



Hon Hekia Parata Education
Minister
Freepost Parliament,
Private Bag 18 888,
Parliament Buildings, Wellington
6160

20 December 2016

Dear Minister

Re: The role of Occupational Therapists in providing alternatives to seclusion rooms

Occupational Therapy New Zealand Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa (OTNZ-WNA) wish to formally state our objection to the use of seclusion rooms in schools as a way to manage children and young people demonstrating challenging behaviours. We congratulate you for your stance and advice to all schools that the practise of using seclusion rooms be immediately ceased. Seclusion of any person is a highly distressing experience, for both the person being secluded and for those carrying out the secluding. It is an extreme power imbalance that has very little, if any, therapeutic value.

Occupational therapy is underpinned by a value system that includes a belief in occupational justice. For children and young people this includes fair and equitable opportunities to participate in education alongside their peers. This is a right that is supported by the Education Act (1989), the Ministry of Education's policies of inclusive education, and the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28: Right to Education). For a significant number of students, exercising these rights requires specialised support and additional resources as well as a constant mindfulness of how the principles of partnership, protection and participation within Te Tiriti o Waitangi are being enacted.

We would suggest that the past use of seclusion rooms by schools has reflected an inadequate level of support and resourcing. Occupational therapists are able to provide sustainable, positive and long term alternatives to practices such as seclusion, particularly for students who learn in non traditional ways. Innovative approaches by occupational therapists include evidence - based strategies that incorporate a whole of life, occupation based approach. These strategies can include the incorporation of highly individualised sensory processing and sensory modulation assessments and therapeutic techniques and require the input and monitoring of an appropriately qualified professional.

At present there are approximately 135 occupational therapists who work in an education setting (Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand, 2016). This is clearly an insufficient number to provide the ongoing support required by the thousands of students who wish to participate in the education system in dignified, equitable and productive ways. Without a serious increase in specialist supports such as occupational therapy, it is difficult to see how many children and young people will ever participate in education in a way that reflects their rights.

For more information about occupational therapists / kaiwhakaora ngangahau please visit the association's website at otnz.co.nz

Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand. (2016). *Annual Report 2015-2016*. Wellington, New Zealand: Author Retrieved from <http://www.otboard.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/OTBAOG-16831-Annual-Report-2016-v7-WEB.pdf>.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signature of Karen Molyneux in black ink.

Karen Molyneux | President, Tangata Whenua

Handwritten signature of Harsh Vardhan in black ink.

Harsh Vardhan | President, Tangata Tiriti

Occupational Therapy New Zealand | Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa

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