

**Managing Transience:
Good Practice in
Primary Schools**

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Contents

Executive summary	1
Introduction	2
What is transience?	2
ERO's previous work on student transience	2
Recent New Zealand research on transience	3
Methodology	3
Evaluation framework	3
Schools in this study	4
Findings	4
School culture	5
Leadership	7
Relationships with families and whānau	9
Effective teaching	12
Full service social support	14
Conclusion	16
Next steps	17
Self Review: Questions for your school	18

Executive summary

This report discusses good practice for primary schools in supporting the achievement of transient students. It identifies the principles and practices of some schools that have been effective in supporting transient students and their families.

This report draws on the work of 11 primary schools across New Zealand. ERO found that good practice in supporting transient students and their families was the result of a school's overall culture, systems and processes, and was not limited to any targeted initiatives and support.

The environment in the schools in this study was welcoming and supportive of transient students. These schools had effective social support systems and built strong relationships with these students and their families. The schools were also effective in identifying and removing barriers to learning and in meeting the social and educational needs of transient students.

The work of these schools has helped transient students to succeed at school. In many cases, the social and educational support provided by the schools, often in combination with other government agencies and support services, has reduced family mobility.

The findings of this report have implications for all schools. Transient students may attend any New Zealand school. In a broader sense, the good practice described in this report gives schools examples of strategies for meeting the social and educational needs of all students.

Next steps

ERO recommends that boards of trustees use this report to review their own effectiveness at supporting the achievement of transient students.

In particular schools should review how they:

- work with the families of transient students;
- work with other schools and educational services in transitioning students;
- analyse barriers to achievement; and
- work with other government agencies to support the achievement of transient students.

Such a review should also provide useful information on how well the school meets the social and educational needs of all its students.

ERO also recommends that the Ministry of Education investigate developing a database of students who have had involvement with Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs), and MOE, Special Education (GSE) so that the information gathered about transient students can be readily accessible by schools across the country.

Introduction

This report discusses good practice for primary schools in supporting the achievement of transient students. It identifies the principles and practices of schools that have supported transient students effectively.

The evidence for this report was drawn from 11 schools across New Zealand. These schools represent a range of deciles and sizes although most were low decile urban schools that have experienced high levels of student mobility.

What is transience?

Schools and researchers define transience, or student mobility, in several different ways. The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) has defined a student as transient if they attend “two or more schools in a year”.¹ Some schools record a student as transient if they have had two or more schools over their primary school career, while others record a student as transient if they have had more than two schools in a year. It is worth noting that in extreme cases of transience, students can experience 10 or more schools over their primary school career.

Transience can be a barrier to achievement. In moving between schools, the learning patterns, programmes and social networks of students are disrupted. Students may experience difficulties settling in to new schools and developing positive work habits. Transient students can be more likely to have special educational and social needs when compared with other students.

Students may be transient for a variety of reasons. Housing problems and domestic changes, such as, partners separating, are common reasons for families to move and for students to attend a new school. Families also move for employment reasons, such as a change in job or to take up the opportunity of seasonal employment.

ERO’s previous work on student transience

ERO’s 1997 report *Students at Risk: Barriers to Learning*² discussed student transience and the affect it could have on student achievement. It also outlined the effective responses used by some schools with high levels of transience. The strategies used by these schools included:

- promoting the notion of the school as one family, with emphasis on *aroha*, *tautoko* and *whanaungatanga*;
- providing orientation programmes, buddy systems and peer support groups to help new students settle into the new school;
- supplying uniforms for transient students;
- supporting students’ families with links to local support services;

¹ This definition was used by the NZEI in a research report they commissioned in 1999. This definition is similar to others used in the international literature, see NZCER (2005) *Educational issues for communities affected by transience and residential mobility*. NZCER: Wellington.

² See www.ero.govt.nz under Media/Publications.

- building connections with students' families; and
- assessing each student's learning needs and providing for special learning and social needs, for example, remedial reading, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), counselling and anger management.

Recent New Zealand research on transience

Since 2000, New Zealand Principals Federation (NZPF), the Child Action Poverty Group (CPAG) and the New Zealand Council for Education Research (NZCER) have carried out research into transience.³

This research has identified high levels of transience, or student mobility, in New Zealand schools and made links between family poverty, transience and low levels of student achievement.

This research has also identified strategies for schools to support transient students, including:

- funding specialist lead teachers to develop individual programmes;
- employing a social worker or attendance officer;
- using a coordinator or case-manager for transient students, (such as the school's RTLB (Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour));
- developing an induction programme to introduce new students to the school's routines and culture; and
- providing new students with a trained buddy or mentor.

Methodology

Evaluation framework

ERO selected 11 primary schools that had previously demonstrated effective practice in supporting transient students. The key question used to evaluate each school's practice was:

How does this school support the achievement of transient students?

The evaluation considered a wide range of school policies and practices, including:

- school support systems;
- student induction processes;
- learning programmes;
- student assessment systems;

³ Murray Neighbour (2002). NZPF transient pupil survey 2001-2002. NZPF as downloaded from http://www.nzpf.ac.nz/resources/research/original_transience.htm.

Alan Johnson (2002). A Study of Student Transience in South Auckland Primary Schools. Child Poverty Action Group, Auckland.

Anna Lee (2000). Transient Children Perceptions of how often transient children come and go. NZEI, Wellington.

- school relationships with families;
- school relationships with external agencies; and
- systems for monitoring student progress.

The information for this report came from:

- written documents, such as ERO reports;
- school charters;
- school and classroom planning; and
- assessment data and school policies and procedures.

ERO also interviewed principals, teaching staff, support staff, school social workers and counsellors, parents and whānau members.

Schools in this study

The 11 schools selected for this study included a variety of roll sizes and deciles. The majority of schools were medium and large low decile urban schools (including schools from cities and provincial centres). These schools were located across New Zealand and have all experienced high levels of student mobility.

Two high decile rural schools were included in this sample. The two rural schools were selected because of their history of effectiveness in supporting the achievement of students whose families had moved into their area due to employment in the agricultural and horticultural sectors.

Findings

ERO found that good practice in support of transient students and their families was the result of the overall approach taken by schools. Good practice occurred across the culture, systems and processes of schools and was not limited to specific initiatives for transient students.

The findings of this report are structured under the following headings:

- school culture;
- leadership;
- relationships with families;
- effective teaching; and
- full service social support.

These five key aspects overlap and complement each other. They work together and should not be thought of as discrete elements of good practice. For instance, the development of a positive and welcoming school culture depends on the relationships developed at the school and the effective management of teaching and learning.

The following sections discuss how schools have developed good practice across these key aspects, and present the important elements of each aspect of good practice.

Specific examples of how transient students and their families have been supported are also given.

School culture

School culture reflects the values and underpins the actions of a school community. It helps to shape the way school personnel respond to challenges. School culture is central to good practice in supporting transient students.

School culture is difficult to quantify or measure and even to describe. Some school staff talk about the culture of their school in terms such as “It’s the way we do things at this school”.

This section describes key features of school culture at the schools in this study. In particular it discusses aspects of school culture that supported the achievement of transient students. Because of the overarching nature of school culture, each of the findings sections should be seen as aspects of school culture and part of the overall approach to good practice in the schools.

Specific qualities that demonstrate a positive school culture in support of transient students include:

- an emphasis on the pastoral care of transient students as the pathway to improved achievement;
- highly responsive systems and personnel, attuned to the social and educational needs of all students;
- thorough processes to identify and remove the barriers to achievement faced by students;
- priority placed on finding and developing the strengths of all students; and
- enthusiasm to make a difference for transient students.

Emphasis on pastoral care as a pathway to achievement

The schools emphasised the social support of transient students as a vital aspect in developing their achievement. In particular, school staff believed that students needed to feel settled and successful at school in order to learn.

The schools recognised that many students with high levels of mobility had significant social needs. These students could, if not adequately supported, become withdrawn or alienated. The schools therefore took effective steps to ensure that transient students built positive relationships with staff and students, and found ways to gain confidence and achieve at school.

These schools were found to have safe, friendly and welcoming environments with low levels of bullying and abuse.

“We care about kids as kids. We take them where they are. The kids are genuinely welcomed.”

Deputy principal’s comment.

The strategies used by schools to welcome and support transient students included the development of buddy systems, ensuring that new students had a desk and coat hanger available on arrival, building strong relationships with families and, where possible, matching the personalities and interests of students with particular teachers.

One school used an effective strategy to monitor, and improve its social environment. This school used a 'social census' tool to provide information on the social dynamic across the school. Once a term each student filled in a confidential worksheet detailing the positive and negative social aspects of their classroom environment. Teachers and senior staff then used this information to develop appropriate pastoral care strategies for all students, including transient students.

"I had an awesome day and was only told off once."

A grandmother quoting their grandchild's description of a day at school.

Responsiveness to social and educational needs

Schools in this study were pro-active in responding to the social and educational needs of transient students. The staff from these schools genuinely took responsibility for supporting students and improving their learning outcomes. Teachers did not accept low levels of achievement and worked, often through the school's well-developed systems for pastoral care and special education, to manage social and academic issues.

This level of responsiveness was an important factor in the very low level of suspensions and stand-downs found by ERO, and in the generally high levels of achievement found across each school.

"We have to find the hook to engage the child into learning."

Principal's comment.

In some schools, the support staff helped respond to social and educational needs. In many cases these staff were long-serving members of the community who could provide additional insight about family or community issues that may affect student learning and well-being.

In one school the level of responsiveness extended to the diligent 'tracking down' of a family that had moved. The family had given very little notice of their shift and the school had very little information about the destination school for the child. A classmate of the child indicated that the family had moved to another town. Although it took some time, a senior management team member contacted each of the schools in this town until the actual destination school had been located. At this point important information about the social and educational needs of the student were relayed to the new school to aid with the transition of the student.

Identifying and removing barriers to achievement

The approach taken by the schools to identify and remove the barriers to achievement for transient students was an important aspect of school culture. The schools took a thoughtful approach to barriers to achievement and attempted to understand the social context of issues such as truancy or poor behaviour.

Analysis of student behaviour to try to understand the reasons why students were not achieving went beyond any school-based systems of behaviour management. These schools did not assume that the students or their families were the cause of the barriers.

Other examples of where schools have thoughtfully identified and removed barriers to learning include the use of social workers and budget advisers to support families who were struggling with school-based expenses (such as school lunches), and the use of health nurses to check the hearing of students.

Finding and developing the strengths of all students

Schools demonstrating good practice built on the individual strengths of students and actively sought to develop the abilities or interests of all students, including transient students. Many schools had well-developed sports and cultural programmes that provided a range of contexts for student success.

Recognition and support for the strengths of transient students also helped include them in the life of the school. Transient students were more likely to participate in and enjoy school where they had rewarding activity as part of their school day. Such experience was especially pleasing for those families and students who had felt that the emphasis at previous schools had been weighted towards students conforming to the norms and rules of the school, rather than building on their particular strengths.

Making a difference for transient students

The schools placed a high priority on adding value to the education of transient students, rather than whether or not these students may have a limited stay at the school. Anecdotal evidence gathered by ERO suggests that some New Zealand schools are hesitant about using resources, such as special education funding, on transient students. The schools in this study, by contrast, wanted to make the most of the time available while the students were in their schools, and took responsibility for providing the academic support they required.

“We may only have these children for five weeks. So we have to hit the ground running to make five weeks of difference.”

Principal’s comment.

Leadership

Leadership across the school was an important aspect of a school’s effectiveness in supporting transient students. Although the leadership of the principal was an important part of a school’s overall effectiveness, the responsibility taken by other people across the school was important in supporting the culture of the school and the achievement of transient students.

This section describes four broad aspects of leadership linked to good practice in support of transient students. These are:

- principal leadership;
- teamwork;
- appointment of staff; and
- student leadership.

Principal leadership

Although the leadership of principals is an important factor in the effectiveness of all schools, ERO found that there were specific leadership roles undertaken by principals that directly supported the achievement and well-being of transient students.

Principals helped maintain a positive school culture through their leadership of staff. For example, principals acted as ethical role models to staff, by placing priority on meeting the needs of all students and ensuring that transient students received the support and resources they needed to achieve.

In the schools in this study, principals also played an important role in linking with families and communities. Principals usually conducted the induction interview with families and were closely connected to any ongoing inter-agency support (such as social workers, Child, Youth and Family (CYF) and Housing New Zealand (HNZ)).

Teamwork

In a related role, ERO found that the principal also managed a strong team approach within each school. The schools demonstrated high levels of cooperation between staff, regarding planning and assessment. A strongly collaborative and consistent approach was also used to support the behaviour of students. This approach was not limited to a consistent set of rules and consequences for students across the school, but included staff considering the range of social and educational factors likely to be affecting student achievement.

Where transient students arrived with a complex set of needs, teamwork was also important in ensuring that the right people and support were provided. This included using such staff as RTLBs, attendance officers, Reading Recovery and other special support teachers and staff, social workers and counsellors.

Schools in this study operated as part of networks in supporting and improving student achievement. Particular initiatives were taken by some schools to ensure that their network had the appropriate staff available to meet student needs. For example, one school gave a Samoan teacher a management unit to recognise her strengths in working with Samoan families. Other schools employed social workers, truancy officers and/or counsellors.

Appointment of staff

Many of these schools had very low levels of staff turnover, and high numbers of applicants for jobs. This meant that schools often had a high number of excellent candidates when they offered a position.

Principals were very careful to match the values of the school with the appointment of staff. Potential staff needed to show important leadership qualities, such as:

- a commitment to meeting the individual needs of students;
- an ability to build excellent relationships with students and their families;
- an ability to work collaboratively with other staff;
- to valuing the diverse backgrounds of students; and
- a thoughtful approach to identifying and removing barriers to achievement.

“We try hard to get people for people”.

Principal’s comment.

Student leadership

The leadership roles taken by students reinforced the positive culture of the schools. These leadership roles included formal roles, such as working on the school council, or less formal roles such as supporting and buddying new students.

On an informal level, principals and teachers reported that the students from their school enjoyed having new students and made them feel welcome.

“How do you get your students to be so kind?”

Letter to the principal from a new student.

In more formal settings, schools used particular student leadership roles to help with the induction of new students. For instance buddy systems involved using current students to help new students find toilets, play areas and so on. One school also used a classroom ‘welcome circle’, where the class sat in a circle and each student presented a mihi to new students.

Many schools also emphasised the importance of students taking responsibility for projects and duties in the school. Examples included students working as leaders in school cultural and sporting groups. One classroom teacher reported to ERO that each member of her class had a job such as emptying the recycling bin, or feeding pets, to encourage a sense of belonging and responsibility. While not directly related to the support of transient students, such activities added to the positive school culture and to the inclusion of new students.

Relationships with families and whānau

Schools that were effective in supporting the achievement of transient students made excellent connections with families and whānau. Where strong connections with families were present, family and whānau members were relaxed in their interactions with the principal and staff, even when they had experienced difficulties with the personnel from previous schools.

Strong connections with families and whānau helped to support the achievement of transient students by providing:

- high quality information about student needs;
- an excellent basis for resolving any future social and educational barriers to learning; and
- a sense of partnership between schools and parents.

This section describes five aspects of schools’ relationships with families and whānau found by ERO during this review. These are:

- the mechanisms for building relationships with families and whānau;
- the emphasis placed on the initial meetings with a family or whānau;
- the impact highly effective support can have on family mobility;
- the impact schools can have on a transient family’s experience of schooling; and

- the specific success of language immersion units in working with families and whānau.

The mechanisms for building relationships with transient families

Schools used a variety of formal and informal mechanisms to build relationships with families and whānau. Informal connections were made with families at school sports and cultural events and when parents collected children from school. Examples of other processes schools used to build relationships with families and whānau included:

- the principal phoning home after the first day and again after the first week, to catch up with families about how a new student has settled;
- three-way conferencing, ensuring that all parents attend regular goal-setting and review meetings, involving the teacher and their child;
- setting up times to meet with families over food (eg. family breakfasts) to discuss the progress of children informally and to develop relationships with families. (Variations of this approach included ‘Dads’ breakfasts’ where fathers brought their children to a school-wide breakfast with staff); and
- school social workers or counsellors informally meeting with new students and/or their families within the first week or two of starting.

Building relationships from the initial contact

Most schools emphasised the enrolment process as a key stage to build a relationship with families. Effective examples included principals spending an hour or more with transient and/or at-risk families at the initial interview stage. A key objective of these initial enrolment discussions was to ensure that the family felt welcome at the school. Some principals were careful to minimise the administration or paperwork of this stage to ensure that this process was informal and comfortable for families.

Some principals also preferred that as many family members as practicable attend the initial interview, so that they could welcome and build relationships with a student’s family. These principals had a box of toys available for younger members of the family.

Initial meetings also enabled principals to understand the family context. Despite the informal and welcoming nature of the initial meeting with the family, principals stated that their professional experience and careful questioning meant that they were able to gain a preliminary insight into why a family had moved to their school, the social and educational issues relevant to the new student or students and the strengths and abilities of new students.

“When you looked at me, you didn’t judge me.”

Part of a parent’s explanation to a principal as to why they chose a school for their child.

Reducing the mobility of a family

ERO found that, in many cases, the positive and supportive relationships between schools and families reduced the mobility of families and whānau.

For example, one school had developed an English language course, funded by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), for a group of South East Asian parents. Traditionally these parents had used the school and its provincial city as a gateway to larger New Zealand cities. The language course had helped provide opportunities for parents and had subsequently influenced their decision to stay and to keep their children at the school.

Other schools worked through social workers and other government agencies to identify and resolve issues associated with family violence, budget and housing.

“Even with the hardest core – the relationships built with the families is the key.”

Principal’s comment.

Transforming a family’s experience of schooling

Family members who talked with ERO, noted the positive impact of their current school in supporting their child’s achievement and approach to schooling. In some cases family members contrasted the efforts of their current school with their experiences at previous schools. Families characterised this difference as moving from ‘failure’ to ‘success’.

“Mum, Mum, Miss didn’t tell us off.”

Mother of a new student quoting her child after their first day at school.

ERO found that some parents and caregivers, who had previously experienced negative messages about their child’s abilities or behaviour, had to some extent accepted such an assessment and had lowered their expectations of that child. On receiving positive messages about their child from the new school, families reassessed their expectations of their child.

Whānau and Māori and Samoan language units

The Māori and Samoan language units in three of the schools were highly effective in making links with whānau. These units engaged parents even more than the mainstream school and this helped parents to value the work of the school.

The positive relationship between the staff of units and whānau contributed to lower levels of student turnover compared to the mainstream. In some cases, the low level of turnover was helped by the fact that parents had continued to send their children to the units even though their family had shifted to other communities.

The approaches used by these language units to help develop good relationships with parents included:

- undertaking enrolment meetings at a new child’s home;
- working with parents to build a joint family-school commitment to the values and curriculum of the unit (especially in relation to language acquisition);
- monthly whānau meetings with open discussion; and
- emphasising values such as whakawhanaungatanga.

Effective teaching

High quality teaching was evident in all schools in this study. This was confirmed by their ERO review reports and in their student achievement data. In addition, ERO also found a range of qualities that made the teaching in these schools effective for transient students, including:

- highly effective systems for identifying and addressing special needs;
- effective analysis and use of assessment and evaluation information; and
- long histories of effective teaching.

Identifying and addressing individual needs

In line with the emphasis the schools placed on meeting the special needs of students, ERO found that transient students were supported more effectively by systems that could identify and address their individual needs quickly. Mechanisms used by schools to collect information about the individual needs of students included:

- enrolment interview;
- contact with the previous school;
- initial classroom assessments;
- formal school-wide assessment processes; and
- student records.

Principals emphasised the importance of informal sources of information, as much as formal methods, in developing a profile of a new and/or transient student. Information from meeting families at the enrolment stage, and phone calls from previous principals, provided important contextual information about a student's strengths and weaknesses, including any special needs issues.

In one example a principal reported that a parent had believed that their child had had "a little difficulty" at their previous school. On calling the principal of the previous school it was found that the student was resourced under ORRS (Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes) and had a high level of special needs.

Many of the schools reported that they had become known in their area for being especially effective at meeting the needs of special needs students. Some of these schools noted that such a reputation had unintended consequences. For instance, schools reported that a few parents were reluctant to send their children to a school that they had been told catered best for low ability students. Alternatively, some of the parents were keen to send their children to a school with a good reputation for special needs support. In another case, the Ministry of Education paid for a child with special needs to be transported across to the other side of a provincial city (bypassing other schools), to a low decile school that was effective at addressing the special needs of students.

Assessment and evaluation processes

ERO found that most of the schools in this evaluation had well-developed classroom and school-wide assessment systems. These systems enabled the monitoring and support of each student and could identify and address the needs of students who were at risk of underachievement. Highly effective assessment systems also provided

school-wide analyses of groups of students across the school, including transient students.

The most effective assessment systems found by ERO tracked the value the school had added to the achievement of transient students. Although many schools could identify the impact of transient students on their school-wide achievement levels, it was more useful and positive when schools used assessment information to improve teaching and learning for these students.

In one example, assessment information was used at classroom level to design units of learning that detailed how the individual educational needs of each student would be met. This was done through a careful grouping of students, linked to their current level of learning.

Informal and formal assessment and evaluation processes

The schools also refrained from carrying out formal STAR (Supplementary Tests of Achievement in Reading) and asTTle (Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning) testing while a new or transient student was still settling into the school. Teachers and principals reported that more accurate assessment results were gained when a student's social or pastoral needs were met. It was preferable, at the initial stages, to use more informal assessment methods such as observation from a teacher-aide and the use of simple classroom tests. These less formal assessment methods provided sufficient information to group a new student appropriately in the class and begin a learning programme. From this basis, transient students undertook the same assessment processes as all other students.

One school also undertook a useful form of self-review with a group of their new and transient students at the end of the academic year. They used this cohort as a focus group to discuss the positive aspects they had experienced as new students and possible suggestions for future improvement. The perspective of these students provided a valuable insight into how the school was seen by students with a diverse range of needs.

RTL B assessment information

ERO found that the RTL Bs from different clusters had no formal mechanism for exchanging information about the educational and social needs of students. This meant that, where schools had engaged the services of an RTL B, assessment tasks were repeated for some students in each school they attended, and the information gathered in one school was often lost when that student moved.

Assessment information and the 'fresh start' approach to new students

Most teachers and principals referred to the need to provide a 'fresh start' for students who may have had less successful experiences at previous schools, because it allowed a student to leave behind issues and concerns from previous schools and make a positive start at a new school.

There were important differences in the ways different schools provided students with a fresh start. These differences were connected to the way information from a student's previous school was used by a new school. In some cases teachers did not want to be influenced by any negative messages about a child's learning and behaviour and would hesitate to examine a student's file. ERO also found cases

where teachers would consider only certain aspects of a student's record and ensure that they understood any major educational or social issues. Either of these fresh start approaches could have resulted in important information about a student's learning or behaviour being poorly understood while a student was settling into his or her new school.

The most effective fresh start approach was one in which principals and teachers were well informed about the social and educational strengths and weaknesses of students. Principals and teachers using an informed fresh start approach drew upon information that was useful in helping to meet the social and educational needs of new students (and the needs of their classmates) and actively worked towards ensuring that a positive start was made by a new student.

Potentially useful information about a student came from several sources, including the student's family, previous schools, and RTLB records. Importantly, this information was subject to the professional judgement of staff. In some cases, overly negative reports from previous schools were not regarded highly or else were considered in relation to the strategies a new school had used to induct a student.

Histories of effective teaching

Many of the schools had long histories of effective teaching. This is evidenced by their ERO review reports and statements made by principals, teachers and parents.

The long tenure of many staff and principals fostered the ongoing effectiveness of the schools. These schools were able to draw upon extensive experience of what has worked for their students over time. From the point of view of the school culture, there was a highly stable and effective platform for supporting the achievement of transient students.

Full service social support

In line with the support given to families and whānau, the schools drew on many social and educational services to provide for transient students and their families. These schools did not limit their role to educational matters, but saw their role in a wider community context. For instance social issues faced by some transient families, such as hunger, family violence, budgeting and housing issues were seen as barriers to achievement that could be addressed through facilitation provided by the school.

Through a coordinated and inter-disciplinary approach these schools drew on government initiatives such as Strengthening Families and Family Start, as well as the services of people and agencies to identify and address barriers to student achievement. These included:

- social workers;
- English language programmes for parents;
- counsellors;
- truancy officers;
- Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs) and Resource Teachers: Literacy (RT:Lits);
- Ministry of Education, Special Education (GSE);

- Housing New Zealand;
- Child, Youth and Family (CYF); and
- Child Adolescent and Family Mental Health Service (CAFS).

Examples of the full service support provided to the families of transient students included:

- hosting monthly meetings of key in-school staff and government agencies to discuss the needs of identified students;
- working with Housing New Zealand to find solutions for families being relocated;
- facilitating the availability of language translators when new immigrant families visit health professionals;
- using the school's social worker or counsellor to touch base with a new family within their first week; and
- having a health nurse regularly assess the health of identified students.

School networks of social support

Where schools had developed the most effective full service approaches, the social and educational support networks involved many different personnel, each undertaking their own specialised roles. Less effective outcomes for families and whānau were evident where, for example, truancy officers and RTLBs were carrying out work better suited to social workers.

The work of RTLBs was consistently a concern in this regard. While ERO found some cases of highly effective RTLB practice, there were other instances where RTLBs were following more eclectic, and less useful, work streams.

The social and educational support networks of schools also benefited from the local knowledge of teachers, support staff and the management teams of schools. This knowledge of families, community issues and the local representatives of government agencies made it much easier to access the support strategies for students and their families. Subsequently a more coordinated approach was able to develop, especially between the government agencies and schools.

While social workers helped facilitate these agency connections at some schools, in other schools, (often where there was not a school social worker - such as in the rural schools) senior management team members played a key role in this relationship. It is worth noting that the social services, which supported some transient students, and were not paid for by the school, were the result of good teamwork between schools and agencies.

The educational benefits of full service social support

There were educational benefits from a full service approach to social and educational barriers to learning. The full service approach resulted in fewer behaviour problems in the classroom and allowed teachers to concentrate on teaching and learning.

Full service social support did not release teachers from playing a role in the social support of students and families. Because of the day-to-day contact teachers had with

students, they continued to be responsible for identifying issues of concern and in initiating a support process involving personnel such as the principal, Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO), RTLBs and social workers.

Conclusion

Transient students can have more social and educational needs than other students. Schools that were effective at meeting the needs of transient students were found to have an overall approach made up of well-developed systems, positive relationships and a responsive school culture focused on taking responsibility and making a difference.

Many transient students and their families needed additional social support in order to raise their levels of achievement. This included the support given to transient students to feel welcome and succeed at school, as well as those systems to deal with the more complex social issues that often affected a student's family.

The level of social support provided by some of the schools in this evaluation had, in some cases, had a positive impact upon family mobility. While there may be many reasons for a family to move, the social support available through a school has enabled many parents and caregivers to work through issues and settle in an area.

The educational needs of transient students were met through several processes. Schools demonstrating good practice had well-developed systems for assessment and evaluation, contributing to high quality teaching and learning. These schools were focused on meeting the diverse needs of all students, regardless of how long they might stay at a school. Principals and staff took active responsibility for the education of all their students.

The findings of this study have implications for all schools. Transient students attend schools across New Zealand. All schools are therefore expected to provide effective support for the educational and social needs of transient students. Although not all schools can employ social workers, or develop the same level of full service social support to students and families as some of the schools in this report, schools can still improve outcomes for transient students by working effectively and positively in partnership with families and support agencies.

Next steps

ERO recommends that boards of trustees use this report to review their own effectiveness at supporting the achievement of transient students.

In particular schools should review how they:

- work with the families of transient students;
- work with other schools and educational services in transitioning students;
- analyse barriers to achievement; and
- work with other government agencies to support the achievement of transient students.

Schools can refer to the following section, *Self review: Questions for your school*, which sets out a series of questions to guide self-review processes in relation to transient students. Such a review should also provide useful information on how well the school meets the social and educational needs of all its students.

ERO also recommends that the Ministry of Education investigate developing a database of students who have had involvement with Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs), and MOE, Special Education (GSE) so that the information gathered about transient students can be readily accessible by schools across the country.

Self review: Questions for your school

These questions have been prepared to support your school's self review processes. They are intended to help you reflect upon the ways in which your school's culture and practices support the achievement of transient students, and to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

- How well does your school welcome and induct new students and their families?
 - What do transient students and their families report about their induction to your school?
 - What is the attitude of staff and students to new and/or transient students? (Not including new entrants)
- How well do transient students settle at your school in their the first week, and after their first month at your school?
 - What extra-curricular groups or activities are they engaged in? What friendships have they developed?
- What processes does your school use to identify the social and academic strengths of new and/or transient students?
 - How well has your school developed the social and academic strengths of new and/or transient students?
- How well does your school identify and address barriers to achievement for transient students?
 - To what extent does your school attempt to identify and address barriers to achievement that are linked to wider social and pastoral needs of some transient students (for instance hunger, family violence, housing problems)?
- How well does your school work with other government and/or social agencies to support the achievement of transient students?
- How well do your school's assessment processes identify the academic needs and development of transient students?
- How well does your school use information from other schools and educational services to support the achievement of transient students?
- To what extent does your school give useful social and academic information to the schools that receive your student leavers?
- Are there units or classes in your school, for example language immersion classes, that appear to have lower levels of transience than the rest of the school?
 - What are the reasons for these lower rates of transience?
 - Are there any practices modelled in these classes that can inform the way the rest of the school responds to transient students and their families?