

# Individual Education Plan (IEP)

A guide for families

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LEARNING & WELLBEING

## What is it? An IEP is...

- > A teaching and learning plan for students with learning support needs.
- > Developed collaboratively by family and whānau, your child, your child's teacher and other educational professionals (i.e. SENCO, speech therapist, teacher aide, Ministry of Education representative).
- > A supplement (not replacement) to the class programme, explaining how the curriculum can be adapted to fit your child. **It prioritises your child's needs and the accommodations they require.**
- > Realistic and achievable: it includes goals for your child while they are at school, how they will be achieved, and who will be responsible for what.
- > Usually presented as a written plan, it is referred to and updated regularly as your child's needs and goals change.

## Who might have an IEP?

The learning support needs of many students can be met through school and class-wide strategies. IEPs are only used when additional teaching strategies are needed. Specifically, an IEP is required for students with a disability, learning or behavioural challenge when:

- Assessment suggests that optimal learning and teaching require differentiations within the curriculum.
- Adaptations to regular teaching strategies, or the school or classroom environment are required to overcome barriers to learning.
- Times of transition require extra attention regarding planning, teaching and learning.

## How does the IEP process work?

- > A team of people who are involved with your child are brought together to work collaboratively in planning an education programme that meets your child's needs.
- > Regular IEP meetings (ideally 2 to 4 per year) are held by the team to discuss, plan and review a few (3 to 5) realistic and achievable goals for your child. A written plan—the IEP—is produced as a result of the meetings.
- > The school normally sets the agenda and time for meetings, invites the team members, leads the meeting, and distributes copies of the IEP afterwards. However, any member of the team can request an IEP meeting and lead it if they want to.
- > A two-page IEP is ideal and more likely to be used. **Don't make it long or overwhelming!** It can include pictures, photos, and other visuals.
- > The process may look slightly different (and the IEP could even be called another name) depending on your child's school. For example, if your child attends a mainstream school where the current staff does not have much experience with IEPs, you might need to be more proactive in driving the process.

## An IEP summarises realistic and achievable goals for your child and might include the following:



A short profile of your child, such as their interests, hobbies, strengths and current support needs.



Who will work with your child and what they will do.



How the family can offer support at home.



The teaching strategies and accommodations that will be needed.



Any specific resources or special equipment that will be needed.



What success will look like, and a suggested timeframe for achieving the goals.



The next review meeting date.

## Helpful tips for families when preparing for the IEP meeting

- > Ensure you have a copy of the meeting agenda and know who else will be present.
- > Prepare any specific information that you need to contribute to the meeting.
- > Talk to other parents about the IEP process and what to expect.

- > **Be prepared to share information about your child during the meeting**—you could jot down some notes and take these with you to share verbally, or you could prepare a one-page profile of your child and take along copies to hand out. For example, describe their interests and hobbies, strengths and challenges, relationships with others, behaviour at home, and support needs.
- > Assess your child's current school and classroom life:
  - Consider any aspects that you and your child would like to **change** or **create some goals around**.
  - Talk to your child to **get their perspective** (very important!) and find out what they do and don't like about school.
  - Perhaps arrange to visit your child's classroom to observe your child during the school day, ask to see copies of your child's recent schoolwork and read your child's recent school reports.
- > Be prepared to discuss your expectations or goals for your child. If you have a **longer-term vision** or **vision plan** for your child, you could also share this at the meeting to ensure your short-term IEP goals support this longer-term vision.
- > Bring along any recent reports or evaluations done outside the school, if you think these will be helpful.
- > If you need support, arrange to take a support person with you to the meeting. **Clarify with them in advance what their role will be during the meeting** (i.e., to take notes for you, to sit quietly in support, to contribute to the meeting in specific circumstances).
- > Consider whether it is appropriate for your child to attend the IEP meeting. Some areas may be better discussed without your child present; if so, another option is to include your child for part of the meeting and/or discuss their views beforehand.
- > Read our article [Five top tips for advocating for your child's right to education](#) for further suggestions about navigating the school years with your child.



**Keep a file of all communication with the school with a record of dates.** Such records limit opportunities for misunderstandings, make it clear who has agreed to what, and will also help you remember past events or dates if needed.













## During the IEP meeting

All team members should have an opportunity to share their views and ideas during the meeting and feel that their contributions are valued and respected.

- > Record your own notes during the meeting (or ask your support person to do this). Ask for clarification if there is anything that you do not understand.
- > Share relevant information about your child and ask any questions that you may have prepared before the meeting.
- > Ensure the IEP is written specifically for your child and is not just a template used previously for another child.
- > The goals agreed upon should ideally be **SMART** goals that apply to the classroom and school setting. Namely, each goal is **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant/Realistic and Timebound**.
- > Ensure that all services, supports, accommodations and strategies that will be needed to implement your child's IEP in the classroom and school setting are written into the document.

**You do not need to make decisions on the spot.** Ask for time to think about things, or to discuss things further, if there is anything you are unsure or undecided about.

**The goals and language in an IEP should be positive, mana-enhancing and affirm your child's worth and identity.** They should respect and encourage your child to flourish according to their unique neurology and support needs. For example, if your child is autistic, an IEP should not be used to reduce 'autistic behaviours' but instead should involve modifications to the environment that help your child to thrive as their best autistic self.

 fixated	 deeply focused
 doesn't listen	 visual learner
 picky	 attention to detail
 inflexible	 likes routine
 slow to learn	 creative thinker
 no filter	 honest

## After the IEP meeting

- > A draft IEP should be circulated to all team members for any amendments, before finalisation.
- > Once finalised, the IEP is implemented! The agreed plan should be provided to all members of the team, and the goals and strategies described in the IEP should be embedded into school and classroom life.
- > If you do not receive a copy of the finalised IEP, please contact your child's school to ask for one, and agree on a timeframe for receiving it.

The IEP is a living, working document, and should be referred to, discussed, and updated regularly as your child's needs change.

**Easy to use:** Are the supports for my child simple, easy to use and flexible?

**Relationship building:** Is my child being supported to build relationships across various spaces?

**Mana enhancing:** Are my child's abilities and contributions being recognised and respected, so they develop a strong, positive identity and a sense of belonging?

## Questions to keep in mind throughout the IEP process:

**Self-determination:** Does my child have choice and control over the types/levels of supports, accommodations and adaptations they receive? Are their voice, needs and desires being heard and kept at the centre of all decisions and planning? Can they fully participate in their learning journey to achieve their highest potential and aspire towards creating a good, purposeful life?

**Beginning early:** Is my child being provided with support and services as soon as a need is identified?

**Person-centred:** Is the support tailored to my child's individual needs and goals?

**Ordinary life outcomes:** Is my child being given equal opportunity to participate? For example, in class, a school camp or a field trip.

**Mainstream first:** Is my child being supported to access mainstream services first, before supported disability services to ensure inclusion? For example, staying in a mainstream class versus a specialist class.

## Some example IEP goals:

What can I do currently?	Goal (next learning step)	Outcome (How will we know we have been successful?)	Strategies (How will we ensure success?)	Responsibility	Timing
<p>Matthew enjoys watching his peers play basketball at lunchtime. He is able to bounce a basketball.</p>	<p>Matthew is interested in learning to play basketball. He will learn the rules and skills of basketball and participate in basketball games at lunchtime with his peers.</p>	<p>Matthew will understand the rules of basketball and be able to join in basketball games at lunchtime with his peers, with or without support.</p>	<p>Teacher aide will use photos, books, YouTube clips and other visuals to teach Matthew the basketball rules. Teacher aide will offer to practise ball skills with Matthew daily during sensory breaks.</p> <p>Classroom teacher will focus on ball skills and basketball for class PE sessions, pairing other students to work with Matthew during this time, only providing support if needed.</p>	<p>Classroom teacher and teacher aide.</p>	<p>Opportunity to practise ball skills daily in sensory breaks and weekly during PE lessons during term 1.</p>
<p>Eva uses some basic signs and phrases in NZSL.</p>	<p>Eva will continue to develop her ability to use NZSL.</p>	<p>Eva will be able to use new signs and phrases each term.</p> <p>Eva will express her basic needs through NZSL (e.g., hunger, thirst, tiredness, saying no; when wanting to use the bathroom, go outside or play).</p>	<p>Adults around Eva will model NZSL in their interactions with her.</p> <p>Eva will have 1-1 sessions daily with her teacher aide, who will sign with her or read her books in NZSL.</p> <p>NZSL will be used regularly in the classroom—for example, the teacher will show books accompanied by sign language to the class via video.</p>	<p>Teacher aide and teachers.</p> <p>Parents will also use NZSL at home at routine times during the day.</p>	<p>Daily sessions with teacher aide.</p> <p>Daily at home with parents.</p> <p>Keep a list of signs Eva can use and update weekly.</p>

What can I do currently?	Goal (next learning step)	Outcome (How will we know we have been successful?)	Strategies (How will we ensure success?)	Responsibility	Timing
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<p>Faye occasionally uses fidget toys at home when feeling overwhelmed, often at her parents' suggestion.</p>	<p>Faye will learn about sensory overload/feelings of overwhelm and feel confident to use sensory toys or her pass notes to leave class when needed.</p>	<p>Faye will be able to use sensory toys or pass notes to excuse herself from class for a sensory break when needed, or with reminders from her teacher or teacher aide.</p>	<p>SENCO will provide pass notes for Faye and sensory toys for use in class. Calm, quiet spaces within the school will be designated (library, breakout room), and a plan agreed upon with relevant staff for Faye to attend these spaces when she needs to use her pass note.</p> <p>SENCO and teacher aide will use visuals/books to discuss with Faye feelings of overwhelm.</p> <p>Teacher aide will help Faye recognise when she is getting overwhelmed in class and remind her of pass notes/sensory toys.</p> <p>Teacher will run a whole-class programme on recognising feelings/emotions.</p>	<p>Class teacher, teacher aide and SENCO.</p> <p>Parents will also discuss this at home.</p>	<p>Weekly class learning programme and reminders for Faye to use pass notes at school during term 1.</p> <p>Regular discussions with parents at home.</p>
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<p>Thomas knows he needs to brush his teeth daily. He is supported to do this.</p>	<p>Thomas will learn about teeth hygiene and how to brush his teeth independently.</p>	<p>Thomas will understand the steps involved and equipment needed to brush his teeth. He will be able to complete the steps involved in brushing his teeth independently or with limited support.</p>	<p>Teacher aide will provide a social story and visual schedule of the steps involved and role model the steps. Toothbrush, toothpaste, facecloth and a small toilet bag will be kept at school (parents to purchase and send to school).</p> <p>Copies of the visuals used will be made for use at home.</p>	<p>Teacher aide.</p> <p>Parents will also follow the same visuals at home.</p>	<p>Daily at school during term 1.</p> <p>Mornings and evenings at home.</p>
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What can I do currently?	Goal (next learning step)	Outcome (How will we know we have been successful?)	Strategies (How will we ensure success?)	Responsibility	Timing
<p>Zoe writes 1-2 sentences during writing time. She needs help understanding and processing the teacher's instructions.</p>	<p>Zoe will be able to understand, follow and query instructions during writing time, writing up to 4-5 sentences during each writing session.</p>	<p>With the support of appropriate technology and her teacher aide, Zoe will hear and understand the instructions for each writing session. She will be comfortable to ask questions if she is unsure. She will be able to write up to 4 -5 sentences during each session on topics that interest her.</p>	<p>SENCO will organise a personal FM system for Zoe to use in class and show her how to use it.</p> <p>Teacher will write instructions for the writing session on the whiteboard and check in with students at their groups of desks to ensure instructions are understood, giving them time to ask questions if needed (this benefits the whole class).</p> <p>Teacher aide will offer extra support to Zoe during writing time— asking her directly if she understands the instructions, encouraging her to ask questions, adapting instructions as needed and prompting Zoe to remain on task. Zoe will be given a small card with a question mark on it, which she can pass to her teacher or teacher aide to indicate she needs to ask a question/needs additional support.</p> <p>Classroom writing topics may be adapted to appeal to Zoe's specific interests, such as choosing her own topic, writing for the special people in her life (a letter to her Nana, a short story for her younger sister), writing about her particular interest (The Titanic movie).</p>	<p>Class teacher, teacher aide and SENCO.</p>	<p>Writing sessions during term 1.</p>



## IEPs in Action – an overview

### Do your Prep!

Talk to your child/consider your long-term vision/think about your child's strengths and the next steps.

**IEP meeting: Discuss goals, needs and accommodations**

### Goals should be SMART!

Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant/Realistic, Timebound

### Check your language!

Positive. Mana-enhancing. Affirming.

**Agree, finalise and implement IEP!**

"My husband and I felt unsure about what we could ask the school for. What adaptations were reasonable to expect from them so our son could bear to be at school? It wasn't until we talked to someone who works for the MoE and they outlined our child's rights within education that we felt comfortable that we had every right to ask the school to adapt." [For further info on rights, click [here](#).]

"I didn't realise that we even had an IEP! Instead, it was called a learning meeting. I wish I had known so I could have tried to understand more what an IEP was and had the chance to prepare a goal or two for our son rather than talking only about his struggles. I would have thought more about what to say to the teacher and tried to be collaborative. For example, when the teacher was getting defensive at the suggestions the LSC was giving on changes to her teaching, I think it would have been good to pause and change from telling the teacher what to do, to asking her what she thought would work. I would have liked to have calmly asked, 'When instructions are given to the class, what do you think would help my son to be able to understand these?' or, 'What do you think would assist my son to write more than one sentence in two days of work?'"



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