

# better outcomes for children: a summary

*Whāia te ara mātauranga mōu ake*

*Seek that educational pathway that realises your destiny*

*Better Outcomes for Children* is an internal plan for the Ministry of Education. It is about raising achievement and improving services for the children<sup>1</sup> who are eligible for specialist services from GSE<sup>2</sup>.

Over the last two years the Ministry has been working on different streams of work to address issues raised by parents and educators in the extensive round of consultation called Local Service Profiling. *Better Outcomes for Children* is the result from one of those streams of work.

It describes important outcomes for children, ways to collect better information on these outcomes within the Ministry, and key actions to strengthen service provision in order to improve outcomes. The plan will guide the work of GSE staff over the next five years.

## Why an outcomes framework?

The outcomes framework focuses our attention on:

- what are the important outcomes for children
- what actually happens as a result of our services. (Has there been tangible benefit or harm to learning outcomes, or no real impact?)
- gathering better information and using it to develop our practices to improve outcomes for children.

The overall framework 'connects the dots' between what we want to contribute to in the very long term (eg, well-being, participation in the community and workforce), with what we need to aim for along the way to get there (eg, children are achieving in education, they are present, participating and learning). Having the big picture about the important outcomes helps us to make wise choices

about what we do and the most valuable information to collect nationally and locally.

## What outcomes?

In the long term we want all children to:

- enjoy a quality education that enables them to achieve and participate in the community and workforce (*Ministry of Education Statement of Intent 2006-2011*) and
- be able to say they live in "...a society that highly values our lives and enhances our full participation". (*New Zealand Disability Strategy vision*)

The Ministry of Education seeks to raise achievement and reduce disparity through the "vital 3" priorities:

- effective teaching for all children
- engaged families and communities
- quality providers.

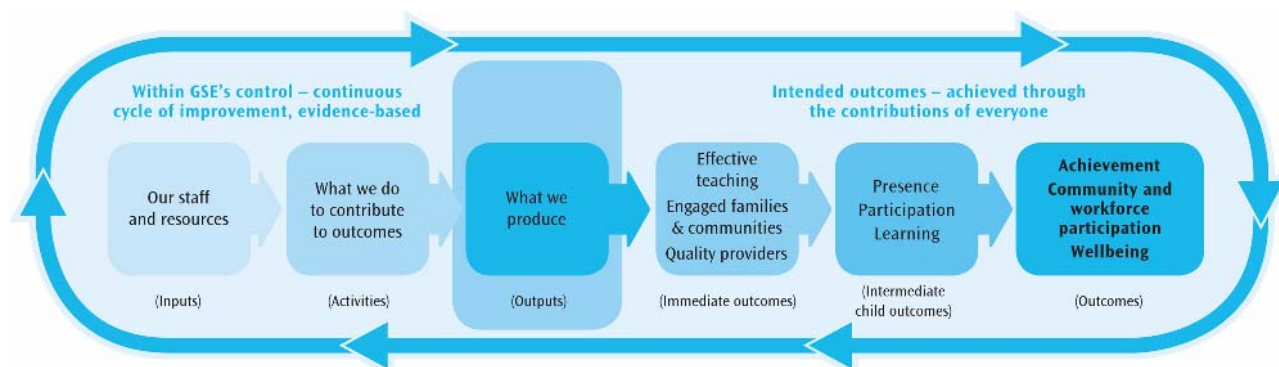
In addition to the 'vital 3' priorities, this plan puts the spotlight on three outcomes for children that contribute to achievement. They are **presence**, **participation** and **learning**. Children, their families and educators, as well as international and New Zealand experts, highlight the importance of these three outcomes for raising the achievement of the children for whom GSE provides specialist services.

The 'results chain'<sup>3</sup> shows how we link what we do (inputs, activities and outputs) with what actually happens for children (outcomes). While GSE staff work directly with children at times, our interventions are primarily indirect. We support teachers, early childhood services, schools and families to work together in ways that increase children's presence, participation and learning in education. This in turn contributes to achievement, community and workforce participation and well-being.

1 Throughout this document the term children is used generically to refer to infants, young children, children and young people in the early childhood and schooling sectors.

2 GSE is the part of the Ministry of Education that provides specialist education services for children with the highest levels of educational, social, behavioural, sensory, physical and communication needs. Services are provided in everyday settings by staff working collaboratively with many people and agencies. See the Ministry of Education Statement of Intent 2006-2011 for detail about the services provided.

## Results Chain



## How are the outcomes defined?

To gain useful information it is important we define and collect data about the outcomes in consistent ways. The outcome definitions<sup>4</sup> are:

### Achievement

Achievement is an overall outcome for all children and is about learning across the early childhood and school curricula. It includes what children know (knowledge), what they can do (skills), and who they are in relation to themselves and others (values and attitudes, including a strong sense of personal and cultural identity). It refers to both what children learn during, and have learned, by the end of their education.

Presence	Participation	Learning
<p>Presence in an education setting means the child is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>attending an early childhood service or school</li> <li>in a safe learning environment</li> <li>able to enrol in and access the same range of early childhood services or schools as other children living in the same location.</li> </ul>	<p>Participation within an education setting means the child is positively engaged in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interpersonal relationships</li> <li>social activities</li> <li>shared learning experiences</li> </ul> <p>and is increasingly self – determining.</p>	<p>The child is in an education setting and engaged in experiences that maximise learning. Learning experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are planned and also build on spontaneous opportunities</li> <li>involve effective assessment, implementation and review</li> <li>implement the curriculum and are evidence-based</li> <li>take account of the child's perspective.</li> </ul>

3 Key to Results Chain:

Inputs are the resources and staffing we have available to contribute to change or to outcomes for children. They are our 'ingredients' for creating change.

Activities are what we do to create changes. Our activities are usually focused on creating change in teachers, parents or providers to improve outcomes for children. Sometimes they may also be focused on creating change in children directly.

Outputs are the products of our activities. They occur at the completion of each activity, for example a behaviour service has been produced.

Outcomes are the changes in individuals or groups that our activities bring about or contribute to and may be short term, intermediate or long term. (Adapted from Plan:Net Limited)

4 More information on outcome definitions can be found in the full plan.

## How will we gather better information about these outcomes?

Knowing how well these outcomes are being achieved by the particular groups and individuals for whom we provide services is very important to service improvement.

We plan to gather better information by deciding what is most important to measure and by developing specific measures at a number of levels:

1. The data recorded in each child's GSE file will be improved.
2. Better information will be collected about GSE services.
3. The Ministry's national indicators for the whole education sector will be developed to include:
  - specific information on groups of children who receive additional support.
  - further indicators for presence, participation and learning.

# GSE actions

## What are our priorities?

Our priorities are:

- to systematically address recurring feedback themes. This includes the nationwide Local Service Profiling feedback about our service provision from children, their families and educators in 2004.
- to move to a stronger outcomes approach and evidence base. In common with other similar specialist service providers both within New Zealand and internationally, GSE needs better information about the effectiveness of programmes for improving learning outcomes. It is hoped that building our own evidence base will, in time, also be of value to other service providers and the wider education sector.
- to achieve greater integration of planning and service provision. The identified outcomes and indicators will be used to guide all parts of the Ministry when their work relates to children with additional support needs and will help us to work together within the Ministry. Being clear about our intended outcomes and indicators will also help us to work with

other agencies to achieve shared outcomes.

## How were the specific actions identified?

We analysed considerable information, including:

- the aspirations of families
- feedback about our services from parents and educators
- current research
- current specialist and management practices.

Most GSE funding is provided for service provision to support individuals (93%). Priority areas for change in this plan reflect this core work.

## How will we implement Better Outcomes for Children?

Implementing the plan will require significant shifts in beliefs and practices of staff. Considerable effort across the organisation will be needed over a number of years to deliver on the commitments in the whole plan.

The plan identifies actions relating to all children receiving GSE services. The implications of actions will also be considered through the "lens" of specific groups (eg, Māori, Pasifika, rural and migrant children).

Implementation will be led by GSE's National Management Team and will be reflected in all business planning. It will be integrated with 'business as usual', which will increasingly reflect managing for outcomes. All staff will be involved to varying degrees.

In addition, a project – separate from 'business as usual' – is planned. Over the next two years, the Outcomes, Evidence and Monitoring Project (OEM) will:

- further develop the outcomes, evidence and monitoring that underpins the plan
- provide advice to support effective implementation
- report on progress.

Specific milestones for 2006 are agreed and further milestones are being developed. The plan will be reviewed annually and adjusted in light of new information. There will be internal reporting six-monthly and external reporting annually.

# in five years time

## What do we aim to have in five years' time?

We aim to have evidence of increased national consistency and service effectiveness. Priorities are better outcomes for children, through quality services provided by skilled staff.

## Working for outcomes

We seek:

- improved outcomes: evidence of improved education outcomes for children and reduced disparity in access to our services
- indicators: agreed indicators consistently used for achievement and presence, and further developed for participation and learning. The indicators are relevant and useful to the education sector and other agencies
- a stronger evidence base: an expanded GSE evidence base, supported by effective information systems, informing both policy development and service provision
- a consistent outcomes focus: including all managers and staff frequently analysing and using outcomes information in their decision-making and actions
- credible and useful performance reporting: to inform GSE, parents, families, educators, government and others.

## Quality services

We seek:

- evidence of national consistency, effectiveness and efficiency for all core services. This includes client satisfaction about responsive ways of working
- equitable service coverage and effectiveness across all groups including ethnic, migrant and rural populations
- explicit prioritisation processes, procedures and tools in place. These are nationally consistent and effective, and address service coverage, workload management and resource management.

## Skilled staff

*"Knowing what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why"*

We seek:

- evidence-based management and specialist practice across all core services, with information gaps significantly reduced
- consistent, professional leadership
- access to professional development that supports ongoing professional competency
- significant reduction in shortages of skilled, qualified staff to deliver all core services.