Key Messages: English language learners and special education needs

English language learners (ELLs) may have learning needs as well as the need to develop their English language skills and knowledge. Ministry of Education priority groups of learners include those with special education needs (SEN) as well as Pasifika and Māori learners. ELLs may be represented in all of these priority groups. The following have been identified as being effective practice to support ELLs with SEN.

• **Talk** with families to find out about the learner - this is a crucial first step. This dialogue must continue throughout the learner’s education. For ELLs, this may require the services of a professionally trained and trusted interpreter.
• **Look** at and gather information about what the learner can do - come from a strengths-based position. For ELLs this will include the learner’s existing strengths in languages, his/her cultural awareness and knowledge, his/her valuable prior experiences, including educational background.

**Issues to be aware of for ELLs**

• English language learning needs may mask other learning needs.
• SEN might be wrongly identified for ELLs.
• Relevant, accurate and appropriate information needs to be shared.
• Provision of support for ELLs who have learning needs requires robust collaboration across different fields.

**Recommendations**

• Have an agreed enrolment, assessment and placement procedure for ELLs and student learning support.
• Ensure that assessment of learner needs is an on-going process - be aware that ELLs are likely to need time to settle in so initial assessment needs to be regularly reviewed.
• Programmes for ELLs and SEN need to reflect the vision, policy and principles of The New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa.
• An Individualised Education Programme (IEP) [http://seonline.tki.org.nz/IEP](http://seonline.tki.org.nz/IEP) process is about writing students into The New Zealand Curriculum rather than writing students out. Individualised Language Programmes (ILP) or similar are sometimes created for ELLs e.g. [http://www.minedu.govt.nz/~/media/MinEdu/Files/EducationSectors/PrimarySecondary/SchoolOpsESOL/RefugeeHandbook/Section3.pdf](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/~/media/MinEdu/Files/EducationSectors/PrimarySecondary/SchoolOpsESOL/RefugeeHandbook/Section3.pdf). Include aspects of both. Involve families, interpreters, teachers, school leaders, SEN specialists and ESOL specialists.
• The wide ranging roles of the Learning Support HOD and ESOL HOD are significantly different and generally will be held by different people. It is important to ensure that adequate PLD and time for collaboration is provided.
• Teaching and learning for ELLs students with special educational needs is the responsibility of the teachers. Bilingual teacher aides can provide vital support for the teaching and learning programmes that the teachers create.
• Many bilingual, emerging ELLs are placed in low band classes at Year 9 and their potential is underestimated.