



26 January 2017

The Chair
Education and Science Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

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Der Chair

Regarding the Education (Update) Amendment Bill (2016), Occupational Therapy New Zealand Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa (OTNZ-WNA) is grateful for this opportunity to make a submission and looks forward to being invited to make a face to face submission in due course.

Our submission supports and enhances the content of the Supplementary Order Paper dated Tuesday, 29 November 2016, moved by Hon Hekia Parata, in committee which outlines a range of proposed amendments to the Education (Update) amendment Bill specifically dealing with the subject of **seclusion** in schools and early childhood services.

About OTNZ-WNA

OTNZ is an association that provides membership to registered Occupational Therapists and promotes the profession of occupational therapy. 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.

Occupational Therapy New Zealand Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa (OTNZ WNA) has recently formally stated our objection to the use of seclusion rooms in schools as a way to manage children and young people demonstrating challenging behaviours. 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.

THE ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS IN PROVIDING ALTERNATIVES TO SECLUSION

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.

In relation to the supplementary order paper and the education (Update) amendment Bill, we urge our policy makers to be cognisant of not just identifying and providing legislation around behaviour management but making it mandatory that teachers have a level of education and awareness of the role that allied health professionals, such as Occupational Therapists, play in providing alternatives to seclusion.

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.

We believe that an investment in specialist resources and early intervention not only demonstrates support for the teaching community but yields enormous cost saving and improvement in terms of social and societal impact in the later years of the students/child's life.

Explicit guidelines in the Education (Update) Amendment Bill covering off and encouraging the use of professional assistance options such as Occupational Therapists for behavioural management is a logical and proactive way forwards.

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/OTB-AOG-16831-Annual-Report-2016-v7-WEB.pdf>.

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