ever told me that Michael did well today, or Michael's reading is progressing, or we're doing this or we're doing that with him. I've not got any positive feedback from them. I'd like to hear it all. Not just when things go wrong. When he's bad and when he's good. I went to a parent/teachers' meeting when he got his report. I was hoping to go up there and see how they thought his reading was going. Whether he was improving. How his maths was going. The teacher spent the whole time telling me how naughty he had been. But that's not really why I went up there. I wanted to know how he was getting on academically. Why does everyone pick on what I do wrong? No one tells me what I do right. It's quite depressing. Especially when you're doing something and you're so proud of what you've done. You can't wait to show someone and they don't say, "That's amazing. You did a really good job there." They'll pick on one little bit that's wrong and you think, 'Well. What a waste of time.' I'm being brought in when he's bad and that's it. Robyn

No, not really. They've never rung me up and told me if he's done anything good. I only ever find out on the school reports and things like that. Or if I go down there for some reason. Marie

No. They don't ring and tell you the good things. One teacher rings me up plenty of times. I said to her, "What's he doing?" "Oh," she says. "He's just being stupid." That's not telling me anything about what he's doing and that's all I ever get. "He's being stupid and I growl at him." She couldn't tell me what he's actually doing. Tania

For other parents there had been occasions on which they had been rung and told of things their child had done well.

If anything happens with John, somebody will ring me up and I drop everything. They tell me all the good things and how good he is at doing this and that. They tell me what John's been doing and the things he hasn't been doing. Alex

I've known all the time what Tim has been up to because I've got phone calls from the school. They've let me know pretty well. They've been excellent really. When he was good Phyllis would ring us up and tell us that he'd been good. Peter

Teachers just didn't ring when there were 'problems' at school. They didn't ring me up for the hell of it, they rang me up to ask me specifically to ask me certain things. It wasn't just for fun. If he had a fit they would let me know. They would either bring him home or I would say, "When he gets over it he can just carry on like normal." Joan

Part of the school's policy for dealing with students who are absent is to inform parents their child has been missing from class. Most parents are appreciative of the information but consider the timing of phone calls a little inconsiderate.

He wagged school once and he got caught. Straight away Susan got in touch with me and she said, "David wasn't at school yesterday." With her getting straight in touch with me I could get on to something like that. Tania

I got a phone call at 9 o'clock at night saying, "Did you know that Michael wagged school today?" And I said, "How on earth can he wag school if he's taken to school in a taxi?" The teacher said, "Oh, well he came in the taxi. Then he went to the shop and didn't come back until twenty to nine." When she first said he wagged school, I pictured Michael not being at school all day and roaming the streets. When she said he wagged school, I got the shock of my life. But when she said he came at twenty to nine, I thought, 'What did she ring me for? Twenty minutes?' I was also a little bit annoyed that I'd been rung at that time of the night. On the other hand, I'm really quite pleased because then I know that Michael can't wag school even if he wanted to because they'd let me know. Robyn

5.2.7 How do you view your relationship with teachers?

Many parents considered their relationship with teachers to be positive.

The teacher struck up quite a bond between them. She took into account Michael's emotional needs and his personality. She worked around how she could get Michael to do things because he can be very extremely stubborn. It's like walking on eggshells with him sometimes. But she had him figured out and he started making progress. Robyn

There have been heaps of times they've said a lot of good things about Rebecca. Lina

We can go up there at any time. Time's never limited up there. I have to see more than one teacher because he's got several teachers. It's quite interesting too because we talk about several aspects of his life and what I think and how well he's done. It's quite good. I can go over whenever I like. I can sit in the room. I can sit in on the class and listen and watch. Whenever I want I can just go up there. I ring up somebody and say, "Oh, I'm coming up for a couple of hours." They won't say anything except, "That's fine." They make a cup of tea. And with chocolate bikkies. They make you feel very welcome. They are very good. I've got nothing to complain about really. Joan

I'm so pleased now. If I've got any concerns, I know I can go up there and get them sorted out. In the past, nobody had come to me. Now I feel that people will listen to what I say.

That people will listen to my concerns. For 8 years nobody wanted to know. Now we're *getting* there. Finally. Anne

I've found the teachers to have been very supportive of Tim. At other schools he would have been suspended or expelled. They've been pretty supportive of Tim and I think they've kept him there under great strain because of the kind of boy that he is. I ring or I go up whenever I've got any concerns. If there are any concerns at school, any concerns at all, they'll ring me up. If they need me, they'll ring me and ask me to come up. I don't mind. Peter

Many parents were appreciative of the support that the teachers in the special education unit had provided in dealing with outside agencies.

I've had good fortune. I've been very fortunate to work with people like Jill and the staff at special ed. They've been good to me and my wife. I can't say anything bad about any of the teachers there. I think that they've got a hard job. I think that what they have to deal with it's too much. They've helped me the most in giving me support. Jill's been to meetings with me with the social workers. We've had meetings here at home with the social workers. She's always given me support by telling the social worker what actually Tim has been up to. The social worker doesn't actually listen to what a caregiver has to say. They just say, "Oh, your job is just for caregiving and that's it." You try and put in any suggestions about what should happen to the boy and they try and shoot your head off. The social workers think they know better than you but they don't. They only get to meet the boy, not on a regular basis, maybe once or twice a year. You've got him all the time. To me our input is more valuable than any of the input they can put in. That's where Jill has been very good, by just backing me up and saying that sometimes Tim is bad and sometimes good. She's been quite a strength for my wife and I. Peter

One parent had rung the school with her concerns.

I've just found the support that I've had has been brilliant. Susan will actually sit down and talk to the kids. She will get in touch with you and talk to you. Or else we can always ring her and talk to her. If she's busy, she'll always ring me back. Tania

Another parent worked with the staff to carefully monitor the food her child ate.

I've been so fortunate throughout his schooling that I've got nothing to complain about really. Genuinely I haven't. There's been nothing that's been really bad all the time that he's been at school. He's not allowed Coca-Cola, chocolate biscuits, lollies, all that sort of thing. It hypes him up. It revs him up all night. I'm monitoring all that at home. At school they're monitoring it too. I know what's going on at school and they know what's going on at home. That's where we've got that understanding which I think is great. We've got a great understanding of one another. We're both working on the same level. To me that's very important. There's 100% support there. It is really good. Joan

Several parents whose older children had attended regular classes noticed a distinction between the teachers in special education and those in regular classrooms.

I just sort of found that it was not the same as when a child is in a normal class. You can go into that classroom and you can talk to the teacher and they can tell you what they're doing, show you their work, tell you where they're at. The only time I see teachers it leaves me confused. I don't sort of feel as though I can walk through Montrose's school gates the same as I can walk into Bramley or Arimu and go to the classrooms, sit down and talk to the teachers. I don't know whether that's me. I find it really hard. It's where to draw that line. Whether to go in or just sit down and make a nuisance of myself anyway. I think that if you have a special needs child, you shouldn't be treated differently by teachers. You should be treated the same by teachers. I'd much rather sit down at a parent/teacher interview like I do at Bramley and hear the whole caboodle, the whole lot if a child has misbehaved or whatever he has done. Instead of sitting down there and just getting a good report and coming away thinking, 'Well. Is it true?' Then you hear what Daniel comes back home with and you think, 'Did he make it all up? Is it just a story or are the teachers not saying anything?' It makes me incredibly wary. I've got another child who looks as though he is heading the same way. And to get into that kind of system. I don't really want him to. Carol

With the ones I've met, some teachers have annoyed me like sending things home with him. He's brought the wrong clothes home. Things like that. Marie

Several parents told of the negative aspects of their child's education. Regular class teachers who appeared to ignore their concerns frustrated many parents.

The day he started school, I explained that he has a problem. They more or less brushed me off and said, "Oh, we'll sort that out." On a couple of occasions for two years I went up there and said I wasn't happy. He's not getting anywhere. He'd learnt absolutely nothing and basically I was brushed off again. I was actually very angry because I had been telling them Michael had the problem and I never got any response. It was, "We'll take care of it." But nothing was ever done about it. I had to push for about two years to get them to actually move and get Michael some remedial reading. I had to push for that. The headmaster got quite anti-me because I kept pushing the school to do something about Michael's learning disability. It was the frustration that nothing had been done for so long. I feel that if I hadn't pushed so hard when I did, he wouldn't be getting the help that he is now. He was just sort of ignored because he doesn't appear retarded and he doesn't appear handicapped in any way. You only notice that he has a problem if you pay him special attention with his reading. People didn't notice. People just ignored him almost. That's basically what happened. Robyn

Only very rarely have people listened to me. It's only since Intermediate that I've had anything. That was the first time. When they first put him into the satellite class at Wilshire. The next lot was here at Montrose. We started having problems. He refused to go to school. Never. I tried and tried to get him to go to school. He was off for about 6 or 7 weeks. Before that he had always wanted to go to school. Then the psychologist and Susan came over here. They were here for a good couple of hours talking to both myself and David. They did the lot. It was really good. They arranged everything. Tania

I come up here and I said to the phys ed teacher and to the principal that Betty was not to do any jumping. That was not long after they did the second operation at the front of the ear. They kept on going. They kept saying she had to do phys ed., but we didn't want to wreck the operation. Sam

I really was so shocked at Intermediate when they led me to believe that she was going to go into the special unit at College and then to find out that, no, she wasn't. At Intermediate School they kept telling me that she needed help but nobody did anything to help. Her teacher talked about getting Jessie assessed to go into the special unit. He said, "We've got to make sure she's on the list of referrals before she goes to College." On her last day of school he said, "Yes, we're on top of that. We're going to do that." But they didn't do it. It wasn't until she went over there the first day of school that I found nothing had happened. It's just lucky I had gone up there with her so I could see her teachers. I thought that if she's going into the mainstream, I've got to do something. I was really worried about her. She would have gone to school by herself and sat there and wouldn't have known what to do. I wanted to see just what was going to happen to her. We were sitting there, waiting. They were calling out all these kids' names and putting them into classes. Everybody left and we're still sitting there. They had looked at the results of the entrance exams and put Jessie in special ed. But she wasn't enrolled in special ed. We went down there and they said, "No. She's not in special ed." Nobody had done anything. Nothing. Anne

Several teachers had made negative comments when parents had approached them to voice their concerns about their child.

They said to me, "You realise your son's handicapped don't you? You realise that your son's not learnt anything at school." Robyn

I'd get things like, "I've got 30 odd kids to teach. I can't spend my time teaching just one kid." and "Oh, he's not doing very well at school. He's so far behind in his work." Tania

When she first started school we didn't really know how bad the situation was. We found out afterwards by a slip of the tongue that one of the teachers shook Betty by the shoulders and pushed her in the corner with a book and told her that, "We don't want to know what you're doing." I just said, "Right, that's it. I'll line her up somewhere else." We decided to pull her out of that school. I had her at home for quite a while then while I sorted things out. It drove me silly. Sam

They turned around and said, "Oh, there's handicapped children at Greendale Intermediate." But Steven's not a handicapped boy. Laura

She would have been going towards 8. I got a call to go up to the school. I went to find out why and the teacher said, "She's no use here. She's got to go into a special needs class." I said, "No, no. She's been enrolled here." She said, "Well, I won't teach her. I won't have her. I haven't got the time." I said, "If you haven't got the time, why did you take her in the first place?" I know why really. She didn't want to be bothered because she wouldn't have the time for one-to-one. She didn't want Betty in that class because she thought that she would pull the others back. You could see that. You were getting that impression that that Betty would make it a drag for her. It was going to be too much of a handicap for the teacher because she's got 30 other children. Sam

I was not very impressed. He was very sanctimonious in the way he spoke. I felt I was talked down. He basically wrote Hunapo off. I don't remember word for word what he said but what I *can* recall is that if it wasn't the law that says kids have to go to school, he would have recommended for Hunapo never to go to school. That's sort of how it came across. That if Hunapo didn't have to go to school, he wouldn't have needed to. I wasn't very

happy with that at all especially when he turned around and said to me that, "People like Hunapo will find a job digging roads or collecting garbage." That kind of thing. That's how he saw Hunapo's life. Jan

For many years, Jan had continued to make the suggestion that her daughter may well benefit from the smaller classes and the individual teaching offered in special education.

"No. Jessie will never make it. She won't get in there. She doesn't qualify." Anne

These negative comments resulted in parents

Just being made to feel I was neurotic. Robyn

I felt funny. Like I had done something terribly wrong. I felt all upset. I felt really terrible. I thought I had done something wrong with him. Laura

A parent whose daughter had been in special education classes throughout her schooling had received several letters from the school requesting payment of School Certificate fees.

This letter. It's really bugging me. They've given me lots of reminders about her school certificate fees. I didn't even know she was going in for school certificate. I don't know what's going on there. Lina

There were also the occasions that her daughter had been out of school and Lina found out when her daughter arrived home to tell her where she had been and what she had been doing.

The only thing that gets to me is if they've gone somewhere and I didn't know about it until she comes home and tells me. The thing that bugged me was that work experience that she went picking tomatoes. So that means she was out of school and I found out when she came home. I don't like that. I hate it. Lina

Jennifer's concerns centred on her interactions with people outside school.

People from SES are the hardest to cope with. They are very business-like. They just do the tests and go. The tests are different from one time to the next and the people are different. Different doctors, psychologists, teachers and speech therapists. Jennifer

Many parents recounted their positive experiences with teachers. It was important for parents to have their concerns listened to and acted upon, to be told the facts of a situation and to have children who were happy.

We went to live in the United States for six months. I enrolled him in an elementary school. I said to them that he has a problem with reading and writing. They said, "Don't worry. We'll sort that out." By two o'clock that same day they had arranged a meeting with me, with the psychiatrist, with the headmaster and with a psychologist. And in that short time they had actually done a brief assessment of him. They called me up to the meeting and we discussed what they had found in their short assessment and decided what's going to happen for Michael. By the end of the week, they had decided that they were going to send him to another city thirty miles away for two hours a day in a special education facility. They were going to take him and bring him back each day. Robyn

I just like people to be honest and tell me straight out. Because if I don't know, I'm not going to do anything about it [a problem or a concern]. Lina

I think he got a lot out of it [special education]. He seemed quite happy with being in there. Fay

The special care. Because the care includes everything. Special teaching. Special looking after. The caring. Martha

There were things that he liked to do. He liked the woodwork and he seemed to enjoy the cooking and that sort of thing they gave him. Jan

The best thing about school for John is being involved. The first year that he went to College, he started to do running. They organised a team to go the Special Olympics. The most achievement he can get out of school is the sports. He loves going to PE. Peter comes in and tells me everything he does at school and about his computers. He loves the computers. Alex

5.2.8 What information have you been given about educational options and choices for (your child)?

Most parents had not been given any information either about the academic level at which their child was functioning, or the nature and purpose of any assessment procedures. Most parents had not been given any opportunity to become involved in discussing either the content or the direction of their child's education.

I never really had that sort of input into his schooling. No one explained things. Nobody ever came and told me anything about him. They just allowed him to puddle on. Nobody discussed anything with me. Nothing. Whether they thought that I was being told stuff at home I don't know. But my kids don't say anything. I think he got to the stage himself and found it really frustrating. Especially when he was in the 5th form. He seemed to take more time off school. A lot of it was he just didn't want to go any more. He had just become completely turned off. He wasn't achieving anything. He was just getting quite stale I suppose. Fay

Once she went to high school sometimes you had contact, sometimes you didn't. But I blame a lot of that on myself for maybe not keeping in touch. I'd ring if there was anything

that bothered me or that bothered Mandy. There was no sort of barrier to me saying, "Look, I'd like a bit of an explanation." I'd have no qualms with marching along before school or trying to catch the teacher to ask about something that was bothering me. I think if I had it all over again, I would ask more. I'd spend more time with Mandy at school when she was very young so that I got to know what was actually out there for her because that was the main thing. Nobody really explained things and said, "Look these are the choices you've got." We just seemed to get into the system of special classes and rolled along with it. Sometimes I feel like maybe they're baby sitting for me which I don't want. I've got an interest as a parent. This is where I'd like my child to be going and it's that sort of input that's important so that we're all going in the same direction. There needs to be some sort of direction in which we're going. Jennifer.

Michael tells me he is learning to read and write in Maori. I'm quite angry about the fact that Michael is having an extreme amount of trouble learning to read and write in English. They're taking away valuable time when they could be teaching him English. It's going to confuse him because the Maori language has different ways of saying letters and Michael does have a speech problem as well. But nobody contacted me to ask me if I wanted him to learn Maori. I do feel as though I'm being left out of Michael's education. I would like to be involved with him the same as I was being involved with him at Intermediate where we sit and discussed things probably every six months. There were quite a few meetings. They were held quite regularly. I kept quite close contact with Michael's teachers. We would discuss together how we thought it would be best to deal with this problem or that problem. They would give me advice on how to deal with him at home with his reading and personality-wise. I would give them advice on how I thought they could get him to do things when he's refused. We'd just swap notes. There was quite a big space in between meetings but it was enough. Also, I could go up there and talk to his teacher whenever I liked. She would give me ideas on how we could handle things. I would give her my ideas and we would swap notes, work together. I can't really give any input on how to teach him to read. I tried teaching him to read at home and succeeded with a few words. As far as handling Michael, I think I should have an input. I think that should be discussed between the teacher and me while I'm there. How best to handle him when he's being stubborn. Or just dealing with his personality. I'd like some contact so I know what's going on. Probably about once a month. Robyn

Comparing him to his brother I have had more input with his brother than I ever did with Blue. I think if somebody had come to me about Blue and said, "Look, we're having this sort of difficulty," I would have liked the same amount of input as I did with his brother but nobody bothered to ask me. Fay

They didn't ask me if I need to know anything or if I wanted anything. They would just call me in and say they were doing an assessment of Rebecca now to see how she's progressing, but that was all. They didn't ask me if I wanted anything changed in the way they were teaching her. They never said what they were doing. They never asked me what I would like to do. They hardly ever asked me if there was anything I wanted changed for her. They just did it. I had never really thought about it before. I just went along with what they decided. Lina

These people from psych services who come in and do the reports. I didn't really know much about that. We used to go to the office for a while and they just used to do assessments and things. They'd ring you up and say, "Someone is coming in. Your appointment is such and such." You'd go in and you'd answer these questions and all

they'd do would be to ask about Mandy. I was just really there to take her to get assessed. He'd just sort of say, "Well, she's reading at a level 6" and "How's her health?" and "Have you any problems with her?" They'd just go on with all the usual things. A couple of times they posted the results. I only found out about things when somebody asked me what had gone on and I didn't know. Jennifer

Not a thing about who was doing the assessments or how it was done. Nothing. Nobody told me anything and I didn't even know she had been assessed. Anne

There's never been anything. Not for all the years he's been at school. Unless Patrick has brought notices home and I haven't got them. Sometimes they've said I could go down to school to see what the kids do but I'd rather be in Patrick's group to see what he does instead of watching all the rest of them and not specifically seeing him. I've known that he's had assessments but they've never sent me any letters or told me anything. Nothing about what they were going to do or if it was all right. I know he's had assessments and all that but what they are I don't know. Marie

It was "Yes, he's doing fine." and "He's doing that." But when it came to the end, we'd sort of have a little meeting and they would say things like, "Well, he's not really where he should be." I sort of felt that when I went along that he wasn't at the age level for reading or writing or maths but nobody was saying that until the end of each year. They said it was just that he wasn't coping. In the course of all that they had one of their psychologists look at him and give him tests and all that and it came out that he was only at a 7 or an 8 year level. I hadn't realised that. Nobody had ever told me. Nobody had asked me what I would like. I just got presented with this thing that they had done. Like saying that he was at a 7 or 8 year level and I thought, 'Well, what's going to happen next?' Carol

It was not until Regina reached Intermediate school that her parents were told of her difficulties with her academic subjects, in particular her reading, her writing and her maths.

I thought Regina's doing all right at school until we find out at the Intermediate that Regina's not coping. When I decided to change Regina's College that's when they told us. That's the first time I knew and even my kids, my eldest girl didn't know. I went to the parents' interview. We was surprised when the teacher told us about Regina. They said Regina's learning is slow. That her age is old, but her mind is like a 6 year old. That's what they told us. All the way through primary school I didn't know about anything. We knew when they told us when we had the meeting with the principal of Taipari when she finished the Intermediate. That's when they told me that Regina's not a normal person. Since she started school, nobody told us that she's not learning. I didn't know that she's not the same person as the other kids at her age. I just knew when they told me about it at our meeting with all the principals. That Regina would find secondary school too difficult. That's what they told me. She's 13 years old but they told us she's only the mind of a 6 year old person. That was the only time they told me what's going on. I thought, 'She's all right. She's doing the same things as everybody else.' I think she's doing well. Since when she's little it was the only time that we knew that she had a problem. Zena

I never heard anything from the teachers about what was going on. Nothing about how he was getting on or how he was at school with his learning or anything. There was never anything like, "Oh, we've got to see you about Blue and his schooling." It was never like that at all. I never had anybody come and say, "He's a bit slow here," or "He's a bit slow there." They just sort of seemed to push him through. Nobody ever said anything. Nobody

ever said anything to me about Blue as being slow or having difficulties or anything like that. Nobody ever said anything. He was never top of the class. You'd see his report and read the comments that they make. Fay

We had nothing to say there was anything wrong with him, nothing. Until he was at Intermediate stage. Until I had enrolled him at the wrong school. Laura

No. Not really. I would have preferred to have been consulted. Along the way I found out things that I hadn't known before. Different things. About assessments and things like that that they actually do for them. I didn't realise that they did that. They never did them on a regular basis. I know about maybe 3 in the whole of her schooling time. One time I went to school and he went through the assessment that he'd done with Mandy. Every few years you'd get hit with, "She's still at a reading level of 5." Jennifer

Nobody said a word. They all just said that she was lazy or that things were going well or that she was all right. Nobody said a thing. Nobody said anything about what was going on at school. Nothing. Anne

Many parents were delighted with their involvement at school. Several expressed amazement at how fortunate they felt to have been included to such an extent.

People explained things to me all the time as he's gone through school. I've been very fortunate in that respect. I felt that you could ask them anything. They were very cooperative and very helpful. They involved me all along the way. Sometimes teachers do things for children and sometimes don't tell the parents. I've never experienced that anyway. All through school what has been done has been done to the best of everyone's ability. I don't think anything could have been done any better. It is quite amazing and that's why I've been very cooperative with the school. They've been cooperative with me. If you're good to me, I'll be good to you sort of thing. Everybody working together to do the best they can for Karl. That's a big thing to me. That's a very big thing. I never used to go to the school a lot but I've had a lot of talking with the teachers. Joan

They do keep me informed. The teachers and this lady from the Special Education Service. I always meet with them so this is when they tell me about Alfonso and then they asked me too if there was anything else that I wanted to know or wanted to say. When they ask me if I want to come with him and meet with them I go. Sara

I knew the teachers. They would talk to me and say, "Well, Andrew is more advanced than what some of the others are in the class so we're going to go on to something else now with him. Is that all right with you?" The teachers always talked about what they were doing. Bonita

It is the teachers first who tell me what is happening. He was doing this programme. They were trying to find some help for him. They found out what was happening to him so they set out this programme to take the special education. They let me know all the time what is happening. Everything about the tests. It's been really good. Everything about the programme is really good. Martha

I've been involved all the time John has been at school. And my wife has too. Sometimes if I get the chance, I go to report afternoons. I've been up to the school two or three times to help plan programmes for John. And at the end of the year to see what John would be able to do the next year. I've had good input into all sorts of things. Teachers have told me what John can do. That has been true all the time he's been at school. Alex

The support system was that fantastic. They involved me and I involved them. But basically all the decisions that were made were mine. *I did it. I decided when, where and if.* We set up meetings every month with everybody that was involved with her. The whole lot. Monica

At report afternoons I've got to go and see her teachers. She's learning what she's supposed to be learning. Marion

I used to go to some of their meetings for special needs. I knew what was going on. I got invited to things like that. I did go to parent/teacher things over there specifically for him. Jan

Fay felt aggrieved that times allocated for her on report afternoons did not take into considerations her commitments to her job. Fay also felt disillusioned about the discrepancies she found between the comments written on the reports bore no relation to what was actually happening.

They always seemed to have glowing reports about him. 'Oh, yes. He's doing fine.' All that sort of thing. There was never really a lot about it. Some of the times when they did have these parent/teacher things, they would give me times that were too late where I couldn't go because I'd be working. It wasn't always easy to get over to these places at the times they had set. Even though I had specifically stated what times I would want they always seemed to shove me into the later times. There were times that I couldn't be bothered going because you get sort of sick of waiting around. Then you'd have talks with the teacher and I feel that they don't really tell you the full story about what's going on with them at school. Fay

When Mandy started College, Jennifer was invited to attend her first IEP meeting and was thrilled to be asked, for the first time in nine years, what her goals would be for her daughter.

I've been to one IEP meeting about the middle of last year. That's the only one. It doesn't seem to be on a regular basis throughout the whole time. It just seems to be whammo and they hit you with one and you think, 'Oh!' It might go for such a long time. I've only had one. I've never ever had them before in any other school. You go down and have a talk with the teacher at parent/teacher meetings but that's not the same. When she first went to College, Jill said "Now what would I like for Mandy?" and I thought, 'Wow. What *would* I like for Mandy?' That was the first time someone had said that to me. That was really good. Jennifer

Martha was constrained by the responsibility of having young children at home.

I go to meetings to talk about Ioasa. Not every time. I should go every time but because of the children I can't take them wherever I go. That's the problem because the children need me. Martha

Although they had been invited to attend meetings, several parents were content to leave educational matters to those at school.

They've tried to get me involved but I never know what to say. I never have much to say. There's not much that I'd like them to do for her besides teach her. I always think they know what they're doing so I leave it to them. I think the teachers have done all right. It's only sometimes I think, 'Oh, why didn't they tell me? Why didn't they let me know?' I know a lot of things that go on at school. It's up to me whether I'm going to come up to school and do anything about it. Lina

I just agreed with what they wanted. They made the plans and told me of the options. They said they had put her into computer studies or metalwork or cooking or sewing. They sent things home and I said, "Yes. All right. You can do it." I was never one to go and interfere unless they got in touch with me. Then I would go up and see them. I keep away. I send them to school because that's their job. It's the teachers' job not my job. The only time I have to go to school if there's been any trouble or if they want to see me. I think that's fair. I give them a fair go. I keep right out of it altogether. I don't ever come by on a report afternoon. I take the report that they write that it's fair dinkum. I let them carry on with their job and do it. I just don't think that I should live on the doorstep of the school all the time. Betty

I've never sort of said no to anything that the school has ever suggested. The only time I ever decided on my own to do anything was to change schools. I just thought that having the same teacher for 4 or 5 years was really probably not good for the teacher or Mandy. Jennifer

For most parents, there had been no information given about alternative placement options. Regardless of the level of entry (primary, intermediate or secondary), most of the decisions about schooling appeared to have been made by teachers.

I wasn't told anything about where he could go. His teacher said that Nevis would be the best place for him because at that time Nevis was the only school around her with a special class so that's where he went. I wasn't asked about that. They just said he was going to Nevis Intermediate so I just let him go there. I wasn't very pleased at the time but then I thought, 'Oh well, he's getting older. I suppose that's the only school around here that's got a special class.' So that's where he went. Marie

It was put to me from the psychologist that they were going to send him down to this class at the school. I was told that he was going down there. They had gone and seen them and all I had to do was just take him down to the school. I don't ever recall being asked what I thought about it. I was just sort of told, "Well, this is it. We can't do anything more for him at this school." They've done all that they feel they could do. Jan

Nobody explained anything to me. Never. Anne

They said, "We've arranged for her to go to Ruarangi." Nobody had asked me once. Sam.

Nobody asked us what we were going to do about secondary school but they did ask us if we would like to go through the school where she's going and have a look. Marion

I didn't want her there but you have to go with the flow. I didn't say anything. I didn't tell them. I just thought it to myself that I didn't want her there. Lina

When John was at kindy I got a lot of the information. It was from an old lady that I knew. Her daughter was working for me. I was telling her that John had been an epileptic and she said, "You should go and have a talk to mum. She'll tell you all the ins and outs." It was her mum that said there was a school in Covil Road that I could go and get an interview there and that's what happened. Alex

They said they were going to take her to Orchard Road Intermediate. They just took her there. When they said she was going into secondary they just told me which one she was going to. I thought, 'it's a bit far.' To me it sounded like, "Oh, that's the only kind of class for her, so we'll go for that class at that school." It sounded like there's no other class around here that's any closer to us. Lina

Throughout her primary and Intermediate years, Regina had been in a regular class.

I decided when she's finished Intermediate I wanted to take her to Taipari because we're Catholic. I want her to grow up so that she learns from there how important the Church is to us. Her application was a success so the principal sent us the letter to say she could go to Taipari after Intermediate. Then they send us a letter. They want to meet me and my husband. We talked and they tried to make me understand why they wanted Regina to go to the special unit at Montrose College. She's 13 but she has the mind of a person that is 6 years old. That's what they told us. I told them why I wanted to take Regina to the Church school but they said they have to take Regina to the unit at Montrose because Taipari haven't got a special unit for the special people like Regina. They told us not to worry about Regina's transport to school. They had to arrange for the taxi to pick her up in the morning and drop her off in the afternoon. So that's why Regina's been going there. Zena

When she started primary school it's like everything is just rolling along. When she had left Intermediate nobody said, "Well these are the options." We just rolled on to the next class in the next year. What I felt was, 'Oh, well. It's just up the road here and it's fine and it's the same. It's in the system. You're lucky to get in.' Her brother was at the same school so that was where she went. Jennifer

Several parents had made enquiries about possible placements for schooling. In most cases these were made when the student changed from Primary to Intermediate schools or from Intermediate school to College.

At primary school we got talking about Intermediate schools. About where it would be possible for him to go. We had to look for somebody that takes special needs because he'd get lost in the system of mainstreaming. She said that Orchard Road Intermediate, which

was closer at hand, had a special needs class. The other kids had been going to the Intermediate anyway so that's where he went. Jan

They did ask me what College I preferred him to go to. His sister was at Unsworth College and they didn't have a special class. The only other college was Montrose and that had a special unit. I was told about the special unit down there so I went and had a look before he actually started. Marie

They sent me a form telling me that Ioasa is ready to go to College and I chose that school for him. Martha

I got on to the teacher about where to send him next. I had to have a look at where I could possibly send him. They told me Montrose College had their own special needs class with people that would help him so I thought, 'We'll put him in there.' I got invited along with a couple of the other mothers. I got a note about it from the Intermediate teacher 'We're going up to have a look. Would you like to come along?' We went on their bus and had a look. I was quite impressed with what I saw and with what I had been told and what I had heard. I thought, 'Well at least there's these people that can still carry on working with Hunapo.' Jan

One parent had made her choice based on information she had gained from talking with her friends.

Sometimes I did get a bit of help from friends or acquaintances in the system. That's how I got into Montrose. By word of mouth. By hearing about what was offering. By a person pointing me in the right direction. It was a friend of a friend who worked in the IHC and who said she'd ask at work for me. I think maybe as a parent you get to roll on with your life like everybody does. Jennifer

Another parent passed the College each day and found it convenient to drop off her son on her way to and from work.

I chose Montrose College because I go past there every day and I take Andrew to school. It's on my way and I thought, 'Oh, well. The other kids from Intermediate were going there too so he would know someone.' Bonita

The greatest concerns for parents were teachers who appeared not to listen to their children and accept their explanations, comments which left them with a feeling of hopelessness, inaction, a lack of information and inappropriate comments.

Twice a week there was detentions coming up because he couldn't do sport. He refused to go and he'd get into trouble. It was really because he couldn't go to them and say, 'this and this.' They wouldn't get in touch with me about it. It's really hard for a parent to get in touch with a PE teacher because they could be anywhere in the school. I told him to tell the teacher to get in touch with me. Never once. No one was listening to him. I feel they should really stop and listen to kids more. Some of the kids find it hard to explain what they mean. David's one of those ones. But if you do sort of stop and listen and talk to him about it you can actually figure out what he's trying to say. I feel that a lot of the teachers need to work

with the kids a lot more. If they're in a satellite class it's obvious they've got problems. They should spend just a bit more time talking to them. Talk to the child before running to the parents. Parents aren't actually there to see what's going on. Tania

A psychologist talked to him and went back and wrote her report and it was sent to me. It said Daniel would always need help. It said that Daniel wouldn't be able to have a proper job, that he would have to be somewhere where he was always helped along. He wasn't going to be able to get out there and do what everyone else is doing. He would always need help. It sounds like, even though they don't say it, that he will have to go into some kind of workshop where he is always helped with his job and to be kept on task and things like that. They seem to think that his mind will just wander off. There's never been much said about what's going to happen when Daniel leaves school. I do wonder what is going to happen. I know he wants to leave. So what *is* going to happen to him? That report was the first time that anyone had ever sat down and written it out and said, "Well, he's not going to cope in a normal environment. He's going to have to be looked after." Carol

If she had been given time when she first started school she might have picked up a lot more. There was not enough one-to-one teaching. She was just sort of pushed into a corner and left. When we thought she might not be able to hear we just took her to the doctor and he put it down to shyness. I went for a second opinion. After a while we took her to a specialist and we found out that she had to have grommets in her ears. It sort of didn't do the job so back again for another operation. They had us everywhere. I had no trouble with my other girls. This was something completely new. We took her into Auckland Hospital. When we came home we noticed when we were going along the motorway and there were trucks and cars going past, she had her hands over her ears. Suddenly she could hear the sounds. She could gradually hear the sound of her own voice. If they had done the operation at the beginning, maybe things would have been different for her. I just can't think why is it me that has got punished? But there you are. That's the way the score went. The specialist said she could have had a slight stroke when she was born. It didn't affect how her body worked but just made the brain a bit lazy on the left. A lot of it we think was we think she wasn't able to hear and with the brain being a bit lazy it was a combination that her speech wasn't there. There's nothing you can do for it. It's just one of those things. You've just got to take it. Sam

Just the little things that affect me personally. About not finding out about the system and how it works and what your choices are or what options there are available and how it all operates. Just the things that directly affect Mandy and me. Probably my main thing is not knowing myself what was out there because nobody told me and because I found out when somebody asked me a question. Now I say to people, "Hey, you can do such and such," or "No, you don't have to do that." They didn't know anything about it and I go, "Oh, I only found out a couple of weeks ago." It's by talking to friends or parents rather than from the teachers. Jennifer

I'm getting a bit brassed off. There is one person who keeps saying that she is going into the mainstream. But she's not. Yesterday I was told that it was up to us if she ever did go into the mainstream. Nobody had said that until yesterday when I asked and complained about this person saying she was going in there. I'm thinking, 'Oh. No. It'll just send her right back again. Back to the beginning.' She's not ready. I couldn't cope with her getting behind, going right back down again. Not right now. Later on maybe. Now it's up to her father and me if she ever does go back into the mainstream. Anne

There were parents who helped students with their homework.

If she's got maths homework I've got little blocks. I bought a bag of little blocks, like threading blocks and she uses that for counting. With any homework or anything she's got I'm here to help. Marion

When John was getting homework, I used to sit down with the maths. I used to sit at the table with him. I've tried to teach John the money value for different things. I give him maybe \$10.00 and then he goes around to the shops. When he comes back he puts the change on the table and tells me how much change he has got. Alex

In addition to coping with other children and numerous hospital appointments, one parent had donated books to school libraries and had made a garden to support his daughter's interest in horticulture.

I've spent hours backwards and forwards to the hospitals. At the schools she went to, I went and bought them maths books. I brought things. I gave them things to help them in their library at school. She gets the encouragement. I had even made a small garden for her at home for her to potter around in. Things like that. Her speech is as good as gold. I've asked people who've rung and they've said she speaks just fine. As clear as a bell. Everything that we have done it's an achievement. I think we achieved something by getting a report back from people that don't really see her. They tell me that she speaks as good as gold. I've done everything for her as much as possible. I've given all of my three girls the best. It's tough being a parent. Betty

As his son became involved with athletics, Alex devoted a considerable amount of his time travelling to different venues to watch the competitions.

I've been involved with the Special Olympics. I've been right through since he started. I've followed him right through. I've taken him to Tauranga, Hamilton, North Harbour, Waiheke Island. I've been all over the North Island. When the Nationals were in Hamilton, John went down on Friday night. My wife and my other son went down on Saturday morning, came home on Saturday night, went down again on Sunday morning and came home on Sunday night. It was a long trip but we were still involved in it. Alex

5.2.9 What have been/are your expectations/goals for your son/daughter?

For most parents, their concerns are about what their children are currently doing at school. As several students approach the time to leave school, there are concerns about appropriate job-training courses and future employment. Several parents wanted their son or daughter to be 'ordinary' children. The most important thing all parents desired was their child's happiness.

When I look it just seems that he is so good. I know that he's no good with his reading and his writing but he's so good with his hands. He's good at cooking. He can follow the instructions in a cook book. Some of that's not so good because he can't be bothered coming and asking. He can drive our car. Is he going to be able to work in a proper job or what? I want him to be happy. Carol

When John leaves school my ambition would be to get a small place down in the country and have two or three paddocks with animals. Even a horse. John would love it. He loves animals. I think that if he got into horticulture he would love it. He loves digging up my gardens. He mows the lawns for me. If he went into the Polytech into horticulture, I think he'd be good there. My look into the future for John is that he can stay there at Montrose College until he's 21. After he's 21 I'd like him to get into Polytech to do something there and get a job after that. Maybe after a while we can look and see what his capabilities are. With one or two courses at Polytech he could learn a lot of different things. Alex

I know that it's going to be hard for her to get a job but we'll try. We'll try anything. Sam

I think at the moment I'm happy just to be that he wants to go to school and come back knowing something he's learned. Even if it's little. Small things. He's happy. I think he's happy. Martha

I've always treated Andrew as an ordinary child. I didn't mollycoddle him or anything like that. When he first went to school he could feed himself. He was blowing a whistle. He was doing all the things that nobody else could do. I was never one to say, "Here let me do that." It was always, "You try." Or I would show him and then say, "You try." He is a boy that would just keep going back to it and trying. Bonita

It's getting towards that time when she'll be leaving school. I'm up to the choices now where I've got to make decisions to see what will be best for Mandy and how we can work it all out. Whether she goes to tech or something like that. I don't know much about tech so I've got to get rolling. Jennifer

I do have some hopes that he is reaching this kind of level. That he knows how to write and how to read and grow up and get out of that slow learner thing. Sara

I don't know. It really is a worry because I don't know what he's capable of. Academically, not a lot. I think he's capable of very little. That's one of the things that worries me about Montrose. I think sometimes they expect a bit much from him. He'll come home with written homework and there's no way in the world he could read it. I have to read it to him which is fair enough. I don't mind doing that, obviously. But I wonder when they send him home with it, do they realise that Michael doesn't really know what they are talking about? I notice lately he's reading simple words on the TV and you think, 'Oh, gosh. He actually read that.' Then another word will come up and it's completely wrong. The first letter's wrong, the last letter's wrong. He'll think what probably *should* be written up there and he'll say it as that. I would like to see him get to be the best that he can be. I don't know what *is* the best he can be. Robyn

Just for her to do her best. To be happy. To do her best and hopefully she'll come out a real good kid. I don't expect too much of her. I'd just like her to be happy. Lina

She didn't go into the 5th or the 6th form to sit School Certificate or anything like that because we knew that she wouldn't get to that level in school. Sam

He can't write his name very good. That's one of the things we've been working on with him. Often we'll sit down and write his name and make him go over and over it again. He is getting better, but I don't think they're teaching him that at school. I would like to know what goals we can set for him. I have never done that. I'd like to know what we can help him with. Marie

Sometimes I think she can be a bit lazy. She still doesn't write her name properly. She still runs all her words into one. She talks too quickly. She still can't grasp the value of money. Sam

For most parents their expectations were realistic and had been met to a large extent. Many parents expressed pride in their son's or daughter's achievements.

He was in a play this year. He performed a part. It was at Maori club where he does the haka. That was a great achievement. We had to live with that for weeks. That's just something that he's achieved and that he was proud of. And I was proud of him too for being able to do it. Joan

I've never had a bad report about her. Sam

Andrew astounds me sometimes with the things he comes out with. A little bit of *Romeo and Juliet*. Or something to do with history of some sort. Bonita

John's done well. John's done really well in his sport. He's got 17 medals, 30 ribbons and 17 certificates he's won in Special Olympics. When he was at Garus school he got certificates for horse riding. He used to come down to the plant shop on Thursdays and clean up and empty the bins and look after the plants. He loved that. Alex

The activities that he brings home like his woodwork. Anything that he does at school and he did it well. He's just made this piece of square wood. I think it was a thing that you put a hot teapot on. It says, 'Happy Mother's Day.' And a thing to put letters in. He does bring things home that he has made. That's when I know he's doing well, especially his fine motor skills. It's his hands. It tells me that he is making progress in making those things at woodwork. He also has brought home a bag to put some socks in. He made it at his sewing class. Sara

She got her report yesterday. She got a CREDIT with her report which none of my children have ever got. I was so pleased and proud of her yesterday when I went up there and spoke to some of her teachers. Anne

Several parents volunteered suggestions which they felt would have enabled them to have coped with an educational system beyond their experience. Jennifer considered herself ill-informed about the options available to her and would have preferred to have the special education system clarified from the beginning of her child's involvement rather than by finding out as things were required. She also considered meetings with other parents would be beneficial.

It's the Special Education system I think that I would open up a lot more and then I would understand it a lot more. Like when a parent starts off in the system that they actually learn it then instead of bits of it as they go. Have it fully explained. I've never been to the Special Education Service. Should I go? When Mandy first started school I wasn't made aware of the system. How it operated and what choices and decisions I might have made. Just knowing more. For a long time I didn't really understand the concept about the teachers that are brought into the class. The helpers. I didn't know that Mandy had 'hours' and things like that. Or that you had to apply for hours and all those sorts of things. I just thought people were there helping. I didn't know that each child had set hours so there must have been lots and lots of things like that. When I first came to Montrose, that was the first time I knew that there were these things. Maggie asked me how many hours Mandy had been allocated and I said I didn't know. When I changed to Montrose I thought I was just going to swap schools just like that. But I had to apply to the Special Education Service. I knew nothing about Special Education Services. Before that, things had just rolled along. We had the taxi right from the word go, otherwise I would still be taking her. Things like that. All the sorts of little things. Now she actually is getting a benefit. I didn't know she was entitled to that. I never knew that for years and years until someone said, "You should apply for Mandy." I said, "Well, we're all right." They said, "No. She's entitled to have it." And actually it does help a lot because she does do lots of things with it. Perhaps a meeting in Special Education. Like all the parents together. It should be helpful to have other parents to talk to. Some of the people seem to have support groups like cerebral palsy, like the blind people. I was talking about it to a parent at one time and they were saying they were getting their daughter to catch the bus and teaching her just the things like that. Like how to cope with living. Like getting along from one day to the next. I wouldn't have a clue about it all. Jennifer

Other parents would appreciate an emphasis on the positive aspects of their child's schooling.

I would dearly love to get a phone call. For Michael's teacher to ring up and say, "I've just rung to let you know that Michael has done so well at school today. His reading has picked up." It also takes a lot of worry off me as well. It is a constant worry to the point I don't get to sleep at night worrying about what is going to happen to him. When you're only getting the negative information about his behaviour, it doubles your worry because you're not only worried about his academic possibilities for the future, you're thinking, 'Oh, God. Now he's going to rebel.' I would dearly love to get a phone call occasionally saying that Michael is doing really well. Even a little note saying, "Michael did very well today. We're happy with him." Anything. Anything positive. Robyn

Other parents found it difficult to get information from their children and thought the production of an informal newsletter would keep them informed about progress and daily events.

It would be nice if all the teachers will write notes each day. Each day something so I could know what's happening because Alfonso comes home and I say, "Where's your book? Where's your jacket?" And he goes, "I don't know." It's hard for me sometimes to cope with communication with Alfonso. Sara

Occasionally I think they should send a notice home. Not really a notice. Just something on what he's doing. Even a letter in an envelope about what he's achieved or something like that instead of getting it all in a school report at the end of the year or at the end of the term. It would be quite a help to get something, say every month or so. Or every two months. Something like that. So that I knew what was going on at school. Marie

I'd like to know where she's actually at. What she is achieving. I'd like more of that. Not go for one or two years and then find she's still on 5 and 6 year old things like she has been for the last 2 years. She sounds better but then she comes to a test. I guess it's knowing where she's come from and where she's at and where do we go from there. I'd like a bit more of that sort of thing a bit more often. Jennifer

Another parent would appreciate an invitation along to the school to see her child in action.

Schools have to be very open and invite parents along and say, "Look, if you want to come and sit in, not to distract the children. But if you'd like to come along and watch." They should have open days quite frequently where parents can go along and watch their children. Watch them what they're doing. Like when he was doing computers. That must have been a *great* achievement for somebody like Karl that can't count, to use computers. We could go along and watch them do it. That would be really interesting. Joan

5.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS

5.3.1 To what extent do you think parents should be involved in their child's education?

All teachers believed parents

[They] should be entirely involved in making educational decisions about their children.
Maggie

The main reasons for parents to be involved were to dispel unrealistic academic expectations, to support the efforts of teachers and to make informed decisions which would affect their children once they had left school.

It should be a mutual process because some parents are under illusions about their children and their abilities. If we're mutually involved in what's best for the child's education, these problems wouldn't arise because there is the opportunity to point out specific strengths needed for specific things. You can point out that academic work is something that shouldn't be considered for the future of the child but that he or she has great organisational skills, or tremendous ability in art, or very good practical skills. You can concentrate on the positive aspects of each person. Maggie

Parents should be totally involved when it comes to discipline when there are challenging behaviours or behaviour problems such as truanting, bad attitudes, wagging classes. When

you ring them up to say, 'I've got a problem with your child. I need your help,' most of the time they say, 'We'll try to keep an eye on her.' Lyn

Ultimately their children are going to leave here and be affected by whatever decisions have been made by parents, or others, about their children's education and future. It's crucial that they are involved because parents are going to have to take total responsibility for them in many cases. Rita

As many teachers pointed out, for parents who have little contact with the school, many have unrealistic expectations of their children's capabilities.

Sometimes parents have totally unrealistic expectations. For example, we've got a student with an intellectual disability whose parents really thought could be sitting school certificate. That person cannot read, but the parents seemed to be unaware of that. Another child is desperately unhappy. She is quite capable and quite able to do a lot of work. She does not have an intellectual disability, rather a learning disability. She is under a great deal of pressure from her father to sit school certificate. Her father says that if she doesn't sit it and doesn't pass then she's dumb and she's no good. This is absolutely dreadful for the child because, on our advice, *she* knows that she is not going to pass no matter *how* hard she tries. There are all kinds of pressures there. Some parents have realistic expectations. but for some parents, the expectations are too great. They don't seem to realise the limitations of their child's ability. Maggie

Most of the time parents are quite understanding. They know their child's limitations. But some parents have unreal expectations of their children. Some of them say, "I want my child to learn French," or "Japanese." Sometimes the students can't even cope with the English language. Their expectations are too high for their children. Things the kids aren't capable of. One particular student has problems with speech. She can talk. She's quite verbal but the parents want her to learn another language before she's proficient in the English language. Another student was enrolled in the School Certificate exam. His parents paid the fees for maths and English but didn't realise that this student didn't have the reading and writing skills or the maths skills needed at that level. His mum worked very hard and paid for two papers. It cost her about \$160.00. Some parents are very unrealistic in what they expect. Some parents say, "Oh, he can do it. Give him a try." Lyn

Parents are aware of what their children can do and of what they can't do. They are also very accepting of what we can do for them too. They also accept the limitations that often we can point out. I can't think of any particular instance where a parent has really not accepted what I have said or has come back at me and said, "That's not right." I find that they may disagree. I often find that they have got a different viewpoint on things and I think that's due to the different environments between home and school. They have a different viewpoint of how the child is at home but they always accept what you say, even if you say, and this is often the case, "Behaviourally he's not very good at school," and they will say, "But he's good at home." But if you explain the situation that has occurred they are quite happy. I can't remember one situation where the parents have not accepted what has happened at school. Often they have found it hard to accept but they do. Maybe that's because of the way I put it across. I try not to browbeat parents but just to present things as I see them, as they are. I find that they're really accepting. Sue

One teacher considered the possibility that parents may not want to face the fact that their child was not as academically able as other students.

I don't know whether some of these parents don't want to face the reality that their kids do have very limited options because of their low achieving level or whether they genuinely don't know or whether they don't want to accept the fact. Rita

For many parents a lack of knowledge prevented them from helping their children.

Parents do have expectations for their children but they don't know how to go about supporting them. Peti

5.3.2 How are parents approached to become involved in school-based activities?

Most teachers felt that the most effective ways of approaching parents were by a direct invitation over the telephone or by a call at the house.

Initially, the most effective way would be contact through the students themselves if there is a problem with a particular student. To meet with parents face to face in a classroom setting with the student present. I'd ring parents and invite them to school. I've never been to visit them. I've always found inviting them in to be most effective. Getting them in to talk about some issue that's affecting their child. Sue

Going into homes sometimes to start with. By sitting there and making them feel a little bit more at ease. They feel that I haven't come to judge. Sometimes they really don't want to know their child is different. But nobody has ever said, "No! I don't want to talk about it!" In a lot of cases they have not had things explained to them. Things have just happened. At present I'm working with a group of three Form 2/Year 8 families who are starting to look at placements for secondary school. A big decision. These three children have been with special education services for many years. They're all in mainstream classes, in a supportive school. However, their choices for secondary school are quite wide. In one case, the boy lives quite a way from the school that he goes to now. Therefore there's another group of schools out of our area that are available to him. There are choices of homeroom facilities or a special 'Experience' or IHC - type units. One parent now is looking at private schools to see what's available. I ask parents if they've thought of any options and try to come to an agreement as to what we might do. Sometimes it involves parents visiting some of the facilities. Sometimes they have left it entirely to me. Annie

For many children, a letter from school to be delivered home was an indication that there was something 'wrong.' This was associated with the negative aspects of 'growlings' and/or hidings for causing trouble at school. To prevent this, letters were destroyed or not delivered. In many cases, children arrived home before their parents and removed letters from the mailbox.

The most effective way of approaching parents is directly. Either over the telephone or by door knocking. Often there's a lack of response to anything that goes in the letterbox or circulars via the children. They just don't work. Maggie

It's usually by telephone. If they don't have a telephone and things really need to be addressed, I actually go to the home and work on a person to person basis. Many of these parents have limited ability to read letters that I might write and so I've found visiting the most successful way. I've always felt quite pleased that I've made the contact. Rita

I try and ring parents. I never go and visit them. If there was a problem in class, I would not contact the parents. I would go through the system. First of all I would inform the tutor about what's got to be done or what the tutor would do. Then I would go through the HOD as perhaps she would go and see the parents of the particular children. Lyn

Although most people agreed that written notices home seldom produced results, Lyn found it a most effective way of approaching parents.

I give them a ring. If there is no phone at home I write them a letter. That is a most effective way of reaching out to parents. Lyn

5.3.3 In what way(s) do you involve parents when making educational decisions about their child(ren)?

After an assessment of the child has been carried out,

I run through my recommendations as to what might be possible. I suggest that I'll meet with the class teacher and we'll put together an IEP for the child. I ask the parents if they would like to be involved with that and they can make their choice. About six weeks after the IEP or other intervention, I go back to check progress with the school about how things are going. Then I decide if it will be another six weeks before checking back. To see if things are going well or things need to be looked at further. Annie

As the Special Education Unit closed for two days each year to enable all teachers and teacher aides to meet with parents to discuss educational programmes, the teachers made every effort to contact parents.

They're invited up to the IEP process. However a lot of them don't come. They rely very heavily on the teacher's advice. Maggie

Some parents are fully involved and very supportive. But most of the parents say, "I'll leave it to you to make the decisions to do what's best for my child." Lyn

For those parents who come to the school it is important to create

... a very friendly and a very favourable environment which says, "You are free just to come in and talk." Start off with a very informal setting where they can freely talk about what they have been doing during the day. Have an informal meeting with them. Peti

Another teacher also believes that the initial conversation should be non-threatening.

Initially I always start an interview with something like "What concerns or problems have you got to address to me?" Whether that takes them on the back foot or not, I don't know but it tends to let them open up to me anything which has happened in the classroom. It can be either positive or negative. What I would say is "Have you got any particular concerns?" and they might say "Oh, he's not bringing homework home" or "she's not doing any homework" or "his reading is bad" or "her spelling is bad" and I can sort of say, "Well, let's sit down and talk about it." I go through what we do in class and say, "Do you think it's working? Do you think he's improving?" and then work backwards from there. We work out a strategy from there as to what we can work on together both at home and at school. I think that's probably the main value of the parent interviews. That can be on an academic basis where the child is working in a particular curriculum area or behaviourally or emotionally – or in any other way. That's the most valuable work I do, by saying, "What are the concerns that you have got? We'll work at this, both of us together. They very rarely say no Even the parents who say, "Look, we're very, very happy with what he's doing, with what work he's bringing home and with what he's achieving." If you prod a little bit further though, they've generally got some concerns to bring out. What concerns they do have. Very rarely would they have nothing to contribute to the discussion about what their children are doing. Sue

Several teachers felt that home visits were the most satisfactory way to discuss matters with parents.

To discuss the report personally with the parents of the child I go to the home and we go through it piece by piece in a way that the parents can understand exactly where we are at. I always try to be positive. It can be quite scary for parents when somebody comes in and sits down and tells them what their child is doing at school. Very rarely have I found a parent who hasn't been concerned for their kids enough to want to sit down and really listen to what's happening. Annie

That's an advantage in going to the home and having the time to sit and talk. You can see from the way that they respond that they didn't understand so you expand on it a little bit more. I'm not above saying, "Are you sure you understand that?" and then that gives them a chance to say "Oh, well" and then you know that you have got to go through and explain it in a different way. They don't seem to be embarrassed about it. They definitely do appreciate you making that effort. They're pleased that you have bothered to come to their house. That is a really big thing, but it's very time consuming. You've maybe got to go two or three times until you find the person that you want at home. You can't really rush in deliver the message and then depart. It's establishing that trust. There also comes a fine line when they know you well enough. A criticism I have of doing home visits, is that they become conditioned to your going to them all the time. There has to be a point at which they feel comfortable enough to take responsibility and then come here at least some of the

time. It's very easy to let them think, "Oh, well, they'll come and see me" That's a very easy option. Rita

For others, it was important for parents to ensure that their child had the equipment necessary to cope with the day at school. The academic ability of many parents was considered a factor as to how much support they could offer their children.

It's the level at which they seem able and willing to be involved. For me, involving parents is to encourage them to send the child to school with the appropriate equipment. There is very little work that we can send home for the child to continue. Almost all of these parents, with the exception of about three, would have educational levels not a lot better than their children. So as far as active involvement with furthering the academic side there are certain limitations. Rita

5.3.4 What do you consider to be the reason(s) for parents' participation or their non-participation in the education of their children?

One teacher spoke of the relative ease with which parents can visit a primary school classroom as opposed to a secondary school where students and teachers change subjects and classrooms every hour.

If parents want to go and join in during the morning, they are free to just walk in and sit down. Some parents go up in the mornings to sing songs, say poems. It is really hard for parents at secondary school level. People here are in all different places. I think that it's the system. Peti

Many parents faced difficulties as they coped with jobs which often had irregular hours.

Sometimes parents get up very early and go off to work and come home late at night. Lyn.

For many parents, the school environment is unfamiliar.

Samoan parents find it really threatening coming into a huge school with their limited English, coming to meet people in school and discussing educational issues when they don't feel very academic. Especially with teachers, and the principal and the Board of Trustees. Their mentality of education is that, 'I've sent my child to school and it's the school's responsibility to educate my child. What right have I to question those people?' The parents think that teachers have got all the knowledge of school. Meetings that are very formal threaten most of the parents. A lot of the parents feel, 'Oh, I've got nothing to share' or 'I'm not academic enough to be part of that setting.' Once they know that you don't think like that, that allows them to come along. Peti

Other parents choose not to become involved with school matters, preferring to leave teachers to make the appropriate educational decisions for their students.

They could be nervous. They're working. They leave it to us as professionals. They feel we're the professional people dealing with their children and we should know what we're doing. Some are not interested. They send their children to school and that's where their duties end. Those who do come are very interested, very anxious to have an input, very anxious to measure the results compared to the previous year's work and they like to know what their children are doing. Maggie

Many parents have not had their education in New Zealand.

There are many parents who have not gone through the New Zealand education system themselves. I think that's why most of them don't take part in school activities. Often we say, "Oh, we only get the parents of the children we really *don't* want to see. They don't have any problems at school." It's always those parents that understand the system that turn up. The ones who don't understand the system are the ones who always don't come to our interview nights or even join in with school activities. We think sometimes that because they don't come they're not interested, which is not always true. It's because they feel they don't have the skills to talk with the teachers. Because they always think that the teachers know it all. They think, 'Oh. What right have I got to go and question someone who knows a lot more than me?' It's a feeling of inferiority that makes them think, 'I've got nothing to offer. What can I say when it's discussion time?' and, 'What am I going to say to the teacher?' We always think that those parents are not very supportive of their children. Peti

After a personal invitation to come to school, sometimes even then they still don't respond. There is a point when it turns around. You've eased them into it. You've made them feel welcome and feel comfortable. They know you. At what stage do they then say, "I can go into school."? They often have a vehicle. They have the time, in many cases more than we do. There's got to be a switchover time. It is a lack of knowledge and information in the beginning. Once people have helped them through that, picked them up to a certain level, then they have to start operating independently. Sometimes they have to be given a little bit of a push. It's that fine line between dependence and independence. Perhaps it's something that we take for granted, that parents are familiar with the system and that parents do know what to do without taking the trouble to make sure that they really do know absolutely clearly what's available. They lack the confidence to pick up the telephone and say, "Look, what *is* this?" The language, the fluency of the language can be a little bit of it. The fear that they mightn't understand what they're told and they don't like to ask, "What was it you said?" or "Can you explain that a little bit more?" Rita

Some parents are afraid to visit the school for fear of what others may think of them. As Peti asks,

How can we motivate the ones who think that their children are struggling at school? They are really scared to come and discuss things. They think 'Oh, shame. I'm not going to show my face because my child is not doing well at school. He's been causing a lot of problems. I don't really want to go and meet those teachers. They look at me and they think that I'm failing on my part as a parent. Peti

5.3.5 How and for what reasons do you communicate with parents?

Most teachers initiated contact with parents if there were problems at school. Among the reasons, seen as problems, teachers suggested that it was to inform parents that their child had been truanting or that their behaviour was a concern.

Most of the time I would contact the parents if there was a problem with the kid and I need the support. I find that to discipline the kid, I need the support of the parents. It's more of a behaviour problem because for many of these kids it's their behaviour which is a problem. I can't do it alone. When the child is wagging parents think that their child is coming to school. Often they don't realise that the children come to school and then wag classes. Lyn

The main reasons to contact parents are negative reasons. Mostly it's about lack of attendance and discipline. Maggie

I contact parents when there is something wrong at school. Almost exclusively. You often start out on a less than positive note. Unfortunately, a lot of the times you have to approach parents, is when there's something going wrong at school with the child. The child is misbehaving. Things that you have asked for aren't being done. Things aren't going home. It's nearly always been the negative things that I've had to see them about. Rita

Although several teachers had contacted parents to tell them of positive things at school, the initial reaction of parents was that there was something 'wrong'.

Sometimes I have rung a parent to say this particular student had improved in behaviour. That they were more focused. That they were trying particularly hard in class. I'm giving them positive feedback. It's not always bad. It's not always negative. Parents don't want to hear when it's always negative. When I rang one parent, the first question she asked me was, "Is he in trouble again?" I said, "No. I rang to tell you he's working very hard in class." It was about how he's trying to change his attitude and how he's doing some good work. Lyn

Other reasons to contact parents were to gain information or if the student was unwell,

When their children do something great. Or if I need information about the child. Maggie

I contact parents to get some information from them. Or if the child is sick and wants to go home, I need to contact the parents to see if they are at home. Lyn

Other teachers considered the contact with parents invaluable in gaining another perspective as a way of working together for the benefit of the student.

I suppose the most valuable contact I have with parents is in a parent interview situation at report afternoons, which I find extremely valuable. Seeing where some of the students have problems. You can see from the home background by talking to the parents themselves some of the issues. You can see where you can develop some of the help for the students

through the parents. That's the most valuable way I think. I try to talk to parents as much as I can because I feel that that's really what a lot of them want to come along to find out. I think that with a special needs parent they are not so concerned about where their student measures up within a group. They're not really concerned about how they rank in a group. Whereas in a mainstream situation, I think that's a major concern of parents. Parents here are different in that they want to know what the child is really struggling with even more than what they're good at. Parents tend to know what their child is good at. They want to know how they can help. They want to know what progress are they making in specific areas where previously they may have been problem areas. Sue

Part of the assessment is to talk with the parents to see what the child does at home. Also there's an interview with the child to get two perspectives. To see not only what they do at school but also what they can do at home. Can they make themselves a sandwich? Can they cook themselves a meal? It's important to see what their self-help skills are like. To see anything else they can do to give a balanced picture. After doing the assessment to see if there is a question about any kind of special facility that needs to be discussed with the parents. In our area, sometimes it's a very lengthy business. In a recent case, I went back to the house 4 or 5 times before I eventually found mum at home and was able to talk about it with her. I discuss the options especially if it's a child who is in a school without any special facility. Most times parents won't opt for a change in schools. They want the child to carry on going to the same school but it's still important for them to know there is another school which does have a different kind of resourcing which may be the best option for them. We've got a lot of special facilities in our area but some of the special facilities *do* vary in quality and I definitely have to use my knowledge of what happens in those special facilities as to whether I think they would cater adequately for the child. But in the end it's for parents to make the decisions for their child. Mary

Once a student has been referred to SES, it is necessary for parental permission to be given before any assessment procedures can be put in place. In many cases, a referral comes as a complete surprise to parents who have no reason to believe that their child is not making the progress expected. There are also difficulties in finding parents at home, and in communicating with parents whose first language is not English.

For referrals to SES, the school will get in touch with the parents. Sometimes that can be done well or sometimes it's not done at all. SES will not pick up *any* referral that has not had parental consent. Unless there's that parental permission given and the form signed nothing can be done. But that's only quite recently happening. Only perhaps in the last eighteen months has that been really, really acknowledged. Whoever is making the referral must vouch for the parents having been contacted and cannot send it on without the parent's approval. If parents don't know what is going on, or didn't agree or didn't understand correctly what was going on, we cannot do anything. We would be accountable if we did something against the parents' wishes. It's crucial to ensure that parents know what is being asked of them. Sometimes, they cannot really understand when somebody rings through and says, "Oh, I want to make a referral to SES. Is that okay, please?" If the parents are not understanding what is required of them they can ask for someone to go and visit the homes. If it is a Maori home the Kaitakawaenga go in and talk to the people in the homes and explain that we believe this assessment/intervention programme could possibly help their child. We explain that we cannot do anything without their permission. Sometimes it

happens. Sometimes it doesn't. Once the child's turn comes up to be seen, I make a phone call to the parents to say the school has asked me to see their child. I give the reasons because sometimes it's a complete surprise to them. Maybe the school has spoken in terms that are too general and has just said something like, "There's going to be someone coming in to see your child." Most times the parents would be quite happy. They are concerned about their child and are very happy that someone is going to do something that will help their child. Annie

Most teachers considered themselves readily available by telephone and approachable by parents.

Just saying, "We would like to meet you. We would like you to come in and we will talk about what we can do. What *you* can do and what *we* can do as teachers to help your child learn at school." Making them part of it, rather than saying, "I want you to come in and we'll discuss your child." Some of the parents are really scared to come in and talk to the teachers because they think that their child is not doing well at school. That's why we always get the parents of the children who are really good at school. They're motivated to come into school because, "Oh, I'd *like* to talk to the teacher about my child, because I *know* he's doing really well at school." Peti

Parents very readily contact us. There is a lot of communication going on. Maggie

I've been quite pleased with the response when parents come along at report time. I'm able to expand more on what has been written. Parents are very pleased to have the opportunity to help the kids. They are very willing to give me information about the child's background. I've had the chance to visit several of homes. I think the parents detect that I'm forthright. I stand my ground if I need to. But they're very pleased. Their attitude is very welcoming. That helps to reinforce that you care about the kids. When the parents feel that you want to support them there is a genuine desire to help. They appreciate what you are doing and that appreciation comes across quite strongly. They very seldom offer anything that they can do for you. They are very eager to have information from me about what they can do. They don't sort of say, "Well, look, I've been trying this or trying that." They welcome my suggestions even though I don't always see much follow-up. But nonetheless, parents are very well meaning. Very willing. Rita

5.3.6 Do you consider parents to be well-informed about the options and choices available to them?

Most professionals considered parents to know little about the options available

They need to have them explained. Some parents are quite capable of going and visiting the various places, but others would like me to come along. Some parents would like to also take their child through to have a look. Mary

There was a young lad going from Primary school to Intermediate school who could be potentially a behaviour problem at Intermediate because he was starting to realise that he was perhaps not progressing as fast as his classmates and was starting distractive behaviour to take everybody's attention away from his lack of academic progress. I *was* concerned

that when he went to Intermediate that his behaviour might become worse. I visited his home and explained to his parents the differences there would be in a special class placement at Intermediate as opposed to mainstream and talked about the options. He would be going into a mainstream placement because he didn't have an S9 agreement with the Ministry. He was just a kid who was starting to struggle. The particular school that he was going to attend did have a special class resource teacher. The school system was such that all the special education children were in mainstream classes, but were taken back to a resource room with the teacher at particular times of the day. This boy had three alternatives to the school that the parents were choosing to send him to. They had chosen this as the school they would like him to go to even before I did any explaining. They had made this decision. They would like to see the boy go to that school because they originally lived in that area. They had moved away but the boy was still going back to go to primary school because meant that he would go on with his friends. Annie

They seem to need reassurance. They need some of the options explained to them. I hear that being told to them often. But the parents are expecting the school to fetch and carry when you know they've got vehicles at home. Sometimes people from here go and pick them up from home if they're late in. That reinforces the notion of dependence. It is not knowing the options to begin with but then when they *have* been explained that they also have to have a bit of a shove. A bit of a push. We'll do the introduction. We'll get them started. It's very hard to judge when is the time that you give the push and say, "Over to you now." They keep on because they know that their dependency perpetuates the support system. It's not all lack of knowledge. It is in the beginning, for all of us, no matter what new experiences we take on board. But as soon as someone points us in the right direction, we can go and get it for ourselves. But that's the danger I find working with these kids. Perhaps we're a bit irresponsible in as much as we don't say, "Now it's over to you" and then insist. Sometimes there has to be a fair bit of insistence with these parents. When you do, they will get up and do it. They're a little bit accustomed to the minister saying, "You will do this" and they do it. We don't like to say "You *must*" but that's the way that they're familiar with. I often feel that I've got the kids in the classroom when I talk to parents. Rita

Many teachers felt that

Their information comes from neighbours, parent/teacher evenings, other parents. Sometimes nobody. They're very unaware of the facilities and very hesitant about going out and finding out things for themselves. If they've been told things they often disbelieve them. Rita

All professionals felt that they were supportive of parents and considered that positive recognition of parents' actions contributed to their self-esteem and encouraged and maintained their interest in the school and in their children.

I think by just affirming them in what they are doing them. By supporting them. By telling them that they are doing a good job and by just encouraging them. I think that I try not to have all the answers because I know that I haven't. I think that if you get alongside parents and say that we're trying to work to do the best for the child in the long term, I think they're happy with that. Rather than instead of saying, "Look, you're doing this wrong, this is what you should be doing," or "this is what we're doing and we're having great success, why aren't you doing this at home?", I think that the main thing that I do, and I really try and do it, is to say, "Really, I think you're doing a good job." I don't lie about that either. I think that if they're not doing a good job on something, I'll tell them that. I won't tell them that I

think they're not doing a very good job, but I'll come around it and see if I can get it across to them that a different way of approaching the problem might work. Sue

It's really been helping parents, getting them to come to school and realising that, "Yes. We can help to make decisions for our children" when things have been explained. To share with them what I know about education and to make them feel really good by saying, "You have got a lot to offer your child." They *do* have a lot to offer. Peti

The parents of a particular child wanted her kept in an ordinary class. She's a very needy child. At Intermediate school she was in a special class and when it was time for her to make the transition to secondary school, she said she very definitely didn't want to be in any kind of special facility. She went in to the mainstream with some teacher aide support. She gets 5 hours of teacher aide support a week. Really she needs more than that but that's all she's got. Mary

One teacher explained that parents are first asked what thoughts they've had about a suitable placement and then the alternatives are presented.

In one case there were three options for the parents to consider. One was that he be fully mainstreamed and I would work with the school to make sure that the school realised that he would need to be in with a teacher who would be caring. Who would know where he was at and who would be encouraging. The second option was that he be put on an S9 agreement, and that he would then come under the jurisdiction of the special needs resource person there. The third option, which I felt would be the most appropriate, was that he go into the Maori bi-lingual class, because this was one area where the boy was having good vibes about his Maori culture. He was involved in Maori cultural groups. He was very proud of his Maori heritage. I personally felt that this would be the best option for him because it would give him lots of personal mana. However, the parents chose to enter into an S9 agreement because they wanted him to have that support in the school. Annie

The suggestion was made that he was not immediately withdrawn from his classroom to the special needs unit to avoid being labelled as 'one of them.' The school was asked to consider leaving him in a regular class and for the special needs resource teacher to work with his classroom teacher to provide a suitable programme. In the event of that not working, there was the option of sometimes being withdrawn to the resource room.

Halfway through the year he hadn't been withdrawn. According to the school things are working well. Annie

5.3.7 In what way(s) do parents fulfil the expectations you have of them regarding the education of their child?

Although recognising the difficulties many parents face, teachers' expectations of parents were for them to make decisions about their child's education, to support teachers in their

work at school and to ensure that students had the equipment necessary to function effectively at school.

I think they should be entirely involved in making decisions about their child's education and about what's going on at school. We need the input from the parents. It should be a two-way process. We need communication. We need feedback. We need the input from parents when it comes to making educational decisions. We want parents to be fully involved to a certain extent. Some of the parents are working and some of them have shifts. It's difficult enough just for them to keep an eye on their child. Lyn

Explaining very basic things. If the child hasn't been bringing pens, pencils, books to school, they have to check their bags on a daily basis before they go out to catch the taxi. That helps me. The child doesn't get into trouble. The child feels supported. Taking the children to the library. Fostering an interest in reading. Encouraging the parents to go to the local public library at least on a weekly basis and to help them with their reading. Keeping in touch. I quite like to meet the parents. That's valuable for me, them and the children. Rita

The expectations teachers have of parents is to be supported in the work they do at school. Parents are expected to provide things the school requires, such as money for school fees, books and uniforms and to ensure their child's attendance at school.

The most important thing is support from parents. If there are problems with a particular student and I contact the parents I require support from the parents to sort out the problem with this particular student. Lyn

My expectations really are not for a high parent involvement. I don't think it is necessary really. In some ways, I think the parent involvement really comes back to me. What I expect of the parents is through homework or through contact from the school initiated by me, I think I should initiate that rather than the parents coming to me. Generally speaking, I think that parents do as much as they can for their children. Oftentimes if you get students who are high needs students. I can appreciate how the parents really only need to see them off to school each day and that's their time out and I'm quite happy with that. I can appreciate that very much. If I need the parents to get involved with homework, oftentimes I can get disappointed when they don't, especially when I think the child can be doing far, far better than he or she is. That would be a fair comment, particularly when perhaps in this area, in South Auckland, you tend to not get a lot of backup with homework. But then again, there's limited resources, there's limited time. There's a limit to the things you can do with homework here too and that's not just to do with the special needs kids. I think it's a general thing throughout the school. Parents definitely have different priorities than we do. They've got other children, they've got different ideas. I don't know but I guess the child goes home and to us homework is a big deal but to them it's something they either do or they don't do. To them it's not such a big deal. We think highly of it. We know that if they do their homework, that they're going to be making some kind of progress. They don't see it like that. Sue

The intention is for them to do what I ask. In theory you get a lot of suggestions, a lot of publicity about the fact that they're impoverished and there's no money. I don't go with that one I'm afraid. It's not that there's not much money, it's a matter of priorities. It's much

more fun to go and hire a video than to buy a pen and pencil if that's what it comes down to. Rita

5.3.8 What do you consider to be critical factors in establishing positive relationships with parents?

One teacher considered the affinity with students to be an important factor in establishing a positive relationship with parents.

A critical factor would be that if the student likes you, I think the parent tends to. Particularly if there is a problem and you are at loggerheads with the student. Sort of working uphill to a certain extent because the parent is getting two different stories off them. I think then that it is critical that you talk to the parents to explain just what is going on otherwise attitudes become entrenched and you find that you are at odds with one another. I would think that if the student likes you, the parent can help a great deal. I also sort of think that if student can go home and can relate to the parents what actually went on in the classroom I think those things reflect pretty well on the teacher. That the students are happy. Sue

Other teachers believed that positive relationships depended on establishing a non-threatening atmosphere in which to discuss issues, being aware of different opinions and working in the best interests of parents and students.

I think it's always taking a positive point of view. I think personally asking for their input and appreciating their knowledge of their child. After all, they know their child better than anyone else. Working with them rather than kind of telling them and explaining options. Then when they make their choice, respecting that choice and supporting them in that choice. Often parents make decisions based on some emotional ground as well. There is one parent whose child is very ill. I thought the child would perhaps have his needs best met by going halfway across Auckland to a unit for the physically disabled but his father didn't want to do that because it would be too far away. He wanted the child closer. He felt that if the child collapsed or anything like that he would be too far away and perhaps wouldn't be able to get to him. You've got to respect things like that. And of course, I'm looking at it from a more rational point of view if you like, but that emotional point of view is just as valid also. You've got to take into consideration what is going on with other members of the family too. But if there's any decision that I think would be very detrimental to the child, then I would say so. But I can't really make decisions that go against the parent's wishes because they've got the best interests of their child at heart. The reason that I get involved is to help the child, not classify them and do anything like that necessarily but to actually help the child so that they can get on better at school and can make better progress. Mary

Showing a sympathetic and a positive interest in their child. Being involved with parents to help them, to support them, to suggest ways which support them. You show that you care about their children in every way. That's *very* critical. Maggie

Rather than saying, "Oh, you're coming to school to discuss this and this," after an informal conversation we come on to discussing education issues. So instead of making a very formal agenda to present to them, I just say, "Oh, it's really neat just to come together to talk about how you feel your child is doing. What it is that you need to talk about how your child is getting on at school?...give them ideas like, "What do you think we should do to help your child?" and, "What can we do to help you help your child?" After establishing that rapport with them in that informal setting, I gradually moved on to talking to them about education and how the New Zealand education system works. In Samoa you expect the teachers and all the people at school to make decisions for you. In the New Zealand system you are allowed to come to school. You can come into school. You can come to talk to the teachers and you can say, "Oh, my child is not learning can you show me how to help?" Telling them they have the right to be decision makers in their child's learning. Start from there. Offer them help. Make them feel at ease. Support them. Share ideas with them rather than saying to them, "Oh, your child is not doing very well" when they come to these report meetings. I feel that's why most of them feel threatened to come along on those report nights because they think, 'Oh, I've got to hear about my child being a pain at school.' It can be time consuming, but it's really important to establish a good rapport with the parents. If you have their trust, and they know that you're trying to do a good job, for their children. That will be a really good start for a positive relationship between the parents and the teachers. Peti

Feeling comfortable in talking to them. You've just got to be yourself with them except that they have certain limitations. You don't have to highlight that. You don't have to belittle them, just have respect for them. It's just basic human relationships although they may not be Einsteins or ever likely to be, they've got other contributions to make even if they do do some of the more menial tasks in the community. Rita

5.3.9 For students with special needs, what do you consider to be the 'advantages' of special education?

The major reasons given by teachers regarding the 'advantages' of special education included job satisfaction and the individual attention made possible by the smaller numbers of students in classes.

I consider it a very rewarding job. The way that students respond to you when they have achieved something. That is very satisfactory. I think that we can work with students at their level. We can give individual attention to the students. Meeting their needs. At IEP meetings we try and meet the needs of the students. We work on their strengths and their weaknesses and give them support. There are advantages in working in small group situations. Every kid is at different levels. They have different abilities. Some kids work much faster. They are much better than the others. Lyn

The individual attention that these children get. They don't drop through the cracks. They are made to feel important, loved, cared about. We can promote their strengths and assist them in overcoming their weaknesses. In the mainstream, the classes are too big, the teachers are too busy. Some of them don't have an interest at helping these children at the bottom end of the academic scale. They are too busy looking for exam passes to be able to help and bolster the self-esteem of slow learning children. To make them feel good about

themselves. To make school a pleasant place. Boosting their self-esteem and making them feel cared for. Maggie

The small classes. It's easier to establish that rapport with them because there's fewer of them. Even that you've got a class of 10 in 10 various levels, they've got the chance of being there and you teaching them to meet their individual needs rather than being in the regular classes. The special needs children need to be supported and for you to be there with them all the time. Otherwise they'll be lost. You know, if you're teaching to a class of 20 to 30 students you won't be having time to cater for different abilities. Peti

For the students in this school, I suppose the close relationship with the teacher. The students and the teachers get to know each other really well. We've got fairly close contact with the students compared to the teachers of the mainstream classes. Probably because of the small numbers. We've got small classes. We've got students with high needs and we have to be open to them too. They're coming to us constantly with something for which they need help. We've also got to have time for those who haven't got the know how as to how to approach us. We can approach them. I think that we can get very close to the students here and also be aware of their needs. Sue

The fact that the facility exists which offers parents the opportunity for choice. We recognise that these kids do have great difficulty themselves operating in the mainstream. The programme can't be provided realistically to cover the huge range if you're going to have to accommodate special needs kids as well from the mainstream point of view. I think it's unrealistic for these kids to have to be stretching all the time say in core subjects. That wide, wide range of ability. These kids *do* need a lot of one-to-one or whatever else depending on their need. In fairness to everybody, the special needs kids' needs can be met and the mainstream kids don't miss out on the attention because of the demands of the special needs kids. We try to accommodate their basic academic education here so that they can have a smaller ratio of teacher to student, appropriate facilities, expectations that they *can* reach and feel that they *are* achieving. We can accommodate the pace at which they work, better than would be the case in the mainstream. It allows the kids in the mainstream to have appropriate contact with the teacher which would be diminished if the same teacher had to accommodate the same number of kids, some of whom we currently classify as special ed. I think it's important for them to be onsite like this so that at least socially, at interval and lunchtime, they are seen around. They learn as far as possible to integrate with others. Rita

In the mainstream some of them cannot cope. They don't even want to go into the mainstream because of the bigger numbers in the classes. They do not have the support. Teachers say, "I wouldn't know what to do. You know what is best for your students with special needs. You know how to cater for them better." In the mainstream the students are really lost. I've got students who come to me and say. "The work is just too hard," or "The teacher talks too much. I don't understand," or "I'm scared." Lyn

In the mainstream it's very difficult to cater for individual learning needs. In a large class you tend to end up teaching the class, not the individual. It's just too difficult. It might be possible if they were in a single cell, rather like a primary school situation. Where you could concentrate on their maths, on their spelling, on their written language and so on at their own individual level on an individual basis. Maggie

All teachers considered the stigma of special education with the associated negative aspects of labelling, putdowns and the lack of appropriate role models to be the most significant features of separate education.

The down side of placing the students in a special unit is the stigma attached to it. They have to put up with name calling, put downs and being labelled as handicapped and dumb. From the feedback I get from the students, they don't want to be in special ed because of the name calling. The teasing. Maggie

For some parents, it's definitely the label. Mary

Students with severe intellectual disabilities who are put in the same class are always receiving the wrong end of the stick. Simply because I don't have the time for them while I am working with those with more ability. Lyn

Clumping them all together. The bad behaviours being re-modelled and repeated and the lack of appropriate role models. The worst aspects of special ed. I would say would be the ideas that the students, not always, but oftentimes tend to be reduced to the lowest common denominator so that a behaviour that is going on and is undesirable is repeated and picked up by other kids. But then again if you are working in amongst a lot of students who have undesirable behaviours for whatever reason that would be the thing that would stand out to me ahead of anything else. Sue

This type of unit is important for these kids that need it. I don't know that I can think of any or identify any of the things which would be of least benefit. There are a lot of kids here because of behavioural reasons rather than just slow learning. It's become slow learning because they've often been truants from school. There's a lack of continuity in their schooling. They can't read. There's the beginning of their problems and they're headed down the bad behaviour road. Maybe you have a unit just for the kids who have learning difficulties, the IH kids, the road accident victims, the slow learners who have an impaired ability to learn. It's time to establish real places for these kids who have missed out on reading so that we can intervene before they end up in Waikeria, which is probably what you'd expect for a quarter or a third of these kids. Rita

For many parents there is a denial that their child would benefit from a special needs placements. There is an opposition from parents about the stigma of special ed. In some cases, very much so. We have to accept that. I can try and explain to them that this particular facility provides *these* things and if the child goes to this other facility then they won't get as many of *those* things. Then there are other things that can be done. And while my opinion would be that if they go to the first facility they would get a better deal, where their child goes is always the parent's choice in the end. Mary

Although small class numbers was one of the important aspects in providing individual assistance, several teachers considered themselves unable to adequately cater for the range of abilities in their classes.

The situation is far from ideal here. I find it is just too difficult to work with kids of differing abilities. Sometimes you don't even get support from the teacher aides because

they are out in the mainstream. There are too many in the class with such a wide range of abilities. There are the IH kids who are very limited. There are some who need a bit of extension. I try to cater for individual needs. I have one set of work for IH, one set of work for 'work experience' and one set of work for the others. I have divided one class into 3 groups. If there is teacher aide support and if all of the students have more or less the same abilities I would be able to carry on and then I don't have to prepare different sets of lessons for different groups of students. It's too hard to give them a diagnostic maths test. They don't have the reading ability. I have to read out each question and everyone is working at different levels. Some kids are working faster than the others so it's just going round being a facilitator. It's just too hard. Everybody is calling out, "I don't understand," or, "Can you read it out to me?" It just goes on and on. IH kids didn't sit for the exam. it's just not realistic for them to sit an exam. They work on their own with a teacher aide doing something else like language activities. Some of them are so low functioning they can't even read let alone write or even spell. Lyn

Realistically, any classroom teacher can only do so much. We're having a lot of these behaviour problems which diminish our ability to help what we have come to know previously as special ed. kids. These behaviours are special ed. of a different kind. It's diminishing the other aspect under which these units were established for. Rita

There are too many students. About 12 in a class would be the ideal number. But that depends on the abilities of the students too. For those who are severely IH it would be about 8 or 9. 'Work experience' about 15. Lyn

In principle, all teachers supported the notion of inclusive education. Most held reservations about the wisdom of combining students with special needs with regular students whose inappropriate behaviour would not provide their students with effective role models; inclusive classrooms with students facing examinations; with regular class teachers being unable (or unwilling) to provide differentiated programmes; and without support structures being in place. One teacher pointed out the necessity of providing parents with a choice of available options.

The idea is laudable but I have very mixed feelings. These students need to have a role model which they can get in the regular class. But the behaviour of some of the students in these classes is not any better than that of the students in special ed. The students with disabilities will be teased and made fun of. I think if the students got enough support from the teachers it would work. It's the support that's very important. You need a lot of support for students in the mainstream. Students who are slow learners, those who have difficulties in learning need a lot of one-to-one help and enough resources. It might work for some but not for those who have severe intellectual disabilities. it might work for 'work experience' students. In a regular classroom situation the teachers just carry on with their work. They don't give enough individual attention to a particular student with special needs. They are more exam oriented. They are more interested in how the kids are going to pass exams. They have to cover the topic and deliver the content and keep moving on. They are teaching a class. They are not teaching an individual student. Teachers have to adapt too. Like their style of teaching. They need to simplify, adapt and change the way they do things. Inclusion might work if you have enough funding, enough resources and one-to one support. It might

work for some kids but not for all. As long as there's a choice. And that goes back to the parents. If a parent thinks their child should be in the mainstream, that child is in the mainstream. Lyn

Inclusive education doesn't work for all children. There is just not enough support given for children who go into the mainstream of education. If it was going to work, it would have to be almost one-on-one. The teachers in the mainstream would have to alter their styles of teaching. There would have to be a lot of adaptation. There would have to be a lot more resources, and different kinds of resources. Teachers in the mainstream are overworked now and I just don't see how it could work under the present setup. You don't always do your very best for individual students because you can't teach everybody in the one class. You haven't got the time. The differences in one class are too great. It's very difficult to teach somebody with a severe intellectual disability with someone who has a learning disability in the same class and to cater for their needs. There may not be a teacher aide. There is a student with a severe intellectual disability who cannot write his own name who receives one hour of support a week. He needs one-on-one support all the time. In an ordinary classroom he would have one hour's help a week. My ideas on inclusion are rather mixed. Ideally, inclusion would be wonderful, but we currently have a far from ideal situation. Maggie

I support inclusion to a certain extent. It would work if you have a well planned, very well organised programme to cater for all levels in the class. Also, the support person in the classroom should be planning together with that classroom teacher. When you go in, you're just not going in to be with the students. You know what to expect from the teachers of that lesson. You go in and you know what you're going to do. Everybody should be involved in the planning so that when that support person takes the child away from the class, they know what they need to work on with that particular child. If I had the support, I feel that I would support inclusive education. I like challenges. Yes, I agree with inclusive education to a certain extent. If it's done properly with the support and the facilities, then there's a place for inclusive education. Peti

Some of these kids as far as lower academic ability goes have great manual skills. In class with the full range you get the smart alocs and the rest of them saying, "Oh, they're special ed." The less able kids are always having it highlighted by the smarter ones. It's more of a put down from the smarter ones than it is for a dull child to tell another one that they're bright. If they're in class more of their own narrower ability range, they don't feel threatened by the better ones. They feel quite comfortable about being in the unit. I don't get any feedback from these kids. Nothing significant anyhow like, 'We're here because we're dumb.' But they feel it when they're in the mainstream and someone's made a comment. Whereas here, they feel quite safe. They don't feel threatened. They don't keep having it pushed in front of their nose that, 'You can't do it. You're a dummie.' If you're in the bottom five, you know all the time that you're thick. Whereas if you're in a class of 25 who are of about the same ability there's not someone who's *hugely* better than them all the time. Rita

Philosophically speaking, I think it's a great idea. I think that's a very good concept. Parents should have the choice to have their child educated in an ordinary classroom but I also like the idea of having special needs classes for those who wish to have their child educated on that basis too. I can see it causing a few problems just from my experiences of mainstreaming. I know that the mainstreamed students do gain a lot from working with special needs kids and I know the special needs kids definitely learn a lot of good

behaviours, good habits from the mainstream kids. It's a two-way process which I think is really, really beneficial but I also think there's a balance point there too. I wouldn't like to see our students thrown totally out into the mainstream. It could have very negative effects for them and for the school. I think there's got to be a bit of both somehow but I like the idea of it being open so that parents have got a choice. I think it's really important that they have got a choice. Often times we say there is a student with special needs and the students can change especially students who have been through here. In Form 3 say, you get them with special needs and a couple of years later down the track you could say they would fit into a mainstream classroom. So really you've always got to have that doorway open. I think they should be encouraged to move into the mainstream, not sort of labelled from without or from within themselves. The concept is really good but for it to work I think you would have to have a way of coping with the lower standard perhaps of the students so the expectations of special needs students would have to be catered for. But I think if you put a special needs student into a mainstreamed class and expected them to perform in the same way, they're going to be completely bamboozled and frustrated and so are the mainstreamed students. So there's got to be catering for specific individual needs as far as evaluation goes. A couple of years ago here, we moved the students out into the mainstream with the idea that they were going to be picking up on the better behaviours of the students in the mainstream, not with the idea that they were going to be academically pushed. I think that was a good premise and very sound and I think that it did work very well. I think that's where the aim of it should be. Take the focus off the academic programme and perhaps just focus on everyone's special needs. Sue

If it is at all possible, it's a very good idea. I agree. It's maybe not possible in some cases. Some teachers and parents lack the willingness to do it. We're not miracle workers. We work with people to do what we can for the benefit of the child. That's the most important thing. I'm all in favour of inclusion. The more contact that children with disabilities have with their ordinary peers the better. But I *also* believe in providing adequate support for the children in regular classes. There can be problems with teacher aide support because they cannot just work on their own. There has got to have some kind of support and guidance from the teachers. And probably the amount of support that can be given is inadequate. It's very little for most children in relation to what they need. Perhaps the thing that teachers in regular classrooms fear the most is that I'll have this child but I don't have the skills to cope. And that's not fair. Especially if that teacher doesn't have the knowledge about how to help the children with special needs. At least they should be given the option of some kind of training. Mary

I think it has to be a modified form of inclusion. I think there's a place for mainstreaming too. I think we all miss out. Rita

It is quite different to what it used to be. Once your local school took you. Now, some local schools are saying "No!" Unless they have got a particular facility that can cope with the things, they say they can't cope with this. However, schools cannot refuse to enrol a child unless there's an enrolment policy in place. Parents are often not aware of their rights around this. They feel quite powerless. Secondary school enrolment is such an airy-fairy business. Different schools have different policies. It's tough on parents. Parents are very interested in what's going to be happening to their own children in secondary school. I just think it gets more scary. The facilities that offer the support that the students need are not easy to come by at times. They may be full. Parents think of their kids out there in that big wide school with nowhere that they can run, nowhere that they identify with. Having been in special ed. through their primary and Intermediate schools, suddenly it's a prospect that it

might not continue. Also, some of the parents, perhaps, don't particularly like the models of support that are available in the schools. Annie

One teacher likened inclusion to a the vertical grouping of a primary school classroom which catered for children from new entrants to Form 2.

It took me two terms to work out a plan that would fit those children. I have never enjoyed teaching so much in my life. I thoroughly enjoyed what I was doing. I had to work with it. I had to find out everything. When I found the answers to my questions to cater for that particular group of children and established a programme that helped to cater for all these different levels, I was just excited about the whole thing. I became totally involved. We made friends with all the children. Every day when you thought of a new idea you couldn't wait to go to school to try it out with the kids. We planned together. The most important thing was to get the children involved in their own learning rather than being up the front and saying, "This is what you're learning today." Peti

5.3.10 How do you view your role as a teacher of students with special needs?

Some teachers saw themselves almost as surrogate parents.

The role of the school seems to be mother, father, caregiver, disciplinarian, preparer for work. Everything. If their child misbehaves, they will often blame it on the school. If the child's truanting, it is the school's fault. They expect us to cover the cracks in their parenting. Somehow we're expected to turn around discipline problems that *really* begin in the home. We're held accountable for what goes on all the time. Even when the children don't arrive at school in the morning, somehow that's our fault. I sometimes wonder what the parents think the role of the school is. Maggie

Sometimes I think it is our duty to provide them with pastoral care. Lyn

Parents mostly appreciate what we're doing for their children. They want their children to be happy and to enjoy what they're doing. People appreciate work experience because they see that as a practical step towards getting a job. It makes parents feel that their child is employable. Maggie

I've tended to have had positive comments about the class atmosphere. I tend to run a fairly quiet class and I have found that parents appreciate that. They sort of expect students to be reasonably disciplined in the way that they approach me or other students and the comments that I have had basically revolve around that. Also the idea that on the odd occasion when you can really get alongside a student and make a big difference. Maybe it's only one a year, or one every two years but for that one student, you can really make a big difference. Somehow you've really changed something. That's happened maybe 4 or 5 times when the parent actually comes to you and says, "You've really made a huge difference in my child" and you know that that is true because of the relationship that has developed with the student. It's not the actual academic progress that the children make. There's not many occasions that a parent would come and say, "Look, my child is making marvellous progress in maths" or in any other curriculum area due to my teaching. But I can't really remember any parent having a go at me for anything. Sue

Sometimes parents have noticed there's a change in behaviour. That the child is more focused and takes more interest in their work. A few days ago I got a thank you note from a parent for giving her child an opportunity to work in a fast-food outlet as 'work experience' one day a week. Now this student has been offered a job to work part-time after school. Lyn

5.3.11 In what way(s) do you support the parents of your students?

Listening to concerns, creating an awareness of opportunities and alternatives, and providing suggestions to particular problems were the major ways in which teachers supported parents. There was a genuine desire on the part of all teachers to support parents as best they could.

By listening to them when they have a problem. You can help to solve the problems by giving them the support that they require. Lyn

Mostly just supporting them generally in their role of bringing up what are often very difficult children. Putting them in touch with each other or agencies that might be helpful. Helping in the discipline of their children when they're naughty and parents are at a loss to know what to do, where to go, how to cope with particular situation. Often parents come up to see me. They are looking for support about their children's future. Not about their education, but about their future. That would be my biggest role with parents. Maggie

In our area, it can be a bit tricky with people not understanding English very well. Sometimes I have had to go back to see parents with an interpreter. Most parents are OK. I just have to use my judgement if I think maybe they cannot understand what is happening or what is being suggested as the best option for their child. Mary

If I felt that a parent was making a decision that would be difficult for the child I would try to outline what may be a difficult situation for that child and what may happen. I'd also say, "Look, if that's the decision you make, that's what we'll do." I would definitely support decisions made by the parents and then try and help the child to make it work. However, I would not put into place anything they do not want. When they've made a decision we'll see if we can action that decision. Annie

5.3.12 What would you consider to be the major concerns of parents?

All teachers considered a major concern of parents focused on how well the school was fostering the academic skills of reading and writing. As the students approached the school leaving age, parents focused on 'life after school' with their concerns centred on the prospects of tertiary courses and/or employment.

Most parents ask how their children are doing in class. They want to know whether their child is employable when he or she leaves school. Most parents want their child to be

independent when they leave school. To find something that they can do to earn some pocket money to become more independent. All the time the children are depending on the parents. This is the expectation of most parents. These students don't need to obtain academic success at school but they can still get employment when they leave with the right work attitude. Lyn

What is going to happen when their child leaves secondary school. Very seldom are there queries as to 'how does this work prepare my child for tertiary education?' A lot of parents are very anxious to send their children to Polytech but there's a limited number of courses that are suitable or would work for our students. You can put them into a course but you don't want to put them into something where you know the result is going to be failure which is another blow to a child's self-esteem. There's a very limited number of courses that are suitable. It's very difficult. You can put them into a TOPs course, but then what? It's very difficult to find employment for them. The advantage of Polytech is that they can then go on to PolyEmp which will work hard to find jobs for them. Unless they go to Polytech, that's an option that's not available to them. There's a very limited number of jobs out there available for our students with intellectual disabilities. When their children don't go to work and other students do, it tends to emphasise to the parents that there is very little out there for their child. It's a *very* grave concern for them. This would be their biggest concern. Maggie

The biggest concern for the parents is how their child is going to adjust to society when the child moves out of school in the long term. As far as special needs students go, that's always a concern that comes through "How's he or she going to cope with life?" They're fairly safe here. It's afterwards. Sue

A major concern is, "What's going to happen when they leave here?" Rita

They're very concerned about the future for their child. They worry about what's going to happen when their children become adults. Mary

This chapter has provided comments from the interviews held with 21 parents and 7 professionals. Their comments provide some insight as to the concerns held by parents and professionals as to what they believe should be done in the education of their children and their students.

The following chapter presents a discussion of the major themes which arose from the interviews.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The research questions provided a framework for the researcher and marked the direction of the study. While each question had a particular focus, each explored issues of relevance from the perspective of parents and professionals. This discussion provides an amalgamation of data and underlying themes which developed from information gained from each interview. The major underlying themes which evolved from the data are interpreted as reasons for special education placement, parents' concerns about teachers, teachers' concerns about parents, support for parents, support by parents, family relationships and personal adjustment, battles with bureaucracy and listening to parents. These themes are arranged into categories as interpreted by the researcher. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings of the study with further analysis and interpretation of data and interviews.

6.2 INTERPRETATION OF THEMES

6.2.1 Reasons for placing children in special education.

For the majority of parents, it was teachers who either told or suggested that special education was the best place for their child to be educated. For five of the children, education in a special school at five years of age was a foregone conclusion. These were children who had been given labels of 'autistic', 'intellectually disabled', or

'Down syndrome.' As Falvey, Grenot-Scheyer, Coots, and Bishop (1995) point out, the existence of labels is affected by social values, cultural belief systems and political activity and is of little use to educators and parents because they do not provide information relevant for addressing individual need. However, placement in special education had never been questioned by these parents as their children moved through special schools, satellite classes and special classes.

One parent told of her determination to keep her daughter in regular classes with her friends. For 6 years she and her daughter had been supported by school principals, teachers, speech and language therapists, psychologists, physiotherapists and teacher aides. Several months after beginning high school, it became increasingly obvious that the gap was widening between the child and her friends. There were differences in interests, the physical environment of the two-storied classroom blocks made access to classes almost impossible, the emphasis on academic subjects created an ever-widening gaps and the teacher aides lacked the skills to provide the help required. Eventually, her daughter's increasing unhappiness and a change in family circumstances appeared to make a special class an appropriate choice.

For thirteen other parents, placement in a special class was an alternative suggested by teachers. In all cases, the reasons given for removing the children from a regular class were for the children failing to make the progress expected of them. As well as a failure to make the progress expected, usually in reading and writing, other reasons included delayed speech development and inappropriate classroom behaviour.

None of these parents had any inkling that their child was unable to read or write until their children changed schools or did not 'move up' to the next class with their peers. One parent was told about her son's difficulties when he was in a New Entrant's class. Compared to his twin brother, he was falling behind. Throughout the primary school years, other parents were under the (mistaken) belief that all was well.

One family had enrolled their daughter at a Catholic secondary school as they wished the school to reinforce the principles and values of their home. After having their daughter's enrolment accepted and information from intermediate school had

filtered through to the college, the parents were called to a meeting. At this meeting, the parents were devastated by the knowledge that their daughter had extremely limited reading and writing skills and was coping at a 6-year old level. They were then told that their daughter could not attend that school as they did not have the facilities to cope with her but that the special education unit operating at a nearby college would cater for her needs. After 8 years of schooling, this was the first inkling the parents had that their daughter was experiencing difficulties.

For two families, it was kindergarten teachers who considered the children were not ready to begin school and who would possibly benefit from another year at this stage. After leaving kindergarten, one of these children began school in a special class while the other child had a year in a New Entrant class before her placement in a special class. For many other families, children were at various stages of primary schooling before their parents had any inkling that their child was experiencing difficulties. One child was considered slow and was 'left behind' by his twin brother. Another child had not attended school until he arrived in New Zealand with his family aged 7.

A study of the effects of placing students with moderate academic difficulties in a variety of segregated environments found that in terms of academic achievement, social-emotional outcomes and social acceptance, few consistent benefits emerged. The research favoured placement in regular classes using individualised instruction or supplemented by well designed resource programmes (Madden & Slavin, 1983).

However, most parents described their introduction to special education as something that just happened. Parents and teachers appeared to view special education as the best placement for children who were struggling with reading and writing and who were not progressing at a similar pace to their peers. In all but two of the cases, it was teachers rather than parents who suggested special education as an alternative placement. The reasons given for placing children in special education included smaller classes and the one-to-one help that would be available as provided by teacher aides and specialist teachers.

Many parents lacked any knowledge of a system of education outside that of a regular classroom. For the parents, whose children had begun their schooling in regular classrooms, the knowledge that their son or daughter was not making appropriate progress threw them into states of confusion, anger and disappointment. The parents of children with the specific labels of 'intellectual disability' or 'autism' or 'Down syndrome' fared better. In most cases, the children had been under the auspices of the IHC as pre-schoolers and although there had been no explanation of alternatives available to them, the children began their schooling at the local special school. These parents spoke highly of the teachers with whom they came in contact and had accepted that their child's level of academic achievement would be different to his or her peers.

Many parents had become disillusioned with the regular education system and considered that their children had been failed by teachers who did not take into account their particular difficulties and individual learning needs. These parents were well aware of their child's difficulties and saw special education as a place where their child would have the perceived advantage of smaller classes, more help, an appropriate curriculum and the company of students of similar ability. Once in the system of special education, these parents spoke of their relief and welcomed the opportunity for their children to progress in a system that took their particular needs into account.

6.2.2 Parents' concerns about teachers

Many parents were frustrated by regular classroom teachers who had continually assured them that everything was under control, that their sons and daughters were making adequate progress and that everything would be fine. This was in spite of the fact that many parents were not entirely satisfied with the apparent lack of progress of their children.

However, many parents are treated in a very dismissive manner by teachers and/or principals. Parents are often told not to be anxious about their child's progress in

school. To do so is to be considered “over-protective or neurotic” (Chapman, 1992, p.83).

Several parents related comments made by regular classroom teachers which left them in no doubt that they and their children were nuisances. Many felt powerless to pursue matters further – they were simply told that their child was at the wrong school or in the wrong class. A study carried out by Ysseldyke, Algozzine and Thurlow (1992) supported the notion that most teachers send home only bad news; that teachers do not follow up on what they say they will do.

Many parents spoke of their diminishing self-esteem as they were criticised for everything that was wrong with their child. Blackhurst & Berdine (1993), maintain that it is teachers who need to reinforce the positive aspects of children with disabilities as the child’s disability may cause parents to lose interest in their child’s accomplishments and reinforce negativity in the child which results in low self esteem.

Parents told of being rung continually to hear only of their son’s or daughter’s latest misdemeanour. Most had never been informed when their child had been successful. A study carried out by Ysseldyke, Algozzine and Thurlow (1992), supported the notion that most teachers send home only bad news. As Rainforth, York and Macdonald (1992) explained, most professionals limit their communication with parents to sending home reports and information and to reporting misdemeanours. Rarely are parents contacted about positive achievements. However, it is the responsibility of professionals to empower parents and to focus on their strengths (Stephenson & Ranginui-Charlton, 1994).

Epstein (1990), observed that more than 30% of parents had no communication with the school; 60% had never talked on the telephone; and most had never had any meaningful discussion with teachers.

In mainstream classes, some parents felt that the teacher’s aide, whose role they saw as being as a support person for their children, spent time with regular class students

who didn't really need the help. Several parents spoke of conflicting advice given by the teacher and the teacher's aide. Lovey (1995), agreed that many parents needed information and reassurance about the role of a teacher's aide in the classroom.

Many parents suggested they would appreciate a brief progress report either weekly or monthly. Several parents felt that a newsletter of coming events, sent home weekly or monthly, would give them advance warning of impending costs to be allocated in budgeting plans.

6.2.3 Teachers' concerns about parents.

School-wide report afternoons are held during the afternoon and early evening at the school twice a year with the express aim of giving parents the opportunity to meet with teachers to discuss student progress. In addition to the school-based report afternoons, the special education unit is closed to all students for two days each year to enable teachers to organise and to attend Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) meetings. Several days before the meetings, a notice is sent home with students inviting parents to attend an IEP meeting, lasting approximately 10 minutes, to meet with their child's teacher(s), teacher aides and the school psychologist with the aim of reviewing the past year and formulating goals for the coming year.

Not only are parents expected to attend, they are also required to make alternative arrangements for their son or daughter on days they would normally attend school. Parents are offered meeting times between 8.30 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. although there is flexibility on the part of teachers to meet outside these times. However, there are many parents for whom the times available do not suit commitments to work and family.

The concerns of teachers focused on the lack of parental involvement demonstrated by most parents. All teachers agreed that the success of educational programmes depended to a large extent on the participation of parents. For teachers, this meant parents attending IEP meetings and report afternoons, supervising/assisting with homework tasks, ensuring that their children were correctly dressed in the

appropriate uniform and that the students had the necessary equipment to carry out school-based activities. Ysseldyke, Algozzine and Thurlow (1992), note that although the correlation between parental involvement in schooling and achievement has been well documented, there is little evidence of any causal link.

Teachers considered some parents made little effort to impart social skills, to provide the necessary equipment for their children at school, to provide nutritional lunches. Although blaming parents for the so-called deficiencies in their parenting has dominated the attitudes of professionals (Stephenson & Ranginui-Charlton, 1994), it is not always the case that dysfunctional families produce dysfunctional children. In many cases, stresses at home may exacerbate the problems students display at school (Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Thurlow, 1992).

Many teachers were critical of parents who did not attend either report afternoon or IEP meetings. Examples were given of parents who never responded to notices sent home, who had never attended IEP meetings or report afternoons, who were unable to be reached by telephone either because they did not have one or because the telephone was unanswered. To all intents and purposes many parents seemed invisible. This invisibility may be a recollection of past experiences when parents have had their suggestions ignored. For parents to be an integral part of IEP meetings, their presence can only be justified if they are listened to and their opinions respected and acknowledged Lovey (1995). Stephenson & Ranginui-Charlton (1994), note that most programmes designed to foster academic success are determined by educators. In many cases, IEP programmes have been completed before parents arrive (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988). This may well leave parents with the feeling that they have nothing to offer.

With the introduction of IEPs as a basis for the distribution of resources and a document to guide professional actions, all teachers felt that parents should visit the school when they were invited to attend such activities as school-wide report afternoons and Unit-based IEP meetings. By attending planning meetings, teachers felt that at least parents were afforded the opportunity to actively participate and to agree or to disagree with the proposals. Although threats of fines and/or penalties

have been suggested for parents who do not attend meetings, Ysseldyke, Algozzine and Thurlow (1992), consider the involvement of schools and society in policing the involvement of parents in their child's education and question the wisdom of punishing parents for what others deem is not in the best interests of their child.

According to Turnbull and Turnbull (1982), the passage of PL14-942 in the United States, marked the beginning of a change in the way parents were regarded by the professionals who served their children. PL94-142 provided the means to change from a predominantly negative emphasis to one of encouraging parent-professional relationships by enabling parents to be part of the decision-making process (Nevin & Thousand, 1987). Legislation thus gave parents the right to be active participants in making educational decisions with regard to planning and evaluating programmes (Schulz, 1987).

6.2.4 Why don't parents come to school?

Schulz (1987), maintained that parents take an active, passive or non-participatory role in the education of their children. The positive features of active participation applies to parents who continue programmes at home; have access to school-based resources; assist with goals that are realistic, attainable and appropriate; and act as advocates for their child (Shevin, 1983). For many teachers, active participation may well be the ideal, but there are many parents who prefer to have minimal involvement or none at all.

Many parents may attend meetings, but their input may be minimal. Attendance (usually by the mother) cannot be interpreted as a willingness to become involved (Rainforth, York & Macdonald, 1992).

Parents who do not participate have a variety of reasons for not doing so. Some of these include:

- there may be an inability to offer the commitment or the support that a school-based home programme requires (Shevin, 1983).

- there may be cultural and/or language barriers; there may be difficult circumstances at home; they may lack time, or they may be willing for the school to assume responsibility for their child's education (Schulz, 1987).
- they may feel tired, angry or apprehensive – possibly in response to the attitudes of professionals who believe they alone have the competence to deal with educational matters; they may lack transportation; they may not be able to express themselves; there may not be anyone to care for others at home; (Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart, 1996; Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Thurlow, 1992).
- they cannot afford help for younger siblings (Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Thurlow, 1992).
- financial hardship may impose severe difficulties and parents may not be able to adequately provide for their families in terms of diet, safety, cleanliness and health; parents believe that professionals have the expertise to make the decisions and that there is little reason for them to become involved; they may wish to take part but the constraints of other responsibilities may prevent them from doing so (Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart, 1996).
- they are reluctant to attend school-based meetings or activities because of their own “fragile confidence” (Lovey, 1995, p.30).
- the language of the curriculum and professional jargon has distanced parents who feel ill at ease with terminology they do not understand (Carpenter, 1996; Lovey, 1995).
- professionals are familiar with routines, regulations and practices of which parents know little about. For many parents, there are negative remembrances of their own schooldays (Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart, 1996).
- many teachers do not really want parents to be present especially those from significantly different educational or income backgrounds or those from racial minority groups (Beveridge, 1993).
- school policies do not encourage ‘untrained’ help (Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Thurlow, 1992).
- programmes must be consistent with parents’ culture, language and beliefs (Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart, 1996). Many educators have different values

and come from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (Stephenson & Ranginui-Charlton, 1994).

The primary concern for all parents is for basic needs to be met and many parents of children with special needs are coping with very difficult circumstances. The struggle to survive in difficult conditions can overwhelm even the most resourceful parents (Stephenson & Ranginui-Charlton, 1994).

There is much to support the contention that collaboration is far greater between parents and teachers of students with disabilities than between the parents of 'ordinary' children (Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Thurlow, 1992). The assumption on the part of most educators is that students will make better progress if home and school are in agreement (Schulz, 1987). However, Turnbull and Turnbull (1982) consider that many of the notions about parental involvement are based more on what educators and policy makers believe parents should do rather than on what parents themselves believe to be appropriate involvement. By expecting all parents to be equal participants in decision-making, Turnbull & Turnbull (1982) believe that many parents are being set up to fail resulting in teachers becoming disillusioned by parents who do not meet their expectations.

The conventional IEP meeting included meetings between parents and professionals focussing on the child. Kirk and Gallagher (1983), noted the trend towards a greater recognition of the critical role of families. The emphasis is now changing and children are no longer considered in isolation from their families. There is increasing consideration of family concerns, priorities and resources as being major components of IEPs. Families are recognised as decision-makers and as being capable of involvement in determining goals, setting short-term objectives and deciding the pace and place of activities in the IEP process. It is no longer the role of professionals to determine, without family consultation, how and where the student with a disability (SWD) is to be educated (Vincent, 1996). Preparing students to become contributing members of society requires families and educators to work together as a team to produce worthwhile programmes which recognise the individual needs of all concerned (Kimm, Falvey, Bishop & Rosenberg, 1996).

While insisting that it was crucial for parents to meet with educators to discuss progress teachers, for the most part, were keenly aware of the difficulties faced by many parents.

Teachers agreed that the reluctance of many parents to attend school were due to combinations of several of the factors outlined above. One teacher considered the parents' level of academic ability to be lower than that of their child. The understanding of this teacher was there was little point in expecting anything of these parents as they would be unable to offer any worthwhile help. Although teachers recognised the difficulties faced by many parents, there was still the expectation that parents could do more to help their children by making the time and effort to attend meetings and to respond to requests made by the school e.g. keeping students home if they were ill, supervising homework and sending children to school in clean clothes.

Lovitt (1989), asserts that students can reach their maximum potential only if their parents become actively involved in all aspects of their education. This observation appears to take little heed of the commitment of parents to other aspects of family life. As Turnbull and Turnbull (1982) point out, parents are not a homogeneous group. All have different degrees of ability, time, energy and interest to devote to their children's education. It is the responsibility of teachers to encourage parents to participate as much as they wish and to respect the wishes of parents who desire to have little or no input into their child's education (Mortimore & Blackstone, 1982).

6.2.5 Supporting parents

Parenting is a daunting, challenging and complex task in today's society. There are increasing demands on time, energy and money. According to Blenk (1995), one of the major roles of educational programmes should be to support family members and to support their efforts in schools. Most children are important to their families as are families the focal point for their children.

The first concern of many parents is to understand their child's disability (Blackhurst & Berdine, 1993). Within the range of emotions experienced by parents

of children with special needs, many may display some of the characteristics of grief (Russell, 1996). They may deny their child's disability which, for some parents, may occur soon after birth. As their child reaches school age, parents may feel overwhelmed or threatened by their introduction to an educational situation with which they are unfamiliar. The impact of reaching school age can be a traumatic experience for many parents and although they may well develop skills to cope with the demands of their child and those of the wider society, parents need the support of teachers, family and friends (Palmer et al., undated).

For others, the grief response may be at any time during the school years when told their child has a learning disability. Some parents may be traumatised in a similar way to a bereavement and their relationships with the school may be affected for many years. Russell (1996), points out that many teachers are often dismissive of emotional responses and there is a need for them to appreciate the adjustment within the family.

Blackhurst & Berdine (1993), consider the discovery of a disability affects the whole family with emotional extremes being "more pervasive, intense and enduring" (p. 178). The parents have an emotional adjustment which affects the dynamics of the whole family as well as the associated factors of religion, socio-economic status, the severity and seriousness of the disability, parental knowledge about the disability and birth order in the family. Many parents undergo feelings of frustration, guilt, fear, disappointment and uncertainty.

Most parents with a child with a disability experience two major crises. The first is a loss of dreams and aspirations held for the child. The second is the problem of providing daily care which may often be difficult and demanding (Kirk & Gallagher, 1983). For families struggling to make ends meet, poverty imposes a considerable stress factor on children and their families (Santrock, 1997). Teachers have an important role to play in the support of parents and families during recurrent crises by keeping the expectations of parents at a realistic level (Lovey, 1995).

All teachers gave instances of the support they had given to parents. Most of the support was in ensuring that parents' wishes were carried out at school. This involved ringing parents if their children failed to arrive at school or were absent from classes, supervising medication, caring for children at school who were unwell and who were unable to be sent home – or kept at home because the parents were at work, arranging medical and dental appointments – often providing the transport and accompanying the student to the appointment, as a support person when for example, parents were dealing with legal or social systems, as empathetic listeners, as advocates when dealing with other professionals – for example speech and language therapists, visiting teachers and the police. None of the teachers mentioned any form of emotional support related to an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the backgrounds of parents

For the parents of secondary school students, there is the changing role of parents as children move through adolescence into adulthood from being (possibly) directive and authoritative to supportive (Bishop, Amate & Villalobos, 1995).

Several parents spoke of their concerns for 'life after school.' For 15 or 16 years, parents had sent their child off to school often with safe and secure transport being provided, perhaps gradually becoming familiar with the jargon, rules and consistent school schedules. Now many face the daunting task of finding suitable tertiary courses or appropriate employment. There is also the possibility of leaving a job to care for a son or daughter at home all day.

Teachers are not expected to take the responsibility for many of the problems faced by parents. However, they can adopt a "truly professional approach" (Chapman, 1992, p. 88), by being aware of the parents' point of view and appreciate the demands and responsibilities they face. Stephenson & Ranginui-Charlton (1994), note the importance for professionals to have a knowledge of the family's background in order to facilitate discussion and to act as a resource and/or support person rather than an expert with a top down approach.

6.2.6 Supporting teachers

Traditionally, the curriculum and its delivery have been jealously guarded by teachers. For many parents, the prevailing attitude has been that educational decisions should be made by teachers as they are the 'experts' and parents the 'intruders' (Styles, 1992). Meighan (1988), suggested that parents are seen as problems to be endured by professionally trained teachers; as clients who control the actions of teachers through their governing bodies; as para-professional aides who can be useful to teachers as resources to the school; or as partners who work with teachers to an agreed programme. The view that parents are problems had its beginning in the 1870s when mass schooling was established. Parents interfered if they took too much of an interest, yet negligent if they did nothing. As most parents had not received any schooling, they were assumed to be illiterate. Parents were not expected to know anything. They were excluded as education was, supposedly, best left to trained teachers (Meighan, 1988).

Support by parents may not be forthcoming for a variety of reasons. As Woodley (1988) suggested, Samoan parents are frequently reluctant to become involved with learning programmes that require a long-term commitment to the school. Their diffidence may stem from obligations to religious occasions; expectations held by the school which are at odds with cultural beliefs; family responsibilities; shyness; a belief that teachers have the skills required to teach and as parents, they feel they lack the expertise and/or the knowledge to effectively instruct their children.

Several of the parents in the study had an intellectual disability. As Losen and Losen (cited in Schulz, 1987 p. 208) pointed out, these parents may be limited in their ability to "articulate, comprehend or communicate". They may be unable to provide an appropriate learning environment and possibly be considered as contributing to their child's problems. This was the case for one teacher who deemed it futile to ask anything of these parents as they "often don't have a lot to offer anyway...you feel that talking to them is worse than talking to the kids in the classroom." As Beveridge (1993) suggests, the role of teachers is to communicate with all parents and offer them genuine respect and understanding. The gap between home and school may be wider for some than for others but surely teachers are not in a

position to make assumptions about their student's home backgrounds. These parents may lack the confidence to *offer* support, but constructive two-way communication between home and school has been identified as one of the factors associated with effective education at secondary school level (Mortimore & Blackstone, 1982).

Although several parents spoke of a desire to have progress reports on a more regular basis, they also recognised the difficulty for this in a secondary school system where the students do not have one teacher for every subject and do not remain in one classroom. Several parents spoke of their involvement in primary school activities and the ease with which they could find and approach primary school teachers. These parents also spoke of the difficulty of not knowing where their children were during the day as they were unfamiliar with the physical layout of the school and school timetables. As Beveridge (1993) noted, parental support and involvement is much more common in early and primary education with little comparable information about general patterns of parental support of secondary school children.

Although parents are typically involved on the school's terms (Beveridge, 1993), Nevin and Thousand (1987), maintain that parental support is crucial for the long-term success of students with disabilities and suggest that, if this premise is true, it is crucial that parents be helped to identify the support they want and need at the time their child's difficulties are determined.

6.2.7 Family relationships and personal adjustment.

The effects of a child with a disability within the family have changed over time. At one time, parents were advised by medical personnel to institutionalise their children. Parents who decided to keep their children at home were stigmatised as were their children. Although parents had to meet the cost of institutionalisation, second-rate care was the norm for many. Changes since the 1970s make this the exception rather than the rule and families are now expected to assume responsibility for their children (Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Thurlow, 1992).

Some families are reluctant to acknowledge their child's disabilities as it reflects badly on them and is considered a punishment for previous transgressions (Blackhurst & Berdine, 1993). Coming to terms with a child who is significantly different to his or her siblings was a concern for many parents. Most parents had not had exposure to children with special needs. Until told otherwise, parents considered their children to achieve similar stages of development. There were feelings of inadequacy as parents did not know what to do in order to provide help and support for their 'different' child. As well as their own feelings of despair, many parents spoke of stresses and tensions created within their families by husbands who had departed leaving mothers with sole responsibility for managing the home, husbands who were unsupportive of either their wives or their children and other family members who lacked tolerance and understanding of the particular needs of their sibling. Even relatively simple tasks expected of ordinary children, such as getting to school on time, may create additional stress for the parents of a child with a disability.

If family relationships are aversive, this will affect the success of any programme aimed at helping one person in that family. Cole and Chan (1990), point out the difficulties faced by a parent who is attempting to be positive and rewarding (for example in carrying out a behaviour modification programme, helping with homework) if there is no support from a possible aggressive partner. Research by Dumas and Walters (1983), suggested that mothers who are depressed, socially disadvantaged and involved with aversive exchanges with others are unlikely to benefit from any form of parent training aimed at, for example, modifying behaviour.

In most cases mothers tend to be the primary caregivers and most of the responsibility for a child with a disability falls on the mother (Blackhurst & Berdine, 1993). As mothers shouldered almost total care-taking responsibility, their opportunities for leisure activities decreased, their work patterns changed and they had a high incidence of leave from work due to illness (Carpenter, 1996).

Palmer et al. (undated), believe that many parents pass through a grieving process with the unexpected reality of a child who is 'different.' The vulnerability of parents is highlighted by Carpenter (1996), who suggests that parents may display hypersensitivity, short temper, an inability to cope with criticism of themselves or their child. These defensive behaviours may be symptomatic of the dread of further bad news, overprotectiveness or a desire to compensate. Teachers have a need to appreciate the adjustment within a family as members may take considerable time to recognise the child as a person with due regard for his or her diverse talents. Sometimes educators in planning for the needs of children with disabilities ignore the special needs of the child's parents and siblings who may experience many stresses that other parents do not (Carpenter, 1996).

Five of the families in the study are headed by single parents on benefits (mothers). As Tew and Lawrence (1975) point out, parents of children with disabilities are twice as likely to separate as are the parents of ordinary children. Thirteen families have one parent working; in three families, both parents are employed. Three students are in foster homes. Family income, resources and the services required for maintaining the health and well being of the family are dependent on the family's financial resources. This becomes even more critical to families that are chronically poor or in which the main breadwinner becomes unemployed Bronfenbrenner (1997). For many families, making ends meet is more important than what goes on at school (Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Thurlow, 1992).

The overall school roll draws its students from a working population in the lowest two socio-economic groups of the Elley-Irving Index. Although low income parents have positive attitudes towards education and have high expectations for their children, they do not voice their concerns to school personnel (Blackledge & Aljazir, 1996). As Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart, 1996) noted, a family on a low income may have lower expectations for achievement.

Although mothers are usually the primary caregivers, Stephenson and Ranginui-Charlton (1994), consider the role of fathers who also have concerns which need to be recognised and addressed. According to Blackhurst and Berdine (1993), fathers

may feel worse about their child's problem. Carpenter (1996), suggests that fathers be offered opportunities to network with other fathers in order to meet their needs for information and to gain emotional support within their family.

Recognising the difficulties faced by many families in a variety of situations the aim of those at school must be to provide an environment which is as tension free as possible (Dumas & Wahler, 1983).

6.2.8 Battles with bureaucracy.

As Chapman (1992) notes, many parents of children with disabilities have experienced major problems in dealing with various 'authorities'. As primary advocates for their child, many parents begin a life of struggle. As well as coping with the grief of shattered dreams and aspirations, parents often have to fight hard to obtain medical, psychological and/or other support services. For those parents whose children began school in regular classes, most spoke of their failure to obtain any in-class support or extra help for their children. As advocates for their children, many parents became frustrated in their attempts to gain help for children. Many parents felt that their children were falling behind, primarily with reading, and yet in spite of numerous attempts to talk to teachers, their concerns were either ignored or brushed aside.

Many parents are often faced with a confusing range of services and conflicting advice about educational options from people with a vested interest in maintaining or promoting their own particular area. The information may subject parents to unintentional pressures as they may have difficulty in resisting well-meant but ill-informed advice from people they perceive to have greater knowledge or expertise (Blackledge & Aljazir, 1996). A further blow to parents' self esteem may be dealt by the knowledge that their educational options are limited as perhaps no other school will accept their child (Lovey, 1995).

6.2.9 Culture and ethnicity.

Dunn (1968), considered the most beneficial effect of special (segregated) education stemmed from the belief that regular class teachers were freed from the responsibility of devising programmes which differed from those directed at the majority of students who did not have learning problems. A major concern of Dunn's (1968) study, was the disproportionate numbers of children from ethnic minority groups who had been identified as having intellectual disabilities.

In this particular study, two-thirds of the parents and children were from minority groups. Within this group of minority students, Maori students outnumbered Tongan and Samoan students at a ratio of 3:1. Reynolds and Lakin (1987), note the disproportionate numbers of minority groups in special education with the incidence being about three times higher than for 'white' children.

Spoonley (1988) suggests the education of Maori children is "prejudice plus power" (p.42) and a system of beliefs perpetuated by the dominant group in society which produces a constant negative result in the education of Maori children. Bowles and Gintis (1976), declared that schools reflect the structure of society by maintaining the interests of the middle-class majority which perpetuate inequalities in relationships as the weaker group are dominated by the more powerful. A study by Simon (1984), reported that Maori students were generally regarded as being less intelligent than their pakeha counterparts and that most teachers regard the purpose of the school as needing to overcome this problem and to rectify the damage. As Woodley (1988) asserts, any movement toward the sharing of power and decision-making among different groups is a curriculum in itself.

Schulz (1987) suggests that the overrepresentation of minority groups in special education is a result of children being mislabeled or inappropriately placed. This racial imbalance has been attributed to identification procedures which suited white, middle class used to categorise children and assign them the appropriate label to determine their educational placement and which disadvantages minority groups.

Reynolds and Lakin (1987), suggest that many minority groups have remedial academic needs that exist outside the area of specific disabilities (e.g. reading, language, behaviour) which results in minority children being regarded as 'poor' children. To overcome these discrepancies, Reynolds and Lakin (1987), propose a change in existing conditions to provide an appropriate education by means of action research and changes in the ways programmes are delivered.

Several teachers spoke of the dilemma they were in when meeting with minority group parents. If they gave parents an accurate picture of the student's progress and behaviour, the child was punished for not doing better or for misbehaving. With regard to Samoan parents, Woodley (1988) declared that the differences between an education the parents have received in Samoa and an education the children are exposed to in New Zealand may result in some children behaving inappropriately at home and at school. Children are 'shamed' at school for inappropriate behaviour and punished at home because the school has informed the family. Many Samoan parents do not want their customs or language fostered at school. They want their children to learn things which will benefit them in society when they have left school (Woodley, 1988). Tongati'o (1994), notes that Samoan parents considered the teacher to be the crucial factor in the learning process of their children.

When teachers and parents do not share the same language and culture there are difficulties on both sides. Both become frustrated by barriers in communication. The school has a policy of employing teachers from many cultures. However, in spite of difficulties with language, many Samoan parents do not want their child taught by Pacific Islanders or Maori. In order to become accepted members of the wider society they want their children to be exposed to role models from the dominant culture (Woodley, 1988).

It was teachers rather than parents who told of the difficulties communicating where English was not a common first language. Although there were members of staff representing many minority groups it was often not easy to locate them to act as interpreters when the occasion arose. For several parents this meant they were unable to share in their children's learning as teachers did not easily make contact

with home. Tongati'o (1994) discussed the lack of knowledge and understanding of school practices by Samoan parents which hindered their involvement in their children's education.

Families of lower socio-economic status or from different cultural backgrounds generally do not promote cognitive and linguistic abilities and different cultural values may not assist generally accepted forms of progress valued in traditional classes (Blackhurst & Berdine, 1993). Differences in the behaviour of middle-class parents and ethnic minority parents tend to be used as a benchmark for deficiencies in minority cultures. Where this attitude prevails, a great disservice is done to children and their families. Their futures are jeopardised because of the way in which their behaviour and classroom performance are judged by standards that are often alien to their own cultural, familial and personal realities (Marfo & Boothby, 1997).

It is essential for good progress at school that parent and child believe the school is working towards the benefit of the family (Woodley, 1988). Many minority parents are willing and able to make contributions to their child's education. However, many feel apprehensive when asked to support their own child's education due to their own lack of proficiency in spoken and/or written English and their cultural distance from the school (Blackledge & Algazir, 1996).

Although minority parents have their own perceptions about what happens in school, they usually have little power to voice their concerns in order to achieve educational reform. Minority parents also have difficulty in gaining access to and benefitting from appropriate educational intervention (Brantlinger & Guskin, 1987). School conditions are not the same for all children. Generally, "Educators...serve those they think they must and when they need not, they do not....most of the children who do not get these services...happen to be...children who are either poor, or of color, or both." (Brantlinger & Guskin, 1987, p.11).

Although there may be difficulties with language and cultural differences, professionals need to reach out and offer support as minority parents are just as

determined as any other parent for their children to succeed (Blackledge & Aljazir, 1996).

6.2.10 Listening to parents

According to Chapman (1992), listening to parents means giving them the opportunity to fully express their concerns without feeling that teachers will be judgmental or offer negative or defensive feedback.

Several parents who felt that their son or daughter was struggling at school described their frustration with teachers who appeared not to listen to their concerns. One parent described things which her youngest son was unable to do when he started school when compared with his siblings. Fearful of his fate when he began school, she suggested to his teacher that he would possibly need extra help and careful monitoring in the early months of school. For two years her concerns were brushed aside and, in spite of her requests for help, nothing was done. The attitudes of professionals who believe that they alone have the necessary skills may alienate parents. By not giving parents the chance to voice their concerns, professionals miss out on opportunities for information and insights (Carpenter, 1996).

When the family left to live in the United States for almost 8 months, there was a marked difference in the way that Robyn's concerns were heeded and preliminary assessments carried out on the first day Michael attended school. Robyn was impressed by the speediness of the professionals involved and wondered why so little had been done in New Zealand.

Several parents told of their frustration at voicing their concerns. Teachers either ignored their suggestions or said that things were under control. Parents were disappointed and angry when they later found out that nothing had happened. In several cases, parents changed schools. Other parents became 'squeaky wheels' and persisted with their concerns until something was done to help their child. But, as Ysseldyke, Algozzine and Thurlow (1992) indicated, many teachers do not follow

through on what they say they will do. There is often a discrepancy between promises and reality (Dickson & DiPaola, cited in Schulz, 1987).

Offering advice and information may be a major role for teachers. However, listening to parents' concerns, queries and successes is an important part of the communication process (Blackledge & Aljazir, 1996). If professionals are to work in an effective partnership with parents, they must listen and not impose their own agenda (Stephenson & Ranginui-Charlton, 1994).

6.3 Summary

For the parents whose children had been 'diagnosed' early in life as having an intellectual disability, their education in special schools and in special classes was a foregone conclusion. Parents accepted that was the way things were and their children remained in special education for their schooling. Other parents, who were aware of the lack of progress of their children, saw special education as a way of giving their children the help and support they required in smaller classes, with students of similar ability working on a curriculum which catered, to a large extent, for their individual need. Several parents remained in total ignorance that their children not making the progress expected of them until teachers, at stages ranging from the primers to intermediate school, suggested a special class placement. Again, this was seen as a means of providing an alternative education for students unable to cope in regular classes.

In spite of the discussion centred on the special education/inclusive education debate, it is clear from the comments made by both parents and teachers that special education is the preferred option for students unable to survive the rigours of regular education. Although parents and professionals recognised the negative aspects of a lack of suitable role models and the social isolation and stigmatisation as a result of being labelled as different, all gave instances of individual success. The happiness of their children was the most important feature for all parents.

Many of the concerns voiced by parents centred on the frustration they felt with teachers who had continually reassured them that their children were making the expected progress. These parents were aware that their children were not, for example, reading at a level appropriate for their age. After articulating their concerns and having their confidence eroded by teachers who appeared not to listen, it became an uphill battle for these parents to persevere with their demands that something be done to help their children. For most parents, the only times they were contacted by teachers was to inform them of the misdemeanours of their children. Teachers also agreed that the most frequent occasions which necessitated contact with parents was for troublesome behaviour.

Teachers considered the involvement of parents as crucial for the success of their children at school. The concerns of professionals were mostly about the apparent apathy of most parents to attend school-wide report afternoons or IEP meetings held on two days each year. Parents who were unable to attend at the school-suggested times were given the opportunity to arrange an alternative time convenient for them. Although teachers recognised the difficulties many parents faced, such as a lack of transport or job commitments, there appeared little effort made to follow up on parents who did not respond to written notices sent home or who could not be reached by telephone. There was no suggestion made that teachers were prepared to go to meetings at places and times arranged by parents. Parents were expected to attend meetings on the school's terms.

For all parents in the study, coping with a child with a disability had opened up a whole new world. In the majority of cases, there were older children in the family who had been considered 'ordinary' children doing 'ordinary' things. Many parents were coping with an educational system about which they were ignorant. Their education had been in regular classes and this, for most people, has parallels in the ways their children will be educated. Several parents in minority groups had not been educated in New Zealand and their cultural values and expectations will be different to those of their children. As well as administering an educational curriculum, many teachers saw themselves in a pastoral role carrying out activities which they considered beyond their role as teachers. One teacher felt that the more that was done for parents, the less they were inclined to make

the effort required to do things for themselves. However, all teachers were prepared to support parents in various ways such as, attending meetings with outside agencies (police, social welfare, training programmes), arranging medical and dental appointments and providing the necessary transport to enable parents and students to attend, administering medication and caring for students who were unwell at school if parents were not at home.

As well as attending meetings, most teachers considered the support of parents to centre around school-based demands. These demands included accounting for absences from school, providing school uniforms and stationery requirements, money and/or materials required for practical courses (workshop technology, home economics), reinforcing social and behavioural standards and assisting with homework.

The school draws its population from predominantly low-income families from a range of minority groups. Many families are dependent on benefits or are headed by single parents who may or may not be employed. In addition to the demands of children with disabilities, all are coping with other children. Many parents (mostly mothers) have marginal support from other family members.

From the parents' perspective, many of their battles with bureaucracy were caused by the failure of teachers to (apparently) heed their concerns. In several cases, parents appeared to be disregarded by professionals who persuaded them to settle their children in schools against their wishes.

From the comments made by parents and professionals, and recognising recent policies which stress the importance of creating and maintaining effective parent/professional partnerships, it is crucial for both parties to heed the concerns of others and to demonstrate the steps they have taken to investigate them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION AND PERSONAL REFLECTIVE EVALUATION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reiterates the aim of the research, presents the conclusions reached as a result of the study and offers a personal reflective evaluation of the study.

7.2 THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The research was designed with the aim of identifying some specific factors that affect the education of students with special needs. The boundaries of the study were established as including parents who had children with disabilities. An interest in the topic arose because of the researcher's background in teaching students with special needs, as well as an involvement with facilitation and advocacy for adults with disabilities. The specific objectives of the research were to document the experiences of parents and caregivers and to determine the factors which influenced their decisions to have their children with special needs educated in a separate educational facility. It also sought the experiences of professionals within special education to determine the effectiveness of their role in communicating with parents and caregivers and in providing the information necessary for them to make informed decisions. It was hoped that the research would identify the major reasons why parents and caregivers made their decisions and provide educators with information about areas of concern for parents and caregivers.

7.3 Conclusion

A study of this size has merely scratched the surface of the complex issues surrounding special education, the parents and caregivers whose children are involved, the teachers who are responsible for their education and the professionals who offer a range of services.

It is evident from this small exploratory study that most parents had seldom had their concerns listened to. This was especially true for parents who had been 'in' special education for many years – in one case for 26 years. These parents were entirely satisfied with a separate system of education and saw no reason to change it for anything else. They were appreciative of the dedication of the staff at special schools and in special classes. All had children who were in regular education and the comparisons between regular classes and in special facilities had given these parents an insight into the so-called shortcomings of large classes, overworked teachers and unsuitable academic programmes.

The shortest time in special education for one parent was 6 months. Since her daughter had begun falling behind in her mathematics and language programmes, this parent had sought help from her daughter's teachers. When the help was not forthcoming, the parent turned to the Specialist Education Services for an assessment to 'prove' her daughter was in need of the perceived benefits of smaller classes and appropriate programmes offered in special education. For these parents and for their daughter the improvement in attitude and behaviour has been remarkable.

Two parents appeared to have 'given in' to 'professional' advice that their children would be more appropriately placed in special education than in a regular classroom. Both parents were reluctant to have their children deemed to have special needs in different schools from their siblings. These parents lacked information and felt they had no power to question or influence the decisions made for them.

It is clearly implicated from this study that special education continues to be a contradictory issue. Parents have the opportunity to have their children educated in regular classrooms and special facilities. Regular schooling and special education created two separate systems

and perhaps neither serve students with disabilities well. As Lipsky and Gartner (1996) point out, inclusion is not common practice in the United States and most students with disabilities continue to be educated in separate settings.

In New Zealand there are efforts underway to address the issues of unhindered access to publicly and adequately funded education, to include students in age-appropriate classes at the same schools as their non-disabled peers and programmes that afford success both at school and in later life.

Although legislation and policy calls for partnerships between parents and professionals and collaboration between families and schools, it is a myth to believe that professionals and parents are equals. The reality for many parents is that they rely heavily on the advice they are given by those whose job it is to educate their children. Many parents are unwilling and/or unable to become involved and are only too happy to leave all decision-making to those responsible for the education of their children.

A disconcerting aspect of the study was the number of parents who, for example, were unaware of assessment procedures, had no knowledge of the contents of their son's or daughter's school records, knew nothing of the educational alternatives available to them, and were ignorant about IEP meetings. There is clearly a need for professionals to make exhaustive efforts to locate parents and offer them an opportunity to take part in educational decision-making if they wish to.

As the school draws its population largely from minority groups, there is a need to send school communications home in the appropriate native language and in a variety of ways rather than in the usual written form.

A recommendation for all professionals would be that they make contact with all the parents of new enrolments to arrange a convenient time to visit them at home. This study provided an invaluable insight into the lives of families as they coped with the demands of a child with special needs. One method that appears to warrant further exploration is the

narration of educational experiences as a tool to facilitate meaningful change for families and their children with disabilities.

It is generally recognised that schools serve to reproduce the inequalities of the communities they represent. As Codd (1987) points out, little attention has been given to the socially reproductive elements of special education and no matter how well the benefits of special education have been explained, there will always be “some unintended...consequences which constrain and limit the opportunities available to individuals” (p. 73).

By directly approaching parents and caregivers, it was my intention to talk with them to address these issues by critically reflecting on their experiences as a basis for informing future practice. Ballard (1994) refers to the work of Walker (1990) who suggests that “Maori as a minority of 12%...cannot achieve justice or resolve their grievances without Pakeha support” (p.306). Similar sentiments may well apply to other minority cultures. Ballard (1994) suggests it is for those who are part of the majority who must research and act on what serves to maintain current exclusionary practices.

7.4 PERSONAL REFLECTIVE EVALUATION

As Ballard (1995) points out, disability is a community issue and therefore an issue for all people. “We can either try to be part of the solution or remain part of the problem” (p.2). It was a decision to try to be part of the solution that underpinned this research.

My research project involved interviewing the parents of children with disabilities who are enrolled in a special education unit contained within the boundary of a large South Auckland co-educational secondary school. Over three months I visited parents in their homes (with one exception) talked with them and recorded their personal accounts of their child’s schooling. I believed that, all too often, teachers make decisions about children without appreciating the need to consider parents in the process. I believed that parents often carried on in ignorance about their child’s progress at school, that teachers and other

professionals made decisions based on observations made in the context of school, that parents were ignored and found out what was happening when the child went home and informed the parent that "...happened at school today" or when the parent attended a report afternoon and talked with other parents, or from chatting with neighbours over the back fence.

As the researcher for this study, I was not in a position to communicate directly with any parent. This required involving the teachers in the special education unit to ensure that all the envelopes containing the information sheets were sent out (on three occasions) and collecting the returned consent forms. The school's telephone number and address were on the information sheet as methods of contact for parents who wished to make enquiries. This meant the enlisting the help of the deputy principal who was often slightly more accessible during the day and who agreed to answer telephone enquiries and to take names of people for me to contact. Most teachers are busy people and I was somewhat loath to involve them in something which was not of their making.

The recruitment of parents proved more difficult than I had envisaged. I had decided the minimum number of parents to be interviewed would be approximately 25. From past experiences I was aware of the difficulties of a) sending written information home and b) getting it back again. After three attempts at sending written information home, which did not attract the number expected, I despaired of finding enough people. One of the staff members offered chocolate bars to students who returned their 'letters' to school regardless as to whether they had been filled in or not. Following the unsuccessful recruitment campaign, teachers in the special education unit then contacted parents who had not responded to any of the written information in order to find out whether the envelopes had ever reached home and to explain the purpose of the study. One staff member called on parents at home to do this. Several parents had not seen any of the material, some parents said they hadn't bothered to read the contents and a few people said they had fully intended to reply but that they had either lost the paper or had forgotten about it. Eventually there were 21 parents who had indicated a willingness to take part.

The recruitment of professionals was straightforward as all the people to whom an information sheet had been sent, replied promptly and agreed to participate.

The first information sheet for participants was set out as required by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. For many parents the content and style proved difficult reading. When I first met with parents, read through the sheet with them and explained exactly what I was doing, several parents expressed surprise and said, for example, "Oh, is that what it means?" For parents, there were several factors which may have prevented them taking part.

- a) The method of getting information home was dependent on students delivering the envelopes.
- b) There was the assumption that all parents could read and understand the purpose of the study.
- c) There was a reliance on students returning the consent forms to school.

Although I had taught many of the students and had previously met their parents, I could not contact them until they had agreed to participate. Thus, there was no way of simplifying the language and ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study until after parents had returned the consent form. Without an overwhelming response, it was unnecessary to consider methods of reducing the number of participants.

Although I had decided on a random method of selecting participants, the method was not at all random. The participants were those who received the written information, who could read and who made the effort to return the consent form to the school

No interviews were held during term holidays between 5th and 20th July. Illness and family commitments for parents were other factors which contributed to the length of time taken to complete the interviews. It also took me longer than I had anticipated to type out the transcripts.

All of the parents lived in urban South Auckland and did not represent a cross section of social backgrounds, ethnic groups or residential areas.

Although every parent had been contacted by telephone to arrange a convenient time for the interview, on two occasions there was nobody at home as they had forgotten. It would have been better for me to have rung each person the morning of the interview to remind and to confirm the arrangements. I had assumed that people would remember or make a note of the date and time when I had first contacted them. While I was teaching at the school it had been impressed upon the staff not to make one's home phone number available to parents or students to prevent its possible misuse. This prevented parents from contacting me to make alternative arrangements. It was thus very difficult for parents to contact me to make any changes as they had to either write or telephone the school and leave a message for me to contact them. Although staff were in the school from 7.30 a.m. the office did not open until 8 a.m. and the one available telephone line in made it virtually impossible for parents to get through until well after 9 o'clock.

The home visits were time consuming and I usually allowed 3-4 hours for each interview. This allowed me travelling time of between 40 minutes and an hour, time to explore the garden and share methods of growing beetroot, to visit the pets and discuss recipes.

There was a certain amount of guesswork involved in finding some of the homes as many of the houses lacked street numbers and, in several cases, the street names were missing. After I had located many of the homes, I sat in my car not wishing to get out. From the street, I found the sights depressing. Many of the houses were surrounded by a sea of mud, dead cars, bottles, cans, dogs and broken concrete. The grass lapped at the washing draped over fences or hung from dishevelled wires. Few of the sections had gardens. The weatherboards lacked paint. First impressions were of hopelessness, despair and neglect. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

Eventually I climbed out and made my way to a door, through the dirt and past the barking dog to a most hospitable welcome. Without exception, I was greeted by my first name and ushered inside. I was sometimes overwhelmed by the generosity of people who invited me into their homes and plied me with cups of tea and coffee, hot scones and fresh muffins. As I elaborated on what I was doing and why, I was continually surprised by parents who said how much they appreciated the opportunity to be involved. Without exception, all the

parents expressed a wish to read a summary of the findings. Perhaps the greatest measure of confidence was displayed when I asked one parent to suggest a convenient time for her to read the transcript. She replied that it wasn't necessary because she trusted me and that I "would get it right."

None of the people had previously been given the chance to talk about their hopes and fears, to discuss their grievances and air their concerns. One parent taped the interview and asked for a copy of the parent questionnaire in order to share the discussion with her husband. With the exception of two parents, all reflected on their good fortune at having their students in a setting which, they felt, gave them the support their children needed and access to the best educational opportunity available.

Having worked in the area for the previous 6 years and visited many homes, I had become very conscious of my cultural values, material possessions and socio-economic status – and how very great were the differences between me and the families I visited. I listened to people who were unemployed – and remembered my job. I tried to understand the difficulties people faced as they kept appointments – with pre-schoolers and no car. I visited homes which had no heating, where windows had been broken and the glass replaced with cardboard, or planks – or nothing.

A significant feature of the research was the wholehearted willingness of parents and caregivers to talk honestly about their experiences with schools and teachers with whom I was familiar. I felt privileged to listen to the information as I considered this displayed confidence in me and in what I was doing.

My aim was to be non-judgmental and to accept people as they are. I attempted to speak so I was understood, neither condescending nor patronising and to display sensitivity to the needs of the families as they coped with divorce, caregiving, unemployment, solo parenting, physical/mental/substance abuse and neglect.

I wondered about what motivated people to respond in the ways they did. Was it from curiosity about what I was doing? Was it because I was from 'the school'? Was it because I

was well-known to many of the parents as I had worked with their children? Did it give people an opportunity to tell their stories? Or was it from a genuine desire to help? After talking with these people, I believe their motivation came from a genuine interest in what I was doing and a desire to help in any way possible.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

My name is Karen McLachlan. I am a student at Massey University (Albany) enrolled in the degree of Master of Education (Special Education). For the research part of my graduate work, I would like to record the experiences of parents and caregivers of secondary school students and of the professionals who work with them in special education.

Students are now able to go to a school which they or their parents have chosen. They are also able to go to ordinary classes with other students. The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of parents and caregivers and the decisions they made concerning the education of their children

You are invited to take part in this research and I value any assistance you can offer me. As part of my research, I will be doing an interview-based study with parents and caregivers of students with special needs and the professionals who work with them. This involves a meeting of about one hour at a time and place of your choice, at school or at home. The interview can be in English or another language if you prefer. All information that I collect will be treated as strictly confidential.

Participants in the study have the following rights:

- * not to answer any particular question and to withdraw from the study at any time.
- * to ask any questions about the study at any time.
- * to agree/disagree to the interview being audio taped.
- * to request that the audio tape be turned off at any stage of the interview.
- * to provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give me your permission.
- * to be shown a summary of the findings of the study when it is finished

With your permission, I will record the information on tape. I will write out the information in full and show you what I have written before any information is used in the study. You must mark the appropriate place(s) on the consent form to show what you want done with the information.

The tapes or written information could be:

- a) given to you OR,
- b) destroyed by me OR,
- c) stored for future use (to be used in articles, reports or a further study). This only applies if you give your permission.

Any information given to me during the interview is strictly confidential. If you wish, a summary of the research will be available to you. The results of this study will be used only for my research and anything written about the research.

Please contact me at the number listed below or return the form to school if you can assist with the study.

Karen McLachlan
Aorere College
Telephone: (09) 278 5608

The Massey University Staff who are responsible for supervising this study are listed below. You are welcome to make contact with them at any time.

Dr Ken Ryba
Department of Educational Psychology
Massey University (Albany)
Telephone: (09) 443 9606

Roseanna Bourke
Department of Educational Psychology
Massey University (Palmerston North)
Telephone: (06) 356 9099

Making Decisions: A Critical Analysis of Factors Affecting Decision-Making Processes for Parents and Caregivers of Students with Special Needs.

Making Decisions: A Critical Analysis of Factors Affecting Decision-Making Processes for Parents and Caregivers of Students with Special Needs.

I would like to take part in this project

Signed _____

Parent/Caregiver of _____

Date _____

Karen McLachlan
Graduate Student
Department of Educational Psychology
Massey University
Private Bag 102 904
North Shore MSC
Auckland

APPENDIX B

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PROFESSIONALS

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Any information given to me during the interview is strictly confidential. If you wish, a summary of the research will be available to you. The results of this study will be used only for my research and anything written about the research.

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Making Decisions: A Critical Analysis of Factors Affecting Decision-Making Processes for Parents and Caregivers of Students with Special Needs.

I would like to take part in this project

Signed _____

Date _____

Karen McLachlan
Graduate Student
Department of Educational Psychology
Massey University
Private Bag 102 904
North Shore MSC
Auckland

APPENDIX C**INVITATION TO TAKE PART IN A STUDY OF
PARENTS' PARTICIPATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

DATE _____

TO THE PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

OF _____

I am carrying out a research project to record the experiences of parents and caregivers of children with special needs. Some people have decided to place their child(ren) in special schools, special classes or special units rather than in ordinary classrooms. I intend to talk with people about the choices they have made and what has influenced these decisions. For the school to be able to offer the best possible help for your child(ren) it is important that you are considered and consulted. Your past experiences will be valuable in helping teachers to develop future programmes which will be of most benefit to your child(ren).

If you would like to take part in this project and would like more information, please would you sign the form below and return it to school.

Karen McLachlan

I would be interested in taking part in this project and would like more information before making any decisions

Signed _____

Date _____

APPENDIX D**INVITATION TO PROFESSIONALS TO TAKE PART IN A STUDY OF
PARENTS' PARTICIPATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

DATE _____

TO _____

I am carrying out a research project to record the experiences of parents and caregivers of children with special needs and of the professionals who work with them. Some people have decided to place their child(ren) in special schools, special classes or special units rather than in ordinary classrooms. I intend to talk with people about the choices they have made and what has influenced these decisions. For the school to be able to offer the best possible help for students with special needs it is important for parents and professionals to work together to develop future programmes which will be of most benefit to these students and to their parents and caregivers.

If you would like to take part in this project and would like more information, please would you sign the form below and return it to school.

Karen McLachlan

I would be interested in taking part in this project and would like more information before making any decisions

Signed _____

Date _____

APPENDIX E - Thank you notes**Thank you**

to the people who have returned their forms to school!!!!!!

A REMINDER

For the people who still have theirs at home!!!!

PLEASE....could you return your form to school.

It is really

important

Kind regards
Karen McLachlan
Thursday 12th June

APPENDIX F

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT BETWEEN PARTICIPANT AND INTERPRETER

I _____ agree to act as interpreter

for _____ in this research. Any information given during this research will not be disclosed by me in any way.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

I understand that _____ will be present during my interview to act as an interpreter and that any information given by me will remain confidential.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX G

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. (*The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project*).

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Please initial one choice for each of the following:

_____ I would prefer to remain anonymous **OR** _____ I would like to be acknowledged for my contribution

_____ I permit quotes to be used from my used from my interview/questionnaire **OR** _____ I do not permit quotes to be used from my interview/questionnaire

_____ I agree that a copy of the information I provide may be kept by the researcher for possible future use **OR** _____ I would like the information I provide to be destroyed at the end of the study

_____ I would like to receive a summary of the findings of this study

APPENDIX H

SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

1. Tell me about your experiences you have had since _____ started school.
(the worst/the best)
2. How did you and (your child) become involved in special education?
3. What information/choices have you been offered about _____'s education?
4. What are your expectations for _____? In what ways have these expectations been met?
5. In what ways do you think that special education provides the best education for _____?
6. Would you have ever considered having _____ in an ordinary class? Why/Why not?
7. How do you view your relationship with teachers?
8. On what occasions do teachers contact you about _____?
9. Are you satisfied with your level of involvement in _____'s schooling? How do you help?
10. What advice and/or help have you been given regarding your child's progress at school?
11. How have you been involved in making decisions about _____'s education?
(placement and/or programmes, IEPs)
12. Is there anything else which you would like to say?

APPENDIX I**SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS**

1. What have you found to be the most effective way(s) of
 - a) approaching parents and
 - b) involving them in their child's education?
2. To what extent do you consider parents should be involved in making educational decisions about their child(ren)?
3. In what ways do you involve parents to discuss with them the progress of their child?
4. In what ways do the parents of the children you teach take an active part in their child's education?
5. In what ways do you involve parents when making decisions about educational programmes for their child?
6. For students with special needs, what do you consider to be the most beneficial aspects of special education? The least beneficial?
7. How do you view your relationship with parents?
8. In what way(s) do parents fulfil the expectations you have of them regarding the education of their child?
9. What are the main reasons you contact parents?
10. What are the major concerns/expectations of parents concerning the education of their children?
11. What are your views on inclusive education for students with special needs?
12. Is there anything else which you would like to say?

APPENDIX J

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

In the education of your child, how accurately do the following statements reflect your opinion? Please circle one number in each line – strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4)

Strongly disagree	Mildly disagree	Mildly agree	Strongly agree	
1	2	3	4	
1. I feel that I take an effective part in my child's education	1	2	3	4
2. I am fully involved in making decisions about educational programmes for my child.	1	2	3	4
3. I have been told about a variety of educational options and choices available for my child	1	2	3	4
4. I have made my decisions based on the information I have been given.	1	2	3	4
5. My expectations about my child's education have been met.	1	2	3	4
6. I have helped my child achieve success at school.	1	2	3	4
7. Special education provides the best educational opportunities available for my child.	1	2	3	4
8. I have a positive relationship with teachers.	1	2	3	4
9. Teachers communicate with me mainly when there are problems at school with my child.	1	2	3	4
10. I am satisfied with the level of involvement in my child's education.	1	2	3	4
11. I am actively involved in the IEP process.	1	2	3	4
12. The advice given by teachers has been helpful.	1	2	3	4

APPENDIX K

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PROFESSIONALS

For the students with whom you are involved, how accurately do the following statements reflect your opinion? Please circle one number in each line – strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4)

Strongly disagree	1	Mildly disagree	2	Mildly agree	3	Strongly agree	4
1. The parents of the students with whom I am involved take an active part in their child's education.	1		2		3		4
2. I fully involve parents when making decisions about educational options and choices available for their children.	1		2		3		4
3. I inform parents about a variety of educational options and choices available for their children.	1		2		3		4
4. Parents have made decisions based on the information I have given them.	1		2		3		4
5. I feel that I am aware of parental expectations regarding their child's education.	1		2		3		4
6. I feel that I meet parental expectations regarding their child's education.	1		2		3		4
7. Parental participation helps their child to achieve success at school.	1		2		3		4
8. For students with special needs, the advantages of special education outweigh the disadvantages.	1		2		3		4
9. I have a positive relationship with parents.	1		2		3		4
10. I communicate with parents mainly when there are problems at school with their child.	1		2		3		4
11. I am satisfied with the extent of parents' participation in their child's education.	1		2		3		4
12. I actively involve parents in meetings to discuss the progress of their child (e.g. IEPs, reports).	1		2		3		4
13. Parents fulfil the expectations I have of them regarding the education of their child.	1		2		3		4