

# Closure of special-needs schools on review list

Labour dismayed that report on future of sector rules out any extra funding

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All special schools could be closed and special-needs children sent to regular schools with special units under options released yesterday as part of the review of special education.

Another of the options would keep the present system but give parents greater choice than they have now, with the ability to freely choose to send their child to a special school. Funding would follow the popular schools.

The overhaul of the special education sector moved a step closer yesterday with Associate Education Minister and Act MP Heather Roy releasing the options report and inviting feedback until March 19.

The Government spends about \$450 million a year on special education and is promising \$51 million more over the next four years for students with the highest needs.

Mrs Roy said there would be no more money other than that.

"The reality of the economic climate means we must look at how we can do things better with what we have."

She was aware that some schools were reluctant to welcome students with special needs but said she wanted to know how to help all schools and teachers feel confident to successfully teach and include every student.

"All students, including those with disabilities — have the same aspirations and rights.

"This means everyone should have the same opportunities to participate and to succeed at school."

Special students can have a physical impairment, a learning disability, hearing or vision disabilities.

About 30,000 children with high or very high needs get special education services directly or indirectly through the Ministry of Education each year.

Schools receive additional funding

## FOUR OPTIONS

- A. Keep status quo: A mix of educational options with special schools for some and regular schools for others.
- B. Closing all special schools and their satellites and boosting the ability of regular schools to educate all children regardless of need, and probably increasing the number of schools with special units.
- C. Turning special schools into resource centres and boosting the number of schools with special units. No residential special schools. Special school teachers would travel between regular schools.
- D. Present system but allowing parents to enrol children in a special school without needing approval of Ministry of Education. Popular special schools would attract more funding from other parts of special education funding.

to support the 40,000 to 60,000 children with more moderate needs.

Special education is delivered through a range of special schools, some residential, or special units in regular schools or in regular classrooms.

Labour special education spokesman Grant Robertson said he was disappointed the possibility of extra funding had been ruled out.

Increased funding was not the only answer but it should not be ruled out.

He said he hoped that Mrs Roy would not use the review to "push Act's ideological barrow about vouchers for education".

"The review must be about what works best for students to achieve their potential."