

Evaluation of the Resource Teacher:  
Learning and Behaviour Service

June 2004



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Ko te Tamaiti te P take  
o te Kaupapa  
The Child — the Heart  
of the Matter



## The Education Review Office

*High quality evaluation contributing to high quality education.*

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Chief Review Officer

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## Executive summary

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB)<sup>1</sup> service.

This project evaluated:

- the extent to which the RTLB service had impacted on student achievement;<sup>2</sup>
- the extent to which the RTLB service had impacted on Māori student achievement;
- how effectively the different aspects of the practice of RTLB had improved student achievement;
- how effectively RTLB had added to and complemented the work of others to improve student achievement;
- how effectively RTLB cluster resources had been used to improve student achievement; and
- how effectively the governance and management processes of RTLB clusters had supported and facilitated student achievement.

The evaluation is based on information from 20 percent of all RTLB clusters. Data collection included interviews with RTLB; observations of their work; interviews with school management and cluster committees; interviews with teachers, parents and students; and reviewing policy and programme documentation. This evaluation was carried out between November 2003 and June 2004.

ERO found that the RTLB service had a variable impact on student achievement across the different clusters evaluated and that there was a wide distribution of performance and effectiveness across all areas evaluated, ranging from highly effective to ineffective. While over half of the clusters (62.5 percent) provided valid evidence that their service had improved student achievement, only a small group (20 percent) had substantial evidence of these improvements. Of concern are the clusters that could provide little or no evidence of improvements to student achievement (37.5 percent).

There was considerably less evidence that the RTLB service had improved Māori student achievement when compared with overall student achievement. Only 20 percent of clusters could provide evidence that their service had improved Māori student achievement, while the remaining clusters (80 percent) could provide little or no evidence of improved Māori achievement. This is concerning given that Māori students make up 33 percent of students receiving RTLB services.

Working with teachers to assist them to meet the needs of diverse learners to raise student achievement is a key national education priority. The wide distribution of effectiveness and performance shows that the RTLB service is not consistently improving student achievement, especially for Māori students.

The following actions are recommended to assist the development and improvement of the RTLB service.

1 All references made in this document to 'resource teachers' refer only to resource teachers of learning and behaviour.

2 For the purposes of this evaluation the term 'student achievement' is inclusive of positive social outcomes for students.

To increase the quality and consistency of RTLB practice:

- build the capacity of RTLB to review the effectiveness of their practice;
- provide RTLB with supervision from suitably qualified and experienced practitioners;
- provide employing principals with support and guidance on how to effectively appraise RTLB; and
- review the current processes for appointing, training, supervising and appraising RTLB.

To increase the effectiveness of the RTLB service:

- introduce regular external review that has a focus on student achievement for all RTLB clusters;
- gazette a requirement for clusters to adhere to *RTLB Clusters: Effective Governance, Management & Practice*, the official Ministry of Education guidelines;
- include the requirement for clusters to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their cluster service (in the gazetted statement); and
- provide management committees with support and guidance to assist them to collect information on the overall effectiveness of their cluster service.

To increase the effectiveness of the RTLB service for Māori students:

- include the requirement for clusters to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their cluster service for Māori students (in the gazetted statement);
- provide management committees with support and guidance to assist them to collect information on the overall effectiveness of their cluster service for Māori students; and
- build the capacity of RTLB to work effectively with Māori students.

ERO will write a follow-up report on good RTLB practice, based on examples provided by the effective RTLB clusters evaluated.



## 1 Introduction

Many children and young people will need some form of additional assistance to participate in education during their time at school. For some, the support will be for a limited time, while others will need sustained help. The Government supports children and young people in many different ways. Two national initiatives that support children and young people in schools are the Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) and the Resource Teacher: Literacy (RT:Lit) initiatives.

While the two resource teacher initiatives originate from different parts of the education system (RTLB from *Special Education 2000* and RT:Lit from the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*), they share many features.

Both services:

- target specific groups of children and young people who need additional support for a limited period of time to participate in education;
- are broadly focused on reducing inequalities in education;
- work collaboratively with teachers to assist them to work more effectively with students who need extra support;
- have provided training to teachers appointed as resource teachers to prepare them to work as specialist teachers;
- add to and complement other roles, including those of classroom teachers, parents and whānau and, in some cases, school advisers and Group Special Education staff; and
- are governed and managed through geographically defined clusters of schools.

There are also differences between the services. The RT:Lit service targets students at risk of not acquiring literacy, while the RTLB service caters for students with moderate education needs, covering a wider range of needs and issues. RTLB clusters are considerably smaller than RT:Lit clusters, and there are usually more RTLB in each cluster than in each RT:Lit cluster.

The RTLB service is allocated \$57.2 million per annum and the RT:Lit \$9 million per annum. Together these services represent a significant government investment in student achievement.

ERO evaluated 20 percent of all RTLB clusters and 24 percent of all RT:Lit clusters between February 2004 and May 2004. This report presents the findings for the RTLB service.

### 1.1 The RTLB service

The Government's special education policy, *Special Education 2000* (SE 2000), aims to improve learning outcomes for all children and young people with special education needs at their school, early childhood service, or wherever they are educated.

SE 2000 provides a framework for the delivery of special education resources and services. A major part of this provision is the RTLB initiative, which was fully established in schools in 1999. The primary role of the RTLB is to work with teachers to help support students with moderate learning and/or behaviour difficulties.

The RTLB positions have replaced other specialist teacher positions. For example, 30 percent of RTLB were automatically appointed into the position having previously been employed as Resource Teachers of Special Needs (RSN), Guidance Learning Unit teachers (GLU) or unit-based special education teachers. Currently 762 RTLB work nationally in 190 geographical clusters of schools. Forty five of these positions are designated as RTLB Māori.

The role of the RTLB Māori is to provide a service that is culturally responsive to the needs of Māori students with moderate learning and behaviour needs. RTLB Māori have basically the same governance and management structures as other RTLB, but work across more than one geographical cluster of schools. Regular RTLB are allocated to only one cluster.

Māori students are over-represented on the RTLB roll. They constitute 20 percent of school students but make up approximately a third of all RTLB clients.<sup>3</sup> RTLB Māori are not expected to take responsibility for all Māori student referrals in their respective cluster areas. The Ministry of Education expects that all RTLB will assist Māori students with moderate learning and/or behavioural needs.<sup>4</sup>

ERO completed an evaluation of the RTLB Māori service and its governance and management structures in 2003.<sup>5</sup> This evaluation identified that greater clarity and direction is needed surrounding the purpose, role and scope of the RTLB Māori service. The findings suggested that the RTLB Māori resource should be explicitly targeted to educational settings that require, in addition to the general RTLB competencies, cultural knowledge and proficiency in te reo Māori.

RTLB are required to undertake a part-time, two-year training programme, which was designed by a consortium of personnel from Auckland, Waikato and Victoria Universities. The programme consists of four papers – *Te Kuhuna (Students in Contexts)*, *Te Putanga (Classroom Contexts)*, *Te Raranga (School and Community Contexts)* and *Te Huarahi (Professional Practice Portfolio)* – and integrates a Māori dimension throughout all papers.

While most RTLB are highly experienced teachers, with 70 percent having taught more than 10 years, they are generally not highly academically qualified, with fewer than 30 percent having completed Bachelors level academic qualifications. The first groups of RTLB completed their training in 2000, and most RTLB received their training by the end of 2001. From 1998–2003, 47 RTLB with high qualifications have been made exempt from the training and a further 21 of the original 750 were exempted for special reasons (health and age). Very few newly appointed RTLB have sought exemption from the training. RTLB who have not passed the four papers continue to work as RTLB but are required to complete the training at their own expense.

3 Ministry of Education. (2002). *Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour – Data on the schools and the students they worked with in 2001 – Annual Report 2001*.

4 Ministry of Education. (2001). *Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) Clusters – Effective Governance, Management and Practice*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

5 Education Review Office. (2003). *Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour Māori*, www.ero.govt.nz.



The Ministry of Education has distributed guidelines on the RTLB service to schools.<sup>6</sup> According to these guidelines, five key themes are central to the RTLB service.

They are:

- a focus on an inclusive teaching philosophy which recognises and values diverse strengths irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, ability/disability;
- an educational/ecological approach to assessment and intervention, incorporating data-based decision-making strategies;
- a collaborative model of problem-solving in service provision;
- the application of cultural values and promotion of preferred learning and teaching practices from within a Māori world view; and
- the reflection on and evaluation of professional practice.

There have been three previous studies of the RTLB service. In 2000, Massey University conducted a study of the service,<sup>7</sup> as part of the wider Massey review of SE 2000. This study used stakeholder satisfaction levels as an indicator of service quality and achievement of outcomes for students. Researchers used questionnaires and interviews to collect the views of principals, RTLB, teachers and a small group of parents whose children had received some form of RTLB support. This study concluded that the quality of the RTLB service had improved between 1999 and 2000 and that the RTLB service was working well for Māori students. This research noted four key issues.

These were:

- the role differences between RTLB who work between primary and secondary settings;
- the systems difficulties that many RTLB experience at a governance and management level;
- the high level of inappropriate referrals of students with high needs; and
- the difficulties some RTLB experience working alongside teachers who are resistant to accepting RTLB expertise.

Wylie (2000)<sup>8</sup> also reported on the effectiveness of the RTLB service as part of the ministerial review of SE 2000. These findings were based on the results of the above study and on data gathered through meetings and interviews with RTLB, schools and some parents.

Wylie (2000) concluded that the service was regarded more positively than previously and noted the following issues:

- some clusters are not workable;
- many secondary schools would prefer on-site support rather than itinerant support of RTLB;
- Māori students are over-represented as clients on RTLB rolls but few RTLB are Māori; and
- the credibility and reputation of RTLB varies, which may impact on how receptive teachers are to the service.

6 Ministry of Education. (2001). *Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) Clusters – Effective Governance, Management and Practice*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

7 Massey University. (2000). *The Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour Initiative*. Report to the Ministry of Education.

8 Wylie, C. (2001). *Picking up the Pieces: Review of Special Education 2000*.

ERO conducted a pilot study of six RTLB clusters in 2002.<sup>9</sup> This evaluation found effective and less effective characteristics in all six clusters. Some of the major findings from this evaluation were that:

- the operation and management of the RTLB clusters reviewed in the pilot evaluation were generally in accordance with the Ministry of Education's expectations;
- cluster management sub-committees and RTLB had a good understanding of their respective roles. However, client schools were unsure of the management sub-committee's role;
- effective RTLB used an inclusive and collaborative approach;
- school clusters were satisfied with the RTLB service they received;
- employing boards and cluster management sub-committees lacked knowledge and understanding of the Memorandum of Agreement signed with the Ministry of Education and all schools within the cluster;
- none of the clusters were able to accurately report on the effectiveness of the total RTLB service;
- none of the clusters had signed job descriptions and appraisal processes that were consistent with the gazetted requirements; and
- some clusters had no access to RTLB (Māori) for kura kaupapa Māori, Māori language immersion classes and schools with high Māori populations.

9 Refer: Education Review Office. (2002). *Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) Pilot Reviews*, [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz)

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Sample

This evaluation sampled 20 percent of RTLB (that is, 40 out of 190 RTLB clusters).

ERO selected the sample to reflect, where possible, the national characteristics of the population. Individual RTLB Māori were considered as part of clusters but were not identified as a separate group in the report.

The cluster sample was selected according to the following characteristics:

- *Size* – most clusters (81 percent) have between one and five RTLB. However, 13 percent have between six and nine RTLB and six percent have 10 or more.
- *Geographical spread* – there is an even distribution across the country from north to south and across the four Ministry of Education areas.
- *Locality* – just under half of all clusters (93 out of 190) are urban, while of the remainder, almost half (47) are rural, the other 50 being mixed.

Overall, the selected cluster sample was representative of these characteristics. (Refer to Appendix 2 for a comparison between the RTLB sample and population characteristics.) At 15 percent, the sample slightly under-represented clusters located in a ‘mixed’ (rural/urban) locality. Given that the difference was evenly distributed between urban and rural clusters, ERO is confident that the sample has not been biased by this under-representation.

### 2.2 Data collection

A group of review officers were trained over two days to undertake this evaluation in January 2004. The training programme was developed by ERO and involved input from the RTLB National Association and the Ministry of Education.

ERO collected data from November to June 2004. Cluster reviews took place outside of the regular review cycle. ERO initially contacted the fund-holder school of each cluster to set up the review.

ERO developed a set of indicators for each evaluation question to provide an explicit basis for evaluative judgements. This approach was piloted in two RTLB clusters during Term 4 of 2003. The results from piloting provided assurance that the questions and indicators were fit for their intended purpose and that they provided a valid basis for reviewer judgements.

Data collection during cluster review included reviewing the school’s documentation and interviewing the following people:

- students;
- parents;
- resource teachers;
- classroom teachers;
- employing principals;
- recipient principals;
- members of the employing school board of trustees; and
- cluster committees/management sub-committees.

Review officers collected data in relation to the indicators that underpinned the evaluation questions. This provided review officers with a consistent process for making evidential judgements. All judgements were triangulated – that is, they each had at least three forms of evidence to support them.

### 2.3 Reliability

Reliability checks were completed by reviewing the raw data against the evidential judgements for all cluster reviews. Particular focus was given to checking the noted sources of evidence that supported review officers' judgements against the raw data. ERO found that all of the evidential judgements were supported by the raw data on file.

### 2.4 Evaluation framework

ERO's school reviews focus on student achievement and how the school programmes and processes contribute to this achievement.<sup>10</sup> All reviews also have a strong improvement focus and provide information on how programmes and processes can be improved to support increased levels of student achievement.

This evaluation has been undertaken with the same focus on student achievement and on how the RTLB service and cluster processes can be improved to support student achievement. The following set of six evaluation questions, focusing on student outcomes, provide the framework for this evaluation.

- *To what extent has the RTLB service improved student achievement in this cluster?*
- *To what extent has the RTLB service improved Māori student achievement in this cluster?*
- *How effectively have the different aspects of RTLB practice supported and facilitated student achievement?*
- *How effectively have RTLB added to and complemented the work of others to improve student achievement?*
- *How effectively have RTLB cluster resources been used to improve student achievement?*
- *How effectively have the governance and management practices of RTLB clusters supported and facilitated student achievement?*

The first two questions focus on student outcomes and provide the most compelling information about the impact that these initiatives are having on student achievement.

Although outcome indicators for student achievement are the most powerful indicators of effectiveness, they cannot be considered in isolation from other areas that relate to the process of improving student outcomes. The remaining four questions cover these areas, and relate to practices/activities that impact on the efficacy of these initiatives.

<sup>10</sup> Refer: Education Review Office. (2003). *Evaluation Indicators for Education Reviews in Schools*, [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz).

### 3 Findings

The findings for each of the six evaluation questions are presented below. Evaluative comments from review officers (in *italic*) are included to provide further information on each question. There is also a section on the overall findings in relation to how the variables (quality of practice, cluster relationships, usage of resource and governance and management practices) impact on student achievement and Māori student achievement.

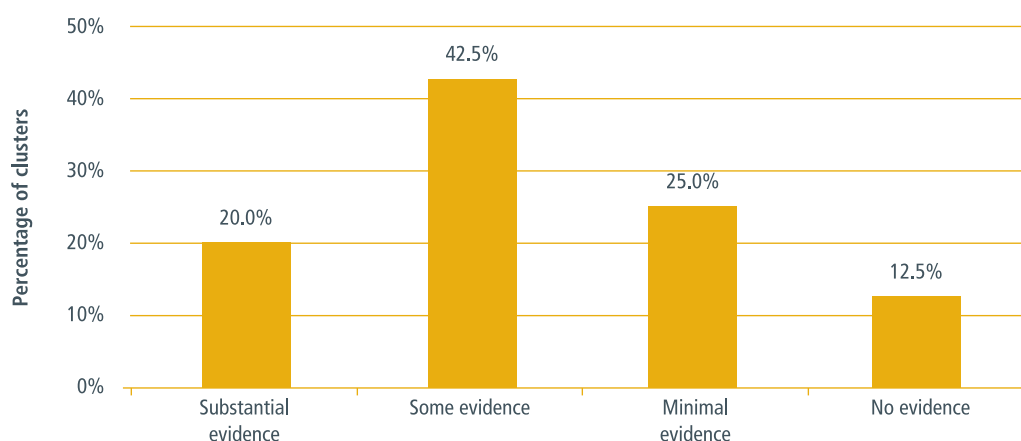
#### 3.1 Student achievement

The Government's special education policy aims to improve learning outcomes for all children and young people with special education needs at their local school, early childhood service, or wherever they are educated.

ERO evaluated the extent to which the RTLB service had improved student achievement according to the level of consistent evidence in each cluster, such as:

- pre and post assessment data on a case-by-case basis that demonstrated improvements in learning for students;
- cluster data that showed evidence of overall learning improvements across RTLB caseloads;
- student work samples that showed improvements in the quality of work;
- satisfaction survey results that indicated high satisfaction with the RTLB service;
- student feedback that indicated they believed that their learning and behaviour had improved;
- teacher feedback that indicated they believed students' learning and behaviour had improved based on their assessment data; and
- parent feedback that indicated they believed their child's learning and behaviour had improved.

Figure 1 – Student achievement



There is a wide variation in the extent to which RTLB clusters could provide evidence that the service had improved student achievement. Eight clusters (20 percent) provided substantial evidence of improved student achievement in their clusters, while five clusters (12.5 percent) could not provide any evidence of this. The remaining clusters could either provide some evidence of improvements (17 clusters) or minimal evidence that their RTLB service has made a difference to student achievement (10 clusters).

#### *Effective practice*

Ten RTLB clusters (25 percent) provided evidence of improvements for students on a case-by-case basis through valid reliable pre and post data.

*The RTLB maintain extensive files, case notes and assessment details to show that learning is improving during the intervention. Pre and post data takes a variety of forms ranging from standardised tests of literacy skills to observations in the classroom and other information.*

Fewer clusters (seven) then aggregated this data to review the overall learning improvements across individual RTLB caseloads.

*Principals' and RTLB data shows that improved learning outcomes are almost universal. If learning has not improved or is not likely to be improved a further referral is made to source another targeted intervention.*

ERO found five clusters (12.5 percent) where parents, students and teachers reported that the RTLB service had led to improvements in learning and behaviour for students.

*The students were very positive concerning the work of the RTLB especially concerning improvement in extreme behaviour which has meant that they are not only still at school but have a new attitude to learning.*

*Students commented on their improved language skills and that the RTLB had given their teacher some ideas.*

*The parents interviewed were overwhelmingly in agreement that there had been positive changes in learning, behaviour and/or attitude to learning.*

*All of the interviewees expressed unqualified support for the impact on learning of the RTLB interventions. Professionalism, knowledge, sensitivity and approachability were often mentioned.*

#### *Less effective practice*

Eight clusters (20 percent) did not consistently collect pre and post data to demonstrate that the RTLB interventions had made any positive difference for students. Another seven clusters (17.5 percent) could only provide minimal evidence.

*A very limited amount of hard data had been gathered to show the difference that had been made to student learning and behaviour as a result of the intervention.*



Half of the clusters (20) could not provide any evidence on a cluster level of improvements to student achievement through the RTLB service. Many of these clusters had not considered aggregating student achievement data on a cluster level to analyse the effectiveness of the service or of individual RTLB.

*Evidence is largely individual. There is no expectation or system for cluster-wide analysis of data. Surveys do not incorporate questions related to improved learning.*

*There is little collation or analysis of data within or across caseloads. There is no significant reporting to the cluster regarding the overall impact of interventions on students, teachers and parents.*

*There is no data available to show overall learning improvements across any of the RTLB caseloads.*

Where clusters had completed satisfaction surveys, these largely focussed on how satisfied schools were with the service and tended to exclude the views of parents and students.

*Questionnaires don't focus on student achievement and are only sent to schools where students have been accepted onto the RTLB roll. Questions were framed to evoke positive answers.*

*There is no cluster provision for obtaining such information from parents on an ongoing basis.*

*There is limited cluster surveying. Those undertaken are not analysed.*

Many students were not aware that they had been the focus of an RTLB intervention and could not describe any improvements.

*Very few students could identify the RTLB, the intervention, or the difference it had made.*

*No students interviewed were able to articulate any benefits from RTLB intervention.*

### 3.2 Māori student achievement

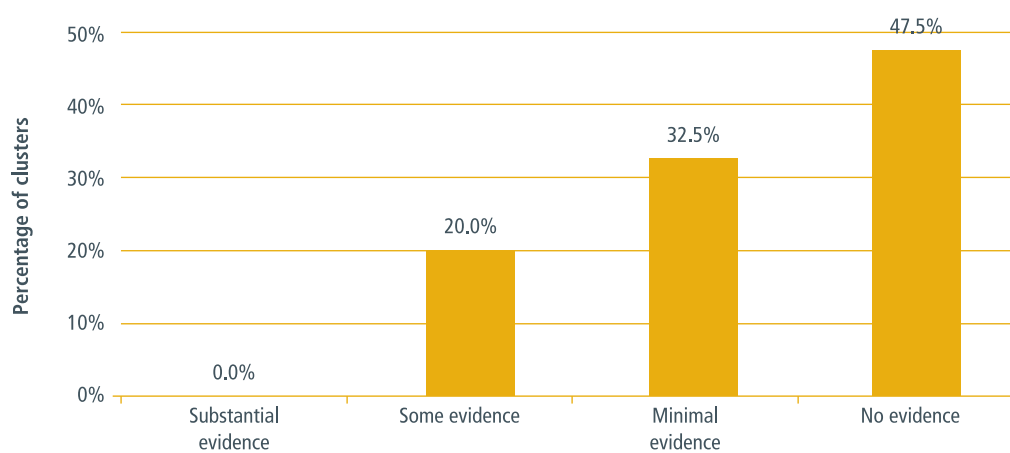
Lifting Māori student achievement in schools is a key priority for the education sector. There is considerable evidence that Māori students are not achieving as well academically as non-Māori.

ERO evaluated the extent to which the RTLB service had improved Māori student achievement according to the level of consistent evidence in each cluster, such as:

- pre and post assessment data on a case-by-case basis that demonstrated improvements in learning for Māori students;
- cluster data that showed evidence of overall learning improvements for Māori students across RTLB caseloads;
- Māori student work samples that showed improvements in the quality of work;
- satisfaction survey results of people connected to Māori students that indicated high satisfaction with the RTLB service;

- Māori student feedback that indicated that they believed their learning and behaviour had improved;
- teacher feedback that indicated that they believed Māori students' learning and behaviour had improved based on their assessment data; and
- feedback from parents of Māori students that indicated they believed that their child's learning and behaviour had improved.

Figure 2 – Māori student achievement



None of the 40 clusters could provide substantial evidence that the RTLB service had improved Māori student achievement. Eight clusters (20 percent) provided some evidence that their service had resulted in improvements in Māori student achievement. Another 13 clusters (32.5 percent) provided minimal evidence, while nearly half (47.5 percent) could not provide any evidence at all.

#### *Effective practice for Māori student achievement*

Those eight clusters that could provide some evidence of improvement had collected pre and post data on a case by case basis to demonstrate improvements in learning for Māori students. Two of these clusters had analysed the overall learning improvements for Māori students across RTLB caseloads, which showed that the RTLB service had improved Māori student achievement.

#### *Less effective practice for Māori student achievement*

Most RTLB clusters could not adequately respond to this question because they had not reviewed the effectiveness of the service for Māori students as individuals or systemically as a group.

*There is no identification of the ethnicity of students in reports to the school and no aggregation of data based on ethnicity.*

*No differentiation – only anecdotal perception.*

Most clusters could not provide any evidence that those connected to Māori students who had received RTLB service were satisfied with the outcome.

*No differentiation in surveys on the basis of ethnicity (surveys are generic in nature rather than specific to particular students).*

*There is no identification of whether the student is Māori on the official cluster evaluation form.*

There were instances of ineffective RTLB practice with Māori students, which may have resulted in negative educational outcomes for these students.

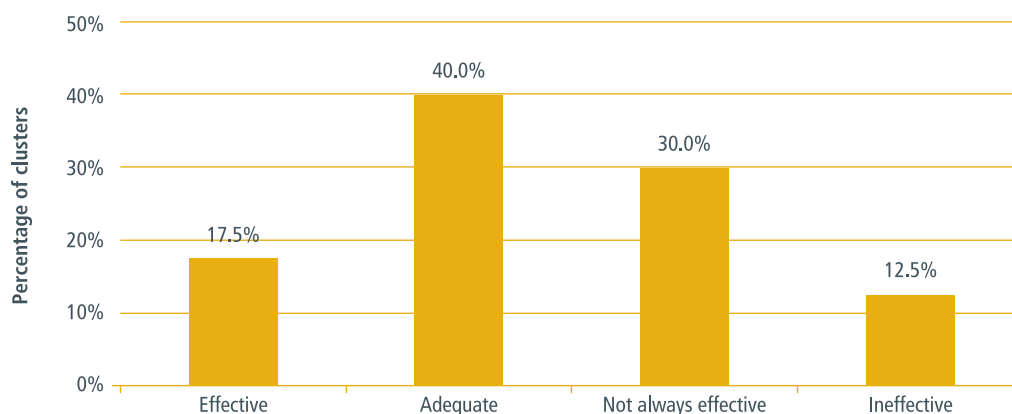
### 3.3 Overall RTLB practice

A well-designed and implemented intervention that is reviewed regularly and based on a valid assessment is likely to improve student achievement and engagement with learning.

The overall effectiveness of RTLB practice across clusters was assessed by evaluating different aspects of practice (model of practice, assessment, intervention and monitoring) and then bringing this information together to make an overall judgement about the effectiveness of practice.

There was a strong relationship between the overall judgement about the effectiveness of practice and the individual scores for each aspect of practice (correlation coefficient  $r^2=0.72$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). This score demonstrates the high level of internal validity for this question.

Figure 3 – Overall RTLB cluster practice



#### *Effective practice*

The practice of RTLB in 17.5 percent of clusters (seven) was effective. The practice in these clusters was characterised by:

- consistently high quality practice across individual RTLB;
- application of relevant research to practice;
- utilisation of a wide range of interventions that had been based on valid assessment data;
- effective communication with stakeholders;
- clear understanding of the referral and intervention objectives by all involved;

- clear understanding of the RTLB role and overall purpose of the RTLB service across all stakeholders;
- effective monitoring across individual cases; and
- collection of exit data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention.

#### *Less effective practice*

The practice of RTLB in 12.5 percent of clusters was ineffective. The practice in these clusters was characterised by:

- variability of the quality of practice across individual RTLB;
- poor or absent assessment data;
- ‘menu’ approach to assessment and interventions in isolation of the reasons for referral;
- no monitoring or collection of exit data to evaluate effectiveness;
- lack of knowledge and/or application of current literature related to RTLB practice;
- lack of clarity and/or agreement about the role of the RTLB and overall purpose of the RTLB service; and
- poor communication across the key parties.

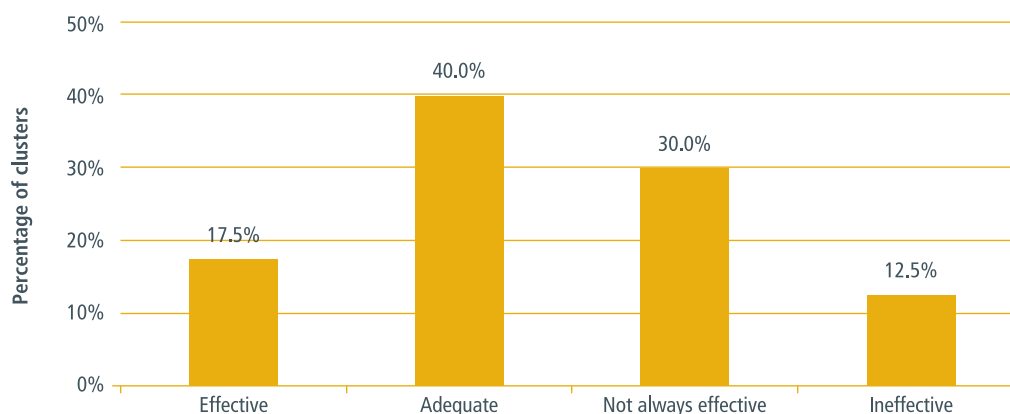
ERO judged the practice of RTLB in the remaining clusters as adequate (40 percent) or as not always effective (30 percent).

#### **3.3.1 Model of practice**

ERO identified clusters as having an effective model of practice when there was substantial evidence of RTLB who consistently:

- described their model of practice with links to the relevant literature which matched with their casework;
- demonstrated their knowledge of the current theory, practice and research in Māori education through their casework with Māori students and in Māori learning contexts;
- demonstrated that they had applied current theory and research to their own practice in individual cases;
- involved and informed key parties (principals, teachers and parents) in all aspects of case management; and
- established appropriate expectations for students and teachers they worked with.

Figure 5 – Model practice within clusters



### *Effective models of practice*

The model of practice of RTLB in 25 percent of clusters effectively supported and facilitated the student achievement.

RTLB in these clusters maintained the currency and applicability of their practice by participating in high quality professional development activities that were pertinent to their role.

*These people are highly knowledgeable and professionally aware. They maintain their levels of knowledge at the cutting edge of current educational research.*

RTLB in these clusters also tended to lead professional development activities for other staff that were directly linked to the learning and behaviour needs of students in their cluster.

ERO found that a focus on the effective engagement of whānau/parents, school staff and students was a key strength of these RTLB.

*This cluster has implemented a hui raranga process, which included the wider whānau in identifying the area for development for a student. This is a very holistic and sharing approach in which equal status is given to students, whānau and professionals. This replaces the IEP [Individual Education Plan] process for some Māori families.*

*The collaborative approach is effective in informing key parties. Sampled cases indicate regular communication with parents, with efforts to involve them in interventions where appropriate.*

Only two clusters in the sample (five percent) provided substantial evidence that the RTLB applied current theory and research in Māori education when working with Māori students and/or in Māori learning contexts.

*Less effective models of practice*

The model of practice of RTLB in 20 percent of clusters was ineffective. These clusters were characterised by RTLB who:

- described a model of practice that was not supported by current literature and/or not consistent with their casework;
- promoted interventions based on specific learning styles for Māori students with little or no consideration of assessment data or reference to current literature (which debunk ‘cultural learning styles’);<sup>12</sup>
- did not have a consistent model of practice across the cluster;
- did not have a consistent view of the purpose of the RTLB service across the cluster; and
- had communication difficulties between management, schools and parents.

There were many examples of RTLB working with students without the knowledge of their whānau/parents.

*Many parents didn’t know that their child was on the RTLB roll. There is no evidence of ongoing communication with parents.*

There was also a group of RTLB who stated that their practice was aligned with the Ministry of Education’s guidelines for RTLB but who ERO found were not practising in this way.

*RTLB can articulate relevant practice but this is not reflected in casework. Their model does not reflect the Ministry guidelines... They talk about an inclusive model but in many cases the child is not included.*

In some clusters, some RTLB found it difficult to practice (as described in the Ministry guidelines) because of a lack of support for this role, and/or lack of understanding by other RTLB, and/or their manager RTLB, and/or school management.

*One of the big tensions is between those who want to perform as per the RTLB training and the manager’s expected culture, which is to... focus primarily on truancy and counselling.*

*One school in the cluster has an untrained RTLB attached to it who works like a teacher aide on low-level behaviour management. The principal has no understanding of the RTLB role but is happy with this arrangement.*

*It was difficult to separate the role of a dean, guidance counsellor, RTLB and HOD Learning Support. The RTLB role was also the first choice for relief teacher.*

An additional barrier to developing an effective model of RTLB practice in clusters was the inclusion of high needs students on RTLB caseloads. This presented RTLB with additional challenges that their training and experience had not prepared them for.

*High needs students take up the majority of places on RTLB caseloads. In many cases principals stated that moderate need students “do not get a look in”.*

12 For example: Ministry of Education. (2003). *Best Evidence Synthesis – Effective teaching for diverse learners.*



The majority of clusters had either adequate (35 percent) or not always effective (20 percent) models of practice. These clusters typically had a wide variation of models of practice across RTLB and/or had not maintained their professional knowledge as practitioners.

*Some very good practice is evident, but not widespread. Overshadowed by too much poor practice.*

The variation of models of practice was demonstrated in several clusters that included secondary and primary schools. It appeared more likely that the RTLB model of practice (as described in the Ministry guidelines) was more accepted in primary schools and therefore more effective than in secondary schools.

*Evidence available for primary only. Referral and closure systems well documented in student files. Records of contact well kept. This is not so easy to establish in secondary, where RTLB are part time and have other roles.*

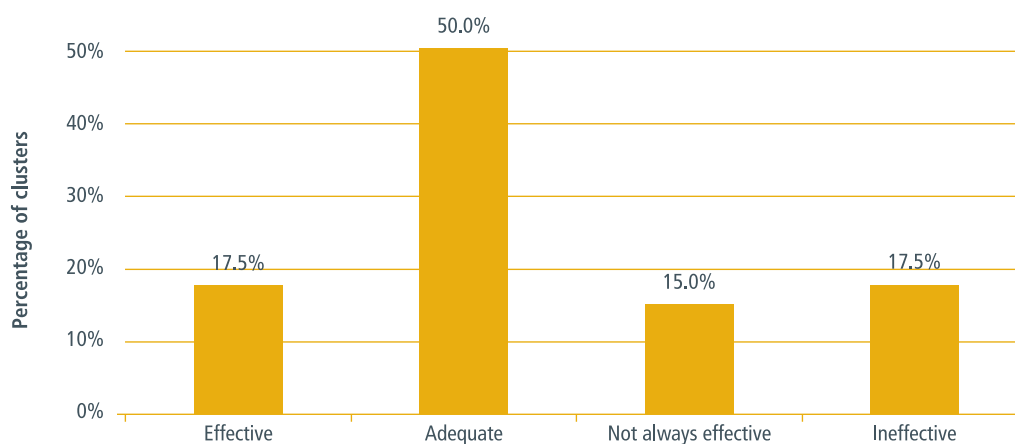
In this example, the RTLB had established themselves in the secondary schools by taking on traditional secondary school roles, such as a supporting dean.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.3.2 RTLB assessment practice

ERO identified clusters as having effective assessment practices when there was substantial evidence that RTLB had consistently:

- collected valid and reliable data to support and inform their practice and advice;
- collected assessment information that was valid and reliable for the purpose for which it was used;
- used assessment processes that enabled students to demonstrate their achievements; and
- used a range of techniques to gather relevant information.

Figure 6 – RTLB cluster assessment practices



<sup>13</sup> The Ministry of Education advises there are no part-time RTLB positions, and the resource teachers are not to take on additional roles or subject responsibilities at an employing school.

### *Effective assessment practice*

The assessment practices in seven clusters (17.5 percent) effectively supported and facilitated student achievement. RTLB in these clusters used a wide range of assessment tools to collect valid and reliable data that related directly to the initial reasons for referral. ERO found that these RTLB tended to make good use of school assessment information.

*The RTLB make good use of existing classroom data and do not repeat testing unnecessarily.*

Assessment approaches were linked to the reasons for referral, and RTLB used a range of techniques to assess needs.

### *Less effective assessment practice*

The assessment practices in seven clusters (17.5 percent) were ineffective at promoting and facilitating student achievement. RTLB in these clusters used a limited range of assessment tools that did not necessarily link to the reasons for referral. In these clusters all students tended to be assessed with the same tools irrespective of their needs.

*One child was referred for behaviour concerns. The only assessment data taken was a running record. This data was then not analysed.*

There was also some repeating of testing that had been completed by the school as part of the referral process (for example, re-doing running records). ERO found that in these clusters, schools often expressed their frustration at the time taken to gather and analyse assessment data.

*Time consuming and irritating to teachers to have basic assessment redone and to have a lengthy series of observations undertaken before any action is taken.*

Half of the clusters (20) had adequate assessment practices. The assessment practices in these clusters were typically variable across individual RTLB and/or across primary and secondary settings within clusters.

*There is a range of skills evident across the cluster, but little sense of a shared skill base.*

*Files sighted for a small sample of secondary students' files do not give a clear picture of RTLB specific involvements – more guidance counsel related.*

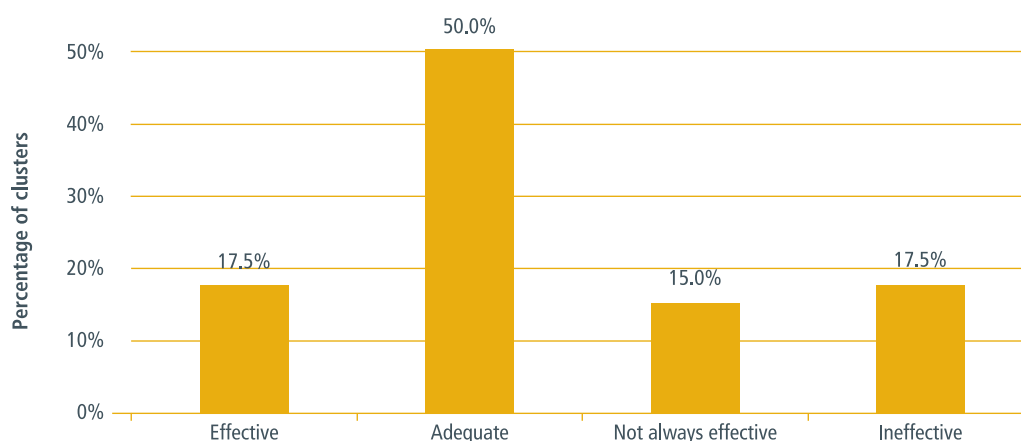
### 3.3.3 RTLB intervention practice

ERO identified clusters as having effective interventions when there was substantial evidence that RTLB had consistently implemented interventions that:

- were focused on improving student learning outcomes;
- were linked to the New Zealand Curriculum;
- were based on assessment data;
- had involved consultation with appropriate groups and individuals;

- met students', teachers' and school needs; and
- had the support and agreement of students, parents, teachers and principals.

Figure 7 – RTLB intervention practices and clusters



#### *Effective intervention practice*

The interventions in 13 clusters (32.5 percent) were effective at promoting and supporting student achievement. These interventions had a clear focus on promoting positive outcomes for students, were linked to the New Zealand Curriculum and to students' classroom programmes, were based on assessment data and involved key parties.

*Clear focus on helping students, and those associated with them, to bring about improved learning and behaviour.*

*This cluster is a model of good practice. Assessment matches referral, and intervention is focused. This is followed by monitoring with reliable data.*

ERO found that 19 of the 40 clusters (47.5 percent) could provide substantial evidence that they had consulted with appropriate groups and individuals during the development and implementation of interventions.

*There is substantial evidence of effective communication with students, teachers, principals and parents.*

*RTLB work with teachers to create a positive environment where students achieve success.*

*All client schools talked about the networks RTLB have access to and use.*

There was substantial evidence in 16 clusters (40 percent) that the interventions had the support and agreement of students, parents, teachers and principals.

*Review interviews indicate high levels of support and agreement with the strategies used by RTLB.*

*They have developed very positive relationships with key stakeholders.*

Overall, consultation appears to be a strength of RTLB practice and this is consistent with the collaborative model promoted by the Ministry of Education guidelines.

#### *Less effective intervention practice*

Seven clusters (17.5 percent) had ineffective interventions. Interventions in these clusters were typically developed and implemented with little or no reference to the initial referral reasons and/or assessment data.

*Assessment data is not sufficiently analysed or sufficiently useful to inform relevant interventions.*

ERO found that some clusters offered interventions to schools for groups of children in a 'menu-like approach' regardless of these students' individual needs.

*Some programmes appear over and over again and do not seem to focus on the same outcomes that the school has referred the child for.*

ERO identified that clusters with ineffective interventions were those that did not adequately meet the students', teachers', families' and schools' needs.

*Parents are well involved in front-end but not as aware of the actual intervention.*

*RTLB do not see the need to involve students.*

Six clusters could provide minimal evidence of consultation. There were some instances where consultation had taken place that was unsatisfactory for the participants because of the lack of focus about the purpose of the consultation and/or the time taken to consult with groups.

*RTLB time is primarily taken up with meetings and the impact this has on promoting positive student outcomes is unclear.*

The extent to which people were involved and informed of interventions varied across individual RTLB and primary and secondary settings within clusters.

*There is less evidence of a range of approaches to involve all parties at a secondary level.*

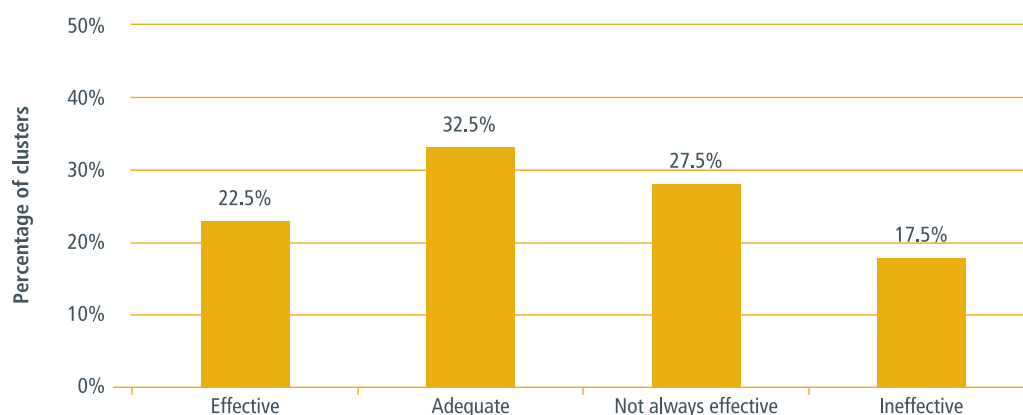
In another nine clusters (22.5 percent), interventions did not always effectively support and facilitate student achievement.

#### 3.3.4 RTLB monitoring practices

ERO identified clusters as having effective monitoring practices when there was substantial evidence that RTLB had consistently:

- provided ongoing monitoring of students' interventions; and
- collected sufficient pre and post data from a variety of sources to illustrate the effectiveness of their interventions.

Figure 8 – RTLB cluster monitoring practices



#### *Effective monitoring practices*

ERO found that the monitoring practices in nine clusters (22.5 percent) were effective at promoting and supporting student achievement. The monitoring practices in these clusters were characterised by the collection of valid reliable data. These RTLB demonstrated the effectiveness of their strategies and their ability to modify interventions in response to information collected by monitoring systems.

#### *Less effective monitoring practices*

ERO found that the monitoring practices in seven clusters (17.5 percent) were ineffective. Another 11 clusters (27.5 percent) had monitoring practices that were not always effective. These clusters either did not monitor their cases or collected incomplete or questionable information as part of their monitoring.

*The quality of monitoring is questionable. It is not always promptly responded to appropriately in that, even though the programme may not be working for the student, the RTLB perseveres with it.*

*Some monitoring of 'how things are going', but there is a lack of measurable goals in place. This contributes to the long period students have on the roll.*

*Not much evidence of monitoring beyond "checked with teacher – all OK".*

*There are huge gaps evident in monitoring. For example, in many cases there was no information transferred to the next school.*

Again there was some evidence of insufficient involvement with students and their whānau/families.

*Data gathering about the effectiveness of interventions does not always sufficiently involve parents or students.*

The quality of pre and post data varied across clusters and, in some, there was minimal expectation from the cluster management committee or employing school(s) that the effectiveness of interventions should be evaluated by RTLB.

*There is no expectation from the management committee that monitoring should occur.*

*There is insufficient data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention – no requirements or expectations from most principals or management committees to do so.*

*Cluster review practices for reviewing the effectiveness of interventions are not yet adequately established. The degree and quality of evaluation is dependent on who the employing school is.*

RTLB who did not have clear objectives for their interventions with students, struggled to effectively monitor their work's impact.

*Analysis of the success of interventions is not comprehensive – for example, there is insufficient provision for gathering post intervention data from parents and students. The quality of judgements about the success of interventions sometimes lacks sufficient focus because the objectives associated with various interventions are not always adequately defined in documents. Consequently some evaluations are general in nature rather than being based on clearly identified and shared objectives/outcomes.*

### 3.4 Working with others

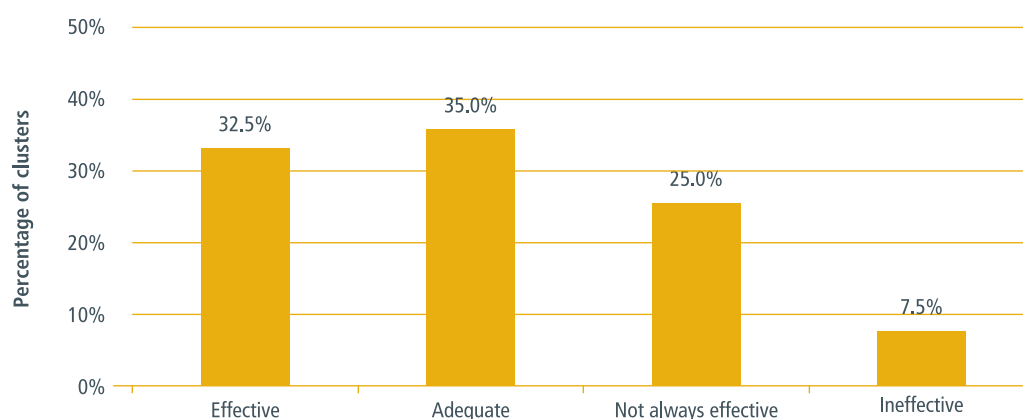
A working partnership between the resource teacher, teachers, parents, caregivers and families/whānau is fundamental to the students' development and achievement.

ERO identified clusters as having effective working relationships with others that led to improved student achievement when there was substantial evidence that:

- policies and procedures for referring students to the RTLB service were known by all cluster principals;
- working relationships with principals, teaching staff, parents and personnel from other agencies were effective;
- RTLB worked in a collaborative manner to keep all key parties informed of progress and/or issues;
- teachers, students and parents had confidence in the RTLB;
- principals and teaching staff acknowledged the expertise of RTLB and sought their advice and involvement;
- RTLB have communicated effectively and in a timely manner with parents about the reasons for referral;
- parents are satisfied that they receive timely and accurate reports on their child's progress with the RTLB;
- RTLB have liaised effectively with external agencies to access support for students; and
- RTLB have liaised effectively with Group Special Education to access support for students.



Figure 9 – Working effectively with others in clusters



#### *Effective working relationships*

ERO found that 13 of the 40 clusters (32.5 percent) provided substantial evidence of RTLB having effective working relationships with others that led to improved student achievement. These RTLB were valued by others for their expertise and professionalism, and their networks with external agencies.

*The service is viewed as credible and useful. In most instances the service is seen as complementing school rather than as a 'fixing service'.*

*All principals understood the dynamics of the RTLB role. Staff reported that RTLB were professional in their attitude and that RTLB expertise was shared with all parties.*

*Client schools reported that RTLB have substantial strengths in networking and tapping into agency expertise.*

ERO found that the policies and procedures for referring students to the RTLB service were known by cluster principals in half of all clusters (20).

*There is a clearly documented process and a variety of formats for referrals, which match the nature of the required intervention – for example, there are separate referral forms for individuals and for groups of children.*

*There are high quality policies and procedures that are well known to cluster members.*

ERO also identified some examples of effective relationships between RTLB and parents/whānau.

*Significant contact is made with parents, particularly when behaviour is the main focus of the intervention.*

*Both parents reported that RTLB carry out home visits and keep contact by telephone. RTLB have made parents feel very comfortable about phoning them and asking for information or discussing concerns.*

*Less effective working relationships*

Three of the 40 clusters (7.5 percent) had RTLB with ineffective working relationships with others and 10 clusters (25 percent) had RTLB that did not always work effectively with others.

Clusters with ineffective working relationships did not have policies and procedures for referral that were understood by schools.

*There are no policies and procedures evident.*

*Some teachers do not appear to be aware of the range of services that RTLB provide across the cluster and that are available to them.*

ERO found evidence in some clusters that negative working relationships between RTLB and others were a barrier to the overall effectiveness of the RTLB service.

*This cluster is strongly driven by personalities and perceptions of competence. RTLB are attached to particular schools – this service is not needs based.*

There was variable practice across and within RTLB clusters in terms of the effectiveness of relationships between RTLB and parents/whānau. ERO found no, or minimal, evidence of effective and timely communication with parents in 15 of the 40 clusters (37.5 percent). There were instances in these clusters of parents/whānau not being informed of the RTLB involvement.

*Contact with parents is variable. Some parents have reported considerable contact over the years, while others have not been contacted at all.*

*RTLB files vary in the extent to which they record involvement. In two cases parents could have been engaged earlier in the intervention process.*

Less than half of the clusters (19) could provide substantial or adequate evidence that the RTLB liaise effectively with Group Special Education staff to access support for students. Some clusters (8) had no relationship with Group Special Education staff, while others were unsure of the boundary between children with moderate needs and those with more severe needs.

*Liaison appears more dependent on individual RTLB initiative than a cluster-wide initiative. There are some combined initiatives but an apparent ‘demarcation’ between services provided by RTLB and Group Special Education means that support for students can sometimes lapse.*

*RTLB report that they get on well personally with Group Special Education staff. However, liaison with cluster and RTLB is hindered by lack of consistent attendance at management committee and review and intake committee meetings.*

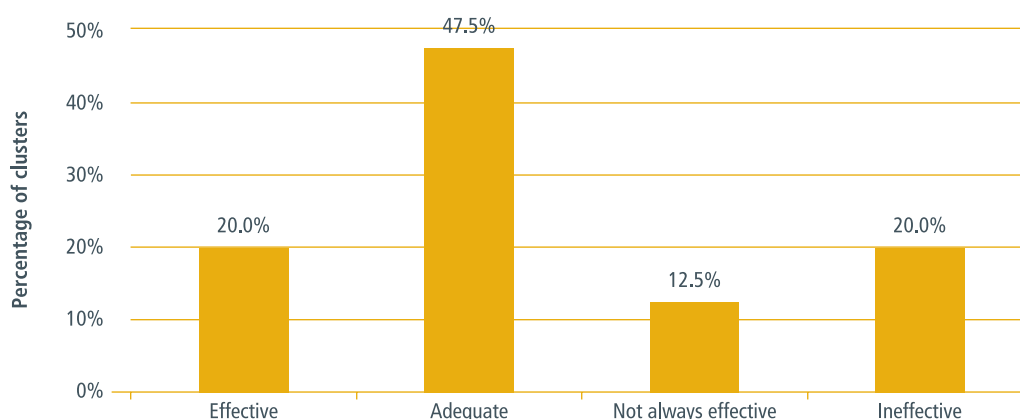
### 3.5 Cluster resources

The RTLB initiative attracts substantial government investment and is intended to complement other sources of government funding (e.g. the Special Education Grant) which aims to support the learning of students with special education needs.

ERO identified clusters as having effectively used cluster resources to improve student achievement when there was substantial evidence that:

- the fund-holder school had effectively managed funds through board accounting and auditing processes;
- there was clearly identifiable expenditure and a breakdown of cost areas related to the RTLB funding in the board accounting and auditing processes;
- there was clear accountability for money that had been transferred from the fund-holder school(s) to the employing school(s);
- roll-over funding had been used accordingly (i.e. not retained from year to year to generate surplus);
- the management committee had rigorous processes for allocating, managing and documenting financial expenditure;
- the Learning Support Fund had been used to support individual and school-wide programmes implemented by RTLB;
- student needs were the main consideration when allocating any funding; and
- RTLB had been used effectively to provide an equitable service to cluster schools and students (inclusive of year groups).

Figure 10 – Cluster resources



There was considerable variation in practice across RTLB clusters for the usage of cluster resources. Practices varied from extremely effective to largely ineffective.

Some clusters had excellent policies and procedures linked to improving positive student outcomes that principals and RTLB were familiar with and supported.

*Management committee and host principals have a clear understanding of all the systems in place, how and why they are necessary, and have an agreed philosophy of how the cluster operates.*

Other clusters had no policies and procedures, and made decisions about expenditure in isolation of student needs.

*There have been lots of resources purchased like laminators and digital cameras. No links to student achievement or evidence-based learning support.*

In some clusters, RTLB were not involved in any decision-making about the use of cluster resources, while in other clusters they made all of the decisions.

*RTLB and the management committee are proud of the fact that they have enabled their RTLB to be autonomous. They make their own professional decisions. RTLB allocate and manage financial resources with no clear links to outcomes for students.*

*RTLB have no involvement in the management and allocation of the Learning Support Fund and know nothing about how it is spent.*

#### ***Effective usage of cluster resources***

Eight of the 40 clusters (20 percent) provided substantial evidence of effectively using cluster resources to improve student achievement. These clusters were characterised by management committees who were clear about the role of the RTLB service and who worked together to ensure that cluster resources were used effectively to maximise student achievement in their cluster.

There was substantial or adequate evidence for 28 clusters (70 percent) that the fund-holder school effectively managed RTLB funds through board accounting and auditing processes.

*All parties consulted believe that clear systems and well-known procedures relating to financial and general accountability are effective.*

There was also substantial evidence in 14 clusters (35 percent) and adequate evidence in another 17 (42.5 percent) that the Learning Support Fund had been used to support individual and school-wide programmes implemented by RTLB.

*Schools apply to the review and intake committee for learning support funding. This funding is allocated according to need and is used for teacher aide time and resources.*

#### ***Less effective usage of cluster resources***

Eight clusters (20 percent) used cluster resources ineffectively and another five (12.5 percent) did not always use cluster resources effectively. The fund-holder schools in three of these clusters could not provide any evidence of effectively managing funds through board accounting and auditing processes, while another nine could only provide minimal evidence of this.

*There is limited discrete reporting of RTLB finances at the board level in annual accounts (school bursar could not provide this information).*

While the sample of clusters with secondary schools is not large enough to come to any conclusions about the usage of cluster resources in these clusters, it appears that clusters with secondary schools found it more difficult to demonstrate effective usage of resources.

*There is substantial evidence for effective use of resources in primary and intermediate schools. While provision exists for the delivery of an equitable service at a secondary school level, this is not occurring consistently.*

*There is no cluster-wide system for identifying the students with the highest needs across the cluster at any one time that ensures that these students receive the greatest amount of RTLB resource.*

*The secondary schools complain. There are ongoing issues with three units that are staffed by RTLB positions.*

Seven clusters (17.5 percent) could not provide evidence and another three (7.5 percent) only provided minimal evidence of having made student needs the main consideration when allocating support funding.

*There has been inadequate tracking of how surplus funds are carried over and subsequently used.*

*Accounts are well audited. Funds are ring-fenced. However, stockpiling \$43,000 in reserves does not demonstrate the best use in terms of meeting student needs.*

*Learning support funding is distributed to schools on a per capita basis with no accountability required.*

*There is no process in place to ensure equity of provision. A portion of the LSF [Learning Support Fund] is used as an 'emergency fund' to 'tide children over' until interventions or support occur. There is no expectation that the difference the funding makes is documented, demonstrated or reported.*

Ten clusters (25 percent) could not provide any evidence that the RTLB are used effectively to provide an equitable service to schools and students. A key issue in these clusters was the process for referral to the RTLB service, in that many students were not being referred and/or not being accepted into the service.

*Some schools prefer not to access the services of some RTLB and, in some cases, of all RTLB.*

*There seems to be little equity in the way students get on the roll. Some schools have all of their students (who are referred) eventually placed with the RTLB while some schools are mostly declined.*

*The fact that RTLB prioritise before the selection meetings means that the children being referred for the first time miss out. The unknowns miss out as the knowns continue.*

There were also examples of RTLB being attached to specific schools in a cluster, and other schools not being able to access the service.

*RTLB are attached to particular schools. One school receives no service because of this arrangement.*

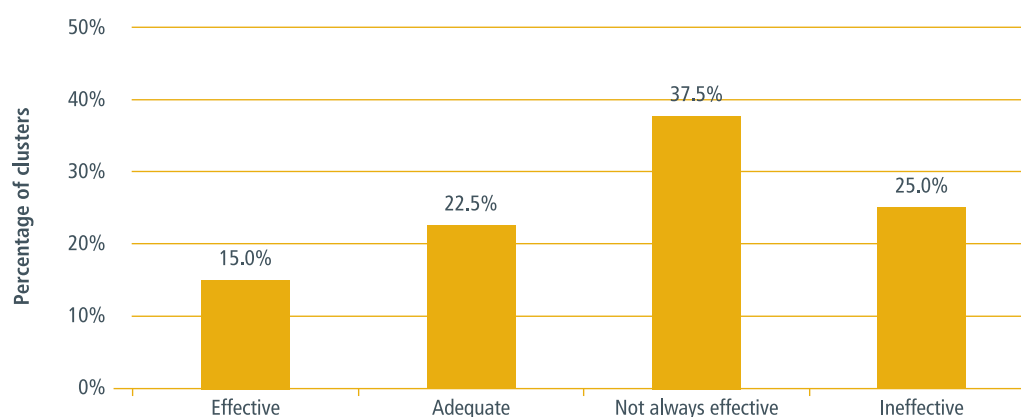
### 3.6 Governance and management practices

A cluster that is well managed and led will have clarity of purpose, use information on students with moderate special education needs to underpin its processes of policy development, planning and self review and direct its resources towards the desired goal of improving student achievement.

ERO identified clusters as having effective governance and management practices that supported and facilitated student achievement when there was substantial evidence that:

- policies and procedures were in place to identify students who were at risk of not achieving or had special education needs for referral to RTLB;
- achievement outcomes had been analysed and used to review and improve RTLB practices;
- achievement outcomes had been analysed and used to review governance and management practices;
- referral trends and patterns had been analysed to review wider school practices and classroom programmes; and
- cluster information for Māori students had been considered separately when reviewing referral patterns and had been used to analyse the extent to which the RTLB service was meeting the needs of Māori students.

Figure 11 – Governance and management



#### *Effective governance and management practice*

Governance and management practices in six clusters (15 percent) effectively supported and facilitated student achievement, while another nine clusters (22.5 percent) had adequate governance and management practices.



These clusters had policies and procedures in place to identify eligible students for the RTLB service that were known across all cluster schools.

*Well established and understood referral procedures.*

*Policies are regularly reviewed and there are clear procedures.*

### **Less effective governance and management practice**

Ten clusters (25 percent) had ineffective governance and management practices for supporting and facilitating student achievement, and another 15 (37.5 percent) had governance and management practices that were not always effective.

Some of these clusters did not have policies and procedures in place to identify students with moderate learning and behaviour needs who should be referred to the RTLB service.

*There is no cluster-wide policy and procedure manual in place. Referral processes are unclear.*

There was little analysis of student needs (as reflected in referral patterns) or of the level of RTLB effectiveness for students (as reflected in student outcome data) across the RTLB clusters. ERO found that 33 clusters (82.5 percent) did not analyse achievement outcomes and referral patterns in their cluster to improve RTLB services.

*No systematic provisions for using analysed achievement outcomes to improve practices at RTLB team level, management committee or cluster level.*

*No analytical data provided. Pre and post assessment data and achievement outcomes were all documented but there was a real weakness in that the data was not analysed.*

*No self review evident. No collation of cluster-wide information.*

*Data collated each term. No systematic use of this information to improve services.*

Only two clusters (5 percent) collected cluster information for Māori students separately, when reviewing referral patterns and student outcomes, to review and improve resource teacher practices.

### **3.7 Summary of RTLB findings**

ERO found that the RTLB service has had a variable impact on student achievement across and, at times, within the different clusters evaluated. There is a wide distribution of performance and effectiveness across all areas evaluated. This wide distribution includes a group of highly effective RTLB clusters and another group of ineffective RTLB clusters. The majority of clusters were performing on an adequate to less than adequate level across all areas evaluated.

There is a high level of correlation across all variables with one another (Spearman's rho,  $p < 0.01$ ). This means those clusters that had improved student achievement were also highly likely to have performed well across all other areas evaluated. The converse

applied to those clusters that did not provide evidence of improved student achievement, in that their performance was likely to have been found ineffective in other areas.

### *Student achievement*

The correlation between student achievement and RTLB practice, cluster relationships, usage of cluster resources and governance and management practices was investigated. A high correlation was found between improved student achievement and all variables. This correlation was significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

The most significant association with student achievement was practice (Spearman's rho  $r = 0.768$ ) and cluster relationships (Spearman's rho  $r = 0.731$ ). The association of the two remaining indicators with student achievement was still significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) but to lesser degrees (government and management practices  $r = 0.591$ , usage of cluster resources  $r = 0.573$ ).

The four variables were modelled using factor analysis to establish level of association with each rating of student achievement.

Table 1 – Factor analysis of student achievement

Evidence of improved student achievement	Percent of variation explained			
	Practice	Cluster relationships	Government & management	Cluster resources
Substantial	46%	37%	12%	3%
Some	60%	25%	10%	7%
Minimal	43%	36%	14%	7%
None	54%	34%	12%	0%

Table 1 shows that practice and cluster relationships are the most important factors related to student achievement. However it is also important to acknowledge the correlation across all variables when interpreting these findings.

### *Māori student achievement*

The correlation between Māori student achievement and RTLB practice, cluster relationships, usage of cluster resources and governance and management practices was investigated. A high correlation was found between improved Māori student achievement and all variables. This correlation was significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

The most significant association with student achievement was governance and management (Spearman's rho  $r = 0.712$ ) and practice (Spearman's rho  $r = 0.64$ ). The association of the two remaining indicators with student achievement was still significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) but to lesser degrees (cluster resources  $r = 0.48$ , cluster relationships  $r = 0.43$ ).

The four variables were modelled using factor analysis to establish level of association with each rating of student achievement.

Table 2 – Factor analysis of Māori student achievement

Evidence of improved student achievement	Percent of variation explained			
	Practice	Cluster relationships	Government & management	Cluster resources
Substantial	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
Some	51%	42%	6%	2%
Minimal	43%	27%	24%	6%
None	65%	20%	11%	3%

*Table 2* shows that governance and management and practice are the most important factors related to Māori student achievement.

## 4 Conclusions

The RTLB service needs teachers with successful teaching experience, relevant qualifications and effective communication skills who are reflective practitioners with a commitment to students. The ideal context for RTLB to work in is a cluster of schools that support their work and have a collective focus on improving student achievement. ERO found a group of RTLB clusters that met this description. Unfortunately these clusters were in the minority.

### 4.1 Student achievement

The RTLB service has had a variable impact on student achievement across the different clusters evaluated. There is a wide distribution of performance and effectiveness across all areas evaluated, ranging from highly effective to ineffective. While over half of the clusters (62.5 percent) provided evidence that their service had improved student achievement, only a small group (20 percent) had substantial evidence of the improvements their services had made to student achievement. Of concern are the remaining clusters (37.5 percent) that could provide little or no evidence of improvements to student achievement.

Working with teachers to help them meet the needs of diverse learners to raise student achievement is a key national education priority. The wide distribution of effectiveness and performance shows that the RTLB service is not consistently improving student achievement, especially for Māori students.

Many clusters found it difficult to demonstrate their effectiveness because they had not evaluated their own performance in relation to student achievement. Most clusters had not collected and analysed information on how their service had improved student achievement for individual cases, individual RTLB caseloads and for the overall cluster service. This lack of reflective practice and self review has had negative consequences on the quality of RTLB practice, the quality of performance appraisals of RTLB and the overall effectiveness of the RTLB clusters. The implications are discussed below.

#### *RTLB practice and student achievement*

The results show that while a small group of RTLB regularly review the effectiveness of their work, most RTLB are not doing this. It can be difficult to demonstrate positive changes from working alongside other teachers and/or with groups of children with a combination of behavioural and learning difficulties – however all RTLB should review and evaluate the effectiveness of their work with others.

Many RTLB cases did not have explicit objectives related to the changes that their interventions were attempting to facilitate. Often objectives were implicit or unclear and not understood or known by those with whom the RTLB were working. It is highly likely that this lack of clarity about the purpose of RTLB involvement is linked to the absence of data for individual cases.

Self review is necessary for developing and maintaining high quality, effective practice. All teachers should collect information on the effectiveness of their practice and analyse the implications of this data with their colleagues in a professional dialogue.

These results strongly suggest that the capacity of RTLB to effectively review their work, needs to be further developed. Possible strategies to achieve this include increased accountability of RTLB to their employing principals and management committees, targeted professional development for RTLB and professional supervision with suitably qualified and experienced practitioners.

### *Performance appraisals of RTLB*

It is also important for employing principals (of RTLB) to have and use valid information on RTLB effectiveness when appraising their performance. The quality of RTLB appraisal is questionable, given the relative dearth of information on their effectiveness. Some employing principals reported that they had experienced difficulties appraising RTLB. Many principals were unclear about their expectations for RTLB and how to manage their role as the employer in the context of cluster management.

Anecdotally, ERO found that the overall quality of the performance appraisals of RTLB by their employing principals was low. There were examples of RTLB not having performance appraisals for considerable lengths of time, RTLB poor performance not being addressed in performance appraisals and RTLB performance not being appraised against the role of the RTLB.

This has meant that many RTLB have not had any formal feedback on the effectiveness of their practice. Therefore, it is highly likely that effective practice has not been recognised and ineffective practice has not been addressed. In this context behavioural drift away from the model of practice RTLB have been trained in may be a likely outcome. This seems particularly likely in clusters where the model is at best, misunderstood and, at worst, unsupported.

This evaluation has found that the quality of RTLB practice is significantly correlated with student achievement and Māori student achievement and that the quality of RTLB practice is highly variable across clusters. This places onus on employing principals to carry out performance appraisals of RTLB and to address ineffective practice. The results suggest that this has been difficult for employing principals and that they may need further support and guidance to effectively appraise RTLB.

### *Cluster effectiveness and student achievement*

There was also an absence across most clusters of self review in relation to improved student achievement. Most clusters had not considered aggregating information on the effectiveness of individual RTLB to review the overall effectiveness of their RTLB cluster service. This information would assist clusters to identify systems issues that impact, both positively and negatively, on the effectiveness of their services to improve student achievement in their cluster.

Where clusters had attempted to gather information about the effectiveness of their services, they had tended to survey cluster schools on their level of satisfaction with the service, not on the level of improvement to student learning, behaviour and/or engagement with learning. The views of parents and students were typically not sought by these clusters.

In short, most clusters did not know what difference their service had made for students. Reviewing the overall effectiveness of RTLB clusters is the responsibility of each management committee. That so many have not undertaken this role reflects on the overall poor quality of governance and management practices across the RTLB service.

#### 4.2 Māori student achievement

There was considerably less evidence that the RTLB service had improved Māori student achievement when compared with overall student achievement. Only 20 percent of clusters could provide evidence that their service had improved Māori student achievement, while the remaining 80 percent could provide little or no evidence of improved Māori achievement. This is concerning, given that Māori students make up 33 percent of students receiving RTLB services.

##### *Governance and management practices and Māori achievement*

The variable that has the strongest correlation with Māori student achievement is governance and management practices. This contrasts with overall student achievement for which the effectiveness of governance and management has less influence. This finding suggests that management committees have a significant role to play in relation to the responsiveness of the RTLB service to Māori students.

Unfortunately most RTLB management committees have not made Māori student achievement a priority. Less evidence was kept on the outcomes for Māori students on a cluster level. Most clusters were not aggregating information on the outcomes for Māori students separately. National student achievement results show that Māori students are not achieving as well as others. Potentially, the RTLB service has an important role to play in improving the achievement of Māori. Currently it is not fulfilling this role.

RTLB managers and practitioners need to review the effectiveness of their service for Māori students on a cluster and individual teacher basis to inform and improve policies, programmes and practices. It appears that principals have not applied the reporting practices associated with Māori student achievement required in schools to the management of RTLB clusters. This suggests that management committees need further direction and guidance in relation to how they review the effectiveness of their RTLB cluster service for Māori students.

##### *RTLB practice and Māori achievement*

There is an emphasis in the RTLB training course on developing practice that is effective with Māori students and/or in Māori contexts. ERO found that RTLB in only a third of clusters were aware of and had applied current theory and practice in Māori education when working with Māori students and/or in Māori contexts. This contrasts with the finding that RTLB in over two thirds of all clusters could demonstrate links to general literature when describing their model of practice. It appears that RTLB have been slow to integrate current research on Māori education into their practice.

These findings suggest that there is a significant gap in the professional knowledge and practice of RTLB in relation to working effectively with Māori students.

In two of the clusters evaluated, some RTLB were involved in the *Te Kotahitanga* project. *Te Kotahitanga* is a national research project that has investigated how Year 9 and 10 Māori student achievement in mainstream schools can be improved through creating a dialogue about learning between Māori students and their teachers.<sup>14</sup> A group of RTLB have been trained to work as facilitators to help teachers respond to Māori students' feedback. This project has received a high level of support from the schools involved, the Ministry of Education and the project team for *Te Kotahitanga*.

Information on the effectiveness of RTLB work in this project was not included in this evaluation because *Te Kotahitanga* is not an initiative of the RTLB service.

Preliminary findings from *Te Kotahitanga* provide substantial evidence that the work of RTLB involved in this project has contributed to improved Māori student achievement. This indicates that the RTLB service can make a difference to Māori student achievement and supports the earlier findings that this is linked to governance and management practices (leadership and infrastructure) and quality practice. Another interesting component of *Te Kotahitanga* project is that it has been undertaken in secondary schools, illustrating that RTLB can make a positive difference in secondary settings.

### 4.3 RTLB practice

The quality of RTLB practice was the third area evaluated and was found to have the strongest correlation with overall student achievement and the second strongest correlation with Māori student achievement. This finding is consistent with other research that shows that teacher practice has the biggest influence on student achievement.<sup>15</sup> It is also consistent with the few instances that ERO observed of highly effective individual RTLB making positive differences for students in clusters that overall were largely ineffective.

The bulk of the clusters were evaluated as having either adequate RTLB practice (40 percent) or RTLB practice that was not always effective (30 percent). A group of RTLB clusters (17.5 percent) had highly effective practice and another group (12.5 percent) had largely ineffective practice.

It is apparent that many RTLB do not have an effective practice. Typically, these RTLB do not collect valid assessment data, have a 'menu approach' to interventions, and do not monitor the impact of their interventions. ERO found that these RTLB were not aware of current educational research and had often implemented strategies for Māori students that have been based on preconceived notions of cultural learning styles as part of their 'menu' of interventions. There also tended to be more focus on 'liasing with' adults than on improving student learning.

While many RTLB have been through the RTLB training, there is a group that has not passed the training, another group that has been made exempt from it and another group of RTLB that have not entered the training programme. Some clusters have appointed RTLB who have not been through the training programme to have professional oversight over other RTLB in their clusters.

14 For further information on this project refer to: *Te Kotahitanga*, [www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz).

15 Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis*. Ministry of Education.

RTLBS are not required to have passed the RTLBS training or to have an equivalent qualification to continue to work as an RTLBS or to be appointed as one. The only mandatory requirement for teachers appointed as an RTLBS is that they are registered teachers. RTLBS are appointed by management committees.

The results suggest that current processes for appointing, training, supervising and appraising RTLBS require significant changes to increase the level of assurance about the quality of RTLBS practice nationally.

#### 4.4 Working with others

The relationship between how effectively RTLBS work with others and overall student achievement has the second strongest correlation. This finding supports the collaborative model of practice promoted in the Ministry of Education guidelines and RTLBS training as an important mechanism for improving student outcomes.

Working with others to improve student achievement was a key strength of many of the RTLBS clusters evaluated. The highly effective and largely ineffective clusters were not as identifiable for this factor. Overall judgements were more positive for this variable than for other areas of investigation. ERO found that over two thirds of clusters were effective or adequate when working with others to improve student achievement and, of the remaining clusters, only a small proportion were ineffective.

##### *Working with others and governance and management practice*

ERO found a significant relationship between how effectively RTLBS work with others and the effectiveness of management and governance practices. Typically, RTLBS clusters with effective governance and management practices were those where there was an agreement about the purpose of the RTLBS service and where there were known and understood policies and procedures in place to identify students for referral. Principals in these clusters knew what the purpose of the service was and how to access services. There was also agreement about how the service operated and support for the work of individual RTLBS.

While ERO found instances of individual RTLBS who worked effectively with others in clusters with ineffective governance and management practices, the results indicate that RTLBS are more likely to be able to establish effective relationships with others in clusters with effective governance and management practices. The quality and cohesiveness of the governance and management relationships appears to be an important factor when considering how effectively RTLBS work with others to improve student achievement. This finding underscores the importance of management committees gaining support from their cluster principals for the RTLBS service.

##### *Working with Group Special Education*

Group Special Education (GSE) of the Ministry of Education provides RTLBS clusters with guidance and support. This arrangement recognises the value that GSE specialist staff can add to RTLBS clusters and also the potential crossover between students with moderate educational needs (with whom RTLBS work) and those with high needs (with whom GSE staff work).



There were some examples of GSE staff working well with RTLB. However, these examples were limited. Anecdotally, RTLB clusters spoke of the limited availability of suitably qualified and experienced GSE staff to support the work of RTLB. A related issue may be the finding that some RTLB clusters were working with high needs students rather than moderate needs students. Given that RTLB are not qualified or supported to work with these students, it is likely that the service will not be effective for high needs students and may at times constitute unsafe practice.

#### 4.5 Cluster resources

ERO found considerable variation in practice across RTLB clusters for the usage of cluster resources. Practices varied from extremely effective to largely ineffective.

Clusters that used their resources effectively had management committees that made students' needs a key point of reference for all decisions. In contrast, less effective clusters had not used the RTLB funds appropriately and/or had not accounted for their expenditure. There were also clusters (25 percent) that could not provide any evidence that RTLB are used equitably across schools according to students' needs. These findings are related to the effectiveness of governance and management practices.

#### 4.6 Governance and management

Performance in the area of governance and management was less than adequate across clusters, with just over a third of clusters having effective or adequate governance and management practices.

As stated earlier, ERO found an overall lack of self review throughout RTLB clusters. Most management committees and employing principals had not applied the same principles of self review to their RTLB cluster service that they are required to apply to the operation of their schools. This has impacted negatively on the information clusters have had available to them to improve their policies, programmes and practices.

The RTLB model of practice was not consistently followed and/or not supported by some management committees, employing principals and schools. There were examples of schools choosing not to refer students because they did not support the RTLB model of practice and/or did not view the service as credible and/or had a negative experience of RTLB work. This appeared to be more widespread across secondary schools. There were also instances of management committees requiring RTLB to work in ways that were clearly outside their role (as defined in Appendix A of the Cluster Memorandum of Agreement signed by all cluster schools) for example, working as a pastoral dean, teaching in a special unit, working as a guidance counsellor and/or working as a truancy officer.

These findings suggest that the RTLB model of practice has not been consistently supported and/or accepted by some schools, employing principals and management committees. Of particular concern are those management committees that have intentionally decided to operate outside the Ministry of Education guidelines.

These guidelines are not mandatory. The Ministry can not instruct clusters to comply with them. This makes it difficult to be confident that the policy intent of the RTLB service, which is for RTLB to work with teachers to help support students with moderate learning and behaviour difficulties, is being carried out by all clusters.

Currently, every RTLB cluster provides the Ministry of Education with an annual report on their service. These reports are then aggregated nationally. This is the only mechanism for reviewing the performance of RTLB clusters.

It is likely that some management committees will be unable to improve their service without some external prompt and guidance. This could be achieved by regularly reviewing RTLB clusters on their performance and making the Ministry guidelines mandatory.

Increased external evaluation would provide RTLB clusters with useful information on how to increase the effectiveness of their services and would also provide government with information on how well the RTLB service is working with teachers to assist students with moderate needs. The Ministry guidelines clearly outline the role of the RTLB service and the management and governance responsibilities of management committees, employing principals and their boards of trustees. Making these guidelines mandatory would provide a clearer focus for the service and a basis for the Ministry of Education to address poor performance.

## 5 Future actions

That a small group of RTLB clusters is highly effective at improving student achievement indicates the potential contribution that the RTLB service can make to students with moderate educational needs. However, significant changes need to be made to the RTLB service to fully realise this potential.

ERO has identified some possible areas for action to assist the future development and improvement of the RTLB service.

To increase the quality and consistency of RTLB practice:

- build the capacity of RTLB on how to review the effectiveness of their practice;
- provide RTLB with supervision from suitably qualified and experienced practitioners;
- provide employing principals with support and guidance on how to effectively appraise RTLB; and
- review the current processes for appointing, training, supervising and appraising RTLB.

To increase the effectiveness of the RTLB service:

- introduce regular external review with a focus on student achievement for all RTLB clusters;
- gazette a requirement for clusters to adhere to *RTLB Clusters: Effective Governance, Management & Practice*, the official Ministry of Education guidelines;
- include the requirement for clusters to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their cluster service (in the gazetted statement); and
- provide management committees with support and guidance to help them collect and use information on the overall effectiveness of their cluster service.

To increase the effectiveness of the RTLB service for Māori students:

- include the requirement for clusters to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their cluster service for Māori students (in the gazetted statement);
- provide management committees with support and guidance to help them collect and use information on the overall effectiveness of their cluster service for Māori students; and
- build the capacity of RTLB on how to work effectively with Māori students.

ERO has written a follow-up report on good RTLB practice, based on examples provided by the effective RTLB clusters evaluated.

## Appendix 1: RTLB clusters

The RTLB clusters selected were:

Cluster name	RTLB	Schools	Rural/Urban
Henderson	9	20	Urban
Hokianga	1	5	Rural
Howick/Pakuranga	12	30	Urban
Kerikeri	2	5	Rural
Manurewa	16	27	Urban
Mt Roskill	9	17	Urban
Mangere	13	19	Urban
Glenfield	4	10	Mixed
Whangamata	1	4	Rural
Fairfield	7	14	Urban
Otorohanga/Kawhia	2	14	Rural
Rotorua Lakes	3	10	Mixed
Hamilton West	4	11	Urban
Taupo	5	12	Rural
Tauranga Peninsula	8	17	Urban
Whakatane	6	17	Rural
Central Taranaki	4	32	Rural
Central Hawkes Bay	3	19	Rural
Gisborne Primary	10	36	Mixed
Hastings East	6	16	Urban
Palmerston North A	4	7	Urban
Ruapehu	3	20	Rural
Flaxmere	4	16	Urban
Levin	7	21	Rural
Tasman	2	11	Rural
Kapiti	7	20	Mixed
Karori	2	9	Urban
Lower Hutt Northern	4	11	Urban
Nelson	5	11	Urban
Upper Hutt	7	21	Urban
Tawa/Newlands	4	14	Urban
Porirua West*	6	9	Urban

Cluster Name	RTLB	Schools	Rural/Urban
Wellington East	5	19	Urban
Aranui	6	11	Urban
Central Southland	2	18	Rural
Dunedin Secondary	4	12	Urban
Kaiapoi	3	14	Mixed
North Otago	3	27	Mixed
Central Lakes	1	5	Rural
Christchurch Pilot*	3	6	Urban

\* These cluster reviews were completed as part of the pilot study.

## Appendix 2: RTLB cluster sample characteristics

Total number of RTLB: 762

Total number of RTLB clusters: 190

Total number of RTLB clusters in sample: 40 (20 percent of all RTLB clusters)

Feature	Total number of RTLB clusters	Percent of RTLB clusters	20 percent of population	Number of RTLB clusters in sample	Percent of sample
1 RTLB	21	11%	4	3	8%
2 RTLB	35	18%	7	5	13%
3 RTLB	47	25%	9	6	15%
4 RTLB	32	17%	7	8	20%
5 RTLB	20	10%	4	3	8%
6 RTLB	9	5%	2	4	10%
7 RTLB	8	4%	2	4	10%
8 RTLB	5	2%	1	1	2%
9 RTLB	3	2%	1	2	5%
10–11 RTLB	3	2%	1	1	2%
12–13 RTLB	4	2%	1	2	5%
14–16 RTLB	3	2%	1	1	2%
Northern	48	25%	10	8	20%
Central N	55	28%	11	12	30%
Central S	38	20%	8	11	28%
Southern	49	27%	11	9	22%
Urban	93	49%	19	22	55%
Rural	47	25%	10	12	30%
Mixed	50	26%	11	6	15%

## Evaluation form

We are currently looking at the value of ERO's national education evaluation reports and the use that is made of them in the education sector. We would very much appreciate hearing your opinions.

School or person responding: \_\_\_\_\_

1 How did you learn about this report?

ERO website	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sent directly to me by ERO	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informed by colleague	<input type="checkbox"/>	Heard about in the media	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>		

\_\_\_\_\_

2 How did you use this evaluation report?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3 How could future ERO evaluation reports be improved?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4 Other comment.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please send your comments:

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- by fax to (04) 499 2482
- by post to: Mike Hollings, National Manager Analysis and Policy, Education Review Office, Box 2799, WELLINGTON







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