

Suggested Tiered Support Framework

Tier 1: Universal Teaching

- Provides high-quality, evidence-informed teaching and learning for all learners, using the teaching sequence and approaches outlined in the curriculum and informed by the science of learning.
- Is deliberately designed to be culturally responsive, inclusive, and differentiated to reflect the strengths, and needs of all learners.
- Teaching is aligned with the national curriculum, rich in knowledge, to ensure all learners can access meaningful content using both explicit and implicit approaches. Explicit teaching is used to introduce and consolidate new concepts, with implicit learning opportunities becoming more prominent as understanding and independence develop—supporting participation and deep learning across all areas.
- Includes early and ongoing universal screening assessment for all students and diagnostic assessments to monitor learner progress and ensure they are tracking towards benchmarks, identify students who may benefit from additional support, and inform planning
- Establishes the foundation for further support, ensuring that all learners have access to teaching that fosters engagement, participation, curriculum progress, and the opportunity to achieve success.

Tier 2: Targeted Support

- Provides more intensive, focused teaching at a pace tailored to the learner's individual needs, to support the development and proficiency of key skills or learning outcomes linked to the curriculum, and to help maintain engagement in classroom learning.
- Builds on and connects with the classroom teaching approach and the national curriculum, rich in knowledge, informed by the science of learning.
- Involves frequent, intensive, and explicit teaching in small groups.
- Includes, where necessary, targeted approaches to address barriers to learning and participation using evidence-based frameworks.
- Is informed by formal and informal diagnostic assessments against specific criteria, with more regular communication to parents and whānau describing the learner's pace and depth of progress.

Tier 3: Individualised Support

- Provides individualised, specialised support for learners whose needs go beyond small-group (Tier 2) intervention, including those with intensive or complex learning support needs. Support will be informed by diagnostic assessment and formalised in an Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- Builds on and connects with the classroom teaching approach and the national curriculum, rich in knowledge, informed by the science of learning.
- Provides scaffolded, explicit teaching adapted in intensity, frequency, and delivery to align with the learner's individual profile, needs, and readiness.
- Focuses on progressing toward proficiency in essential curriculum-linked skills or outcomes through one-to-one teaching, or in an intensively supported setting designed to meet complex learning needs.
- Includes, where necessary, close collaboration between teachers, specialists, and whānau to support the learner's progress, engagement, and wellbeing.
- Includes, where necessary, targeted approaches to address barriers to learning and participation using evidence-based frameworks.
- Is informed and guided by formal and informal diagnostic assessment, with ongoing monitoring and regular, collaborative communication between families, teachers, and specialists to ensure support remains responsive to the learner's evolving needs. Outcomes are addressed through coordinated planning and reviewed over time.
- Includes planning for key transitions, such as moving between classes, schools, or levels of support, to ensure continuity, preserve progress, and reduce disruption for the learner.

Below are my reasons for suggesting these changes to the framework, each aimed at improving clarity, consistency, and inclusiveness for all learners, educators, and families."

Clear Expectations for Educators and Families

The descriptions used by the Ministry of Education come across broad or open to interpretation. Phrases like “may be more individualised” left too much room for variation in how schools interpreted and implemented support. While flexibility is important, the absence of clear definitions can result in inconsistent practice, misunderstandings with families, and confusion for classroom teachers who are already navigating major shifts in curriculum, literacy, numeracy and learning support delivery.

The updated language I’ve proposed aims to make expectations clearer for everyone, including teachers, learning support staff, parents, and whānau. By defining what each tier involves, who is typically responsible, and how it aligns with everyday teaching, we reduce ambiguity and foster shared understanding. This clarity is especially important in schools that are transitioning from older practices such as balanced literacy to more evidence-informed approaches like structured literacy and cumulative, diagnostic-based support.

From a trauma-informed and neuro-affirming lens, vague language can be unintentionally harmful. When families and teachers don’t know what support is available or how to access it, it creates uncertainty, frustration, and mistrust. These gaps can disproportionately affect learners with intensive and complex needs or those who’ve already experienced educational harm. Providing precise, compassionate, and strengths-based language is part of creating a safe, inclusive learning environment.

The changes also better align with national and international commitments, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and New Zealand’s own frameworks such as Te Tūāpapa o He Pīkoria and the UDL (Universal Design for Learning) principles. These frameworks call for education systems to be proactive, equitable, inclusive, and guided by the needs of the learner, not by assumptions, time limits, or funding eligibility.

I also appreciate the complexity of aligning multiple frameworks—national, international, and philosophical, while ensuring cohesion with the Ministry’s own approach. Balancing these perspectives is no easy task, especially when trying to meet the diverse needs of learners, schools, and communities. My hope is that the wording I’ve suggested offers a shared language that enables schools, teachers, parents, and educators to see the frameworks they value reflected within it. If we can make those

connections visible and meaningful, we not only promote clarity but also strengthen shared purpose, trust, and consistency across the entire sector.

In short, the language updates are designed to be practical, clear, and respectful. They support better communication across the whole system and reduce the risk of learners falling through the cracks because of unclear expectations or inconsistent delivery.

Replacing Ambiguous or Deficit-Based Language

Terms such as *“unique needs”*—while often well-intended, can be interpreted in deficit-focused or minimising ways. The word *“unique”* is highly subjective and can mean very different things depending on the context. For some agencies, it may signal rarity or exceptionality, implying that only a small number of students qualify for additional support. For others, it might be used more broadly to refer to any non-typical learning profile. In practice, however, this lack of clarity can lead to gatekeeping, inconsistency in resource allocation, and confusion about eligibility for support.

Families may hear the word *“unique”* and assume their child doesn’t qualify if their needs are considered *“too common,”* while educators may interpret it to mean *“too complex”* to be supported within a mainstream setting. To reduce these risks, the revised framework uses clearer and more inclusive terms such as *“intensive or complex learning support needs”*, which more accurately describe the level of instructional response required and allow a wider group of learners to be recognised and supported appropriately. This shift helps ensure schools can make timely, needs-based decisions that reflect the realities of classroom practice and the diversity of learners.

Rethinking the Use of 'Accelerated' Terminology

The word *“accelerated”* has been intentionally removed from this framework. While it features in Ministry initiatives such as ALL (Accelerated Learning in Literacy) and ALiM (Accelerated Learning in Mathematics), its continued use raises concerns. The term implies speed or urgency, rather than responsiveness to a learner’s individual needs. It carries historical associations with Reading Recovery, a programme many educators and parents have since questioned due to mixed outcomes and a mismatch with current research. For this reason alone, we should be cautious about retaining the term in today’s frameworks.

More importantly, *“acceleration”* can create unrealistic expectations, particularly for children recovering from trauma, or for those who are neurodivergent and may process, learn, or respond differently. It inadvertently promotes a time-limited or compliance driven model of support, rather than one that values deep, steady progress at the

learner's pace. From both a trauma-informed and neuro-affirming lens, this framing can be harmful.

While it's acknowledged that programmes like ALL and ALiM currently exist, this should not be a reason to embed the same language into updated tiered support frameworks. If these programmes are found, over time, to not be delivering the intended outcomes, or if their framing creates pressure or confusion in schools, then a shift in language may help pave the way for more effective, inclusive support.

Instead, the revised wording, *"teaching at a pace tailored to the learner's individual needs, to support the development and proficiency of key skills or learning outcomes"* is clearer, more practical, and better aligned with how teachers actually deliver support. It also closes the door on misinterpretation, ensuring that what's expected at each tier is developmentally appropriate and based on the learner's readiness, not a race to catch up.

Inclusive of Non-Academic Barriers

In Tier 2 and Tier 3, I added the phrase: "Includes, where necessary, targeted approaches to address barriers to learning and participation using evidence-based frameworks"

This acknowledges that learning is not just about academic instruction. Many students require targeted support in areas such as behaviour, emotional regulation, social skills, or trauma recovery, all of which impact their engagement and achievement. This wording creates space for schools to incorporate approaches such as trauma-informed practices, neuro-affirming support, or collaborative problem-solving (e.g., CPS by Dr. Ross Greene), without needing to list each one explicitly.

Making the Framework Usable by Parents and Whānau

Wording has been updated to be clear and inclusive. The goal is to ensure families understand their child's rights and what each tier of support provides. This helps parents participate more confidently in discussions about their child's learning and advocate effectively for the support their child needs. When families understand how the system works, they are better equipped to ask informed questions, recognise when additional help is needed, and work in partnership with educators. A shared understanding between home and school supports stronger, more coordinated outcomes for learners."

Including Learners Not Funded Under ORS

Many students with high instructional needs, such as those with severe dyslexia, severe dyscalculia, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), severe Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), low cognitive ability that does not meet the criteria for a diagnosis of

mild intellectual disability, or mild intellectual disability, do not meet the eligibility criteria for ORS (Ongoing Resourcing Scheme) funding. These students often require intensive and sustained teaching support due to significant learning barriers, even though their challenges are primarily educational in nature.

While the focus of this framework is on instructional need, we also acknowledge that when the right supports are not in place, behavioural responses may emerge that further impact learning and participation. These behaviours are often an expression of unmet need, rather than standalone issues.

The updated language in the framework uses the term 'intensive' to better reflect their needs. This acknowledges that these learners often experience persistent difficulties in literacy, numeracy, oral language, and executive functioning that affect their ability to engage with the curriculum independently. They may also need tailored planning, frequent monitoring, and highly scaffolded instruction across multiple years to make progress.

By highlighting instructional need rather than relying on clinical diagnoses or funding categories, the revised wording ensures this group is no longer overlooked. It promotes equitable access to support based on what the learner requires to succeed in education, not solely based on formal labels or medical criteria.

Support That Matches What Schools and Families Actually Need

This updated framework matches what really happens in schools and what families need to understand. It follows trusted international models like MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support) and RTI (Response to Intervention). These are systems that help schools provide the right level of support to each learner, starting with classroom teaching and adding more help if needed. The framework includes the things that make these systems work: good assessments (both formal and informal), teaching that is clearly explained and adjusted to each child, planning with families and teachers (like IEPs), regular checking to see what's working, and staying connected to the New Zealand curriculum.

It is also based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which is a way of teaching that gives all students different ways to access information, stay engaged, and show what they know.

The framework is neuroaffirming, meaning it supports children with conditions like ADHD, autism, or dyslexia in ways that are respectful, flexible, and focused on strengths — not just diagnosis or labels.

It is also trauma-informed, which means it takes into account how past experiences (like stress, bullying, or instability) can affect learning. Support under this model creates a safe, calm, and predictable environment where children feel understood and ready to learn.

This approach supports the rights of all learners, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). These global agreements say every child has the right to a good education that meets their needs and helps them fully take part in life and learning.

Finally, it is built on the principles of Te Tūāpapa o He Pikorua, the Ministry of Education's practice framework for learning support in Aotearoa. This means it encourages strong relationships between schools, families, and professionals. It also makes sure teaching is culturally respectful, focuses on strengths, and supports smooth transitions when a child moves between teachers, schools, or levels of support.

To the best of my knowledge, the updated Tiered Support Framework I have suggested brings together all of the key approaches that the Minister of Education and Ministry teams need to consider when planning for an inclusive and effective education system. It reflects current frameworks already recognised by the Ministry — including *Te Tūāpapa o He Pikorua*, U

niversal Design for Learning (UDL), trauma-informed practices, and international models like MTSS and RTI, while also upholding commitments under the United Nations Conventions.

That said, I fully acknowledge that the Ministry has expert teams who can explore this more deeply and confirm whether what I've proposed meets all formal criteria.

Preparing for the Future

Tier 3 demand is high due to years of ineffective practices and delayed interventions. Many students, particularly those in Years 4 to 8 and in secondary education, have significant gaps in their learning that were not addressed under previous models. These students will require intensive and sustained support. This is not a short-term situation: the need for Tier 3 intervention is expected to remain high for several years, not just

months.

While Structured Literacy and improved teaching practices are beginning to change outcomes, we must plan for a long transition period. The language in this framework reflects that reality emphasising urgency, fairness, and long-term resourcing to ensure these students are not left behind.

Flexibility for System Changes

No specific specialist roles are named in this framework. This is a deliberate choice, recognising that the Learning Support Delivery Model is undergoing changes and refinement. By keeping the language flexible, the framework remains relevant and adaptable as new roles emerge, or existing roles evolve. This approach avoids the need for constant updates and ensures the document continues to support collaboration between schools, whānau, and specialists, regardless of job titles. It also reflects the broader shifts occurring across the education system, where interdisciplinary support teams and localised approaches are becoming more common."

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