

# SCHOOL EXPERIENCE FOR PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS ~ BY MOTHERS HELPERS

## SURVEY RESULTS APRIL 2016

A survey was taken of 100 parents whose children were of school age, had participated in a mainstream school within the last five years and had special needs. The tool used was Survey Monkey and the platform was an anonymous online survey which was distributed via social media. Responses were collected from the 4<sup>th</sup> March 2016 till the 17<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

### Demographics

43% of respondents' children went to school in Auckland

10% in the Waikato

8% in the Bay of Plenty

8% in Christchurch

7% in Dunedin

5% in Northland

5% in Wellington

4% in Southland

3% in the Central North Island

2% in Taranaki

2% in the Manawatu

1% on the West Coast

1% in Nelson-Marlborough

1% in Hawkes Bay

The average age of respondents' children was 8.6 yrs old

65% of respondents' children had ADHD

40% of respondents' children had Autism Spectrum Disorder

19% had an Anxiety Disorder

15% had Oppositional Defiance Disorder

10% had Auditory Processing Disorder

8% had Dyslexia

6% had Depression

4% had Intellectual Disability

3% had Conduct Disorder

3% were Hearing Impaired

3% had Dyspraxia

1% had Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

There were a range of other special needs for 1 or 2 respondents including syndromes (eg. Downs), seizure disorder, global developmental delay, impulse disorder, "gifted", epilepsy, obsessive compulsive disorder, ataxia and cerebral palsy

### **School Experience**

Overall, just 29% of parents said that their child with special needs was very well supported in school. Of the remaining 71%, 37% said their child's support from the school was average and 35% said they were not at all well supported.

Of the children that had attended more than one school, 60% of parents said they were not at all well supported at their previous school and a further 32% said that support was average at their previous school. For those currently in a mainstream school, just 46% said their child was very well supported at that school with the remainder describing support as "average" or "not well supported."

The top five reasons given for having a very supportive school experience were:

1. The principal/teachers have listened to me (82%)
2. They genuinely show they care about my child (83%)
3. They support me as a parent (64%)
4. The school is actively working with me to find the best solutions for my child (57%)
5. The school has good knowledge/training in special needs/education (52%)

A further 39% said they found the school supportive in that they had a supportive teacher aide for their child.

The top five reasons given for having an unsupportive school experience were:

1. My child did not have an Individualised Education Plan or it wasn't useful or reviewed regularly (46%)
2. The school did not have good knowledge/training in special needs education (41%)
3. The school did not work with me to get the best solutions for my child (37%)
4. The school did not show they genuinely cared about my child (34%)
5. The principal/teachers did not listen to me (34%)

A further 33% said that their child needed a teacher aide but their child was not funded for one and 34 % said the RTLB/SENCO did not get involved at all or there was a significant delay in involvement.

As a result of those that felt their child was very well supported in either their previous or current school, the following outcomes were reported:

- My child's academic learning has improved (71%)
- My child enjoys school more (63%)
- As a parent my stress levels have reduced (64%)
- My child is more positive about going to school (60%)
- My child's behavior has improved (55%)
- My child's anxiety has improved (49%)
- Behaviour at home has improved (39%)
- There's been an increase in children wanting to play with my child (36%)

As a result of those that felt their child was inadequately supported in either their previous or current school, the following outcomes were reported:

- It increased my stress levels as a parent (74%)
- My child did not enjoy going to school (64%)
- My child's academic learning deteriorated (60%)
- My child became unhappy 60%
- My child's behavior became worse (57%)
- My child's anxiety increased (53%)
- Behaviour at home became worse (53%)
- Children began to withdraw from my child (didn't want to play with my child) (49%)
- My child was reluctant/didn't want to go to school (48%)
- My child was suspended from school (23%)
- My child was excluded (expelled) from school (10%)
- I removed my child from the school (26%)

- I decided to homeschool my child (10%)
- I decided to take my child to a school exclusively for children with special needs (7%)

### **Recommendations**

Based on the feedback given by parents and analysis of results, Mothers Helpers would like to make the following recommendations:

That schools can increase the experience of a parent's support simply by:

- Principals and teachers actively listening to what parents have to say
- Showing an attitude of genuinely caring about their child
- Showing/being supportive towards the parent who is under a lot of stress
- Actively trying to find the best solutions for their child in partnership with parents
- Putting in place SENCO and RTLB support as soon as possible with an Individualised Education Plan put in place that is relevant, useful and reviewed regularly

That funding by the Ministry of Education should be prioritised in:

- First and foremost: providing training in special needs education for school staff including teachers, principals, teacher aides, SENCO and RTLB.
- Providing supportive teacher aides to children with special needs in the school setting