



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION NEW ZEALAND

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga Aotearoa



**Learning More about
Support Staff in Schools:
Results from Surveys of Principals and
Support Staff Members**

Research Division
Ministry of Education

Published by:
Research & Evaluation Unit
Research Division
Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666
Wellington
New Zealand

ISBN: 978-0-478-38603-5

ISBN: 978-0-478-38604-2 (web)

RMR: 984

© Ministry of Education, New Zealand 2011

Research reports are available on the Ministry of Education's website Education Counts:
www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications.

Opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily coincide with those of the Ministry of Education.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to all of the principals and support staff who made time in their busy schedules to take part in our surveys and provide the information and insights on which this report depended.

Thank you too to members of the Support Staff Working Group who took the lead in developing the questions included in the surveys and provided helpful feedback on this report, and to Lydia Berlad for her careful work with entering the data and categorising open-ended responses. Thank you also to Research Division colleagues — Sharon Cox and Megan Lee for help with SurveyMonkey, a very large mail-out, and sample and analysis matters, Heleen Visser and Melissa Weenink for commenting on survey questions and for other feedback, and to Christabel Dillon for her usual care in the layout and design work for this report.

Shelley Kennedy
Research Division

Contents

Report Overview	1
Report Outline.....	3
A Note about Reading/Using this Report	3
Highlight Findings	5
Support Staff Responsibilities	5
Positive Views and Experiences of and about Support Staff Roles	6
Issues, Concerns, Challenges	7
Addressing Issues and Concerns: Participant Suggestions and Positive Practices.....	9
Some Concluding Comments	10
Chapter One: Introduction.....	11
The Support Staff Working Group's Programme of Work	11
Purpose of the Present Report	12
Chapter Two: The Study	13
Principal Survey.....	14
Support Staff Survey and Participant Demographics.....	14
Type of Support Staff Position Held	14
Employment Status	15
Hours of Work	15
Length of Employment in a Support Staff Role	16
Qualifications held by Support Staff	17
Limitations of the Study.....	17
Chapter Three: How Support Staff Contribute to Schools' Ability to Operate Efficiently and Effectively — Support Staff Perspectives.....	19
Contributions to School Effectiveness by Administrative/ Executive Staff.....	20
Contributions to School Effectiveness by Teacher Aides with a Focus on Students with Assessed Special Education Needs	22
Contributions to School Effectiveness by Teacher Aides with a Focus on General Teacher or Classroom Support	24
Contributions to School Effectiveness by Specialist Support Staff.....	27
Librarians	27
Science and Other Technicians	28
IT Support	29
Contributions to School Effectiveness by Student/Whānau Support Staff	30
Contributions to School Effectiveness by those in Combined Support Staff Positions.....	31
Contributions to School Effectiveness by those in 'Other' Support Staff Positions	32
Summary Comments	34

Chapter Four: How Support Staff Contribute to Schools' Ability to Achieve Good Learning Outcomes for Students.....	35
Contributions to Achieving Good Student Learning Outcomes by Administrative/Executive Staff	36
Contributions to Achieving Good Student Learning Outcomes by Teacher aides with a Focus on Students with Assessed Special Education Needs	38
Contributions to Achieving Good Student Learning Outcomes by Teacher aides with a Focus on General Teacher and Classroom Support	41
Contributions to Achieving Good Student Learning Outcomes by Specialist Support Staff	43
Librarians	43
Science and Other Technicians/IT Support.....	44
Contributions to Achieving Good Student Learning Outcomes by those in Student and Whānau Support, Combined, and 'Other' Support Staff Positions.....	45
Summary Comments	46
Chapter Five: Best Things about their Positions: The Views and Experiences of Support Staff	47
Satisfaction from Seeing Positive Results of their Work with Students	48
Working Collaboratively; being a Valued Member of the Team	50
The Variety and Challenges of the Role	51
Interacting with Children/Young People	53
Being Trusted and Appreciated for their Contributions	54
Conditions of Work	55
The Positive and Supportive Environment within the School.....	57
Meeting and Helping a Diverse Range of People	58
Making a Positive Difference within the School	59
Summary Comments	60
Chapter Six: More on Support Staff in Relation to Student Learning Outcomes: Principal and Support Staff Perspectives.....	61
Principal Views on whether Support Staff were Being Used in the Best Ways to Achieve Optimal Learning Outcomes for Students	61
Principals Commenting on Support Staff (other than Teacher Aides)	61
Principals Commenting on Teacher Aides	66
Support Staff Views on whether their School Could Better Use them to Help Achieve Good Learning Outcomes for Students	68
Summary Comments	69
Chapter Seven: Challenges in Relation to Support Staff: Principal Perspectives	71
Funding.....	72
The Supply and Take-up of Professional Development Opportunities for Support Staff.....	74
Support Staff Adapting to Changes within the Role/School	75
Effective Communication about Roles and Responsibilities	76
Time to Adequately Work with Support Staff	77
Recruitment and Retention	78
Principal Views on the Biggest Challenges Typically Faced by Support Staff	79
Challenges Faced by Teacher Aides According to Principals	79
Challenges Faced by Support Staff (other than Teacher Aides) According to Principals.....	80
Summary Comments	81

Chapter Eight: Support Staff Perspectives on Aspects of their Work and Conditions	83
Induction; Role Definition; Appraisals, Guidance, Support and Mentoring; Communication; Involvement in Planning; Professional Development	84
Induction.....	84
Job Descriptions, Appraisals, Formal Discussion of Goals for Development	84
Meetings for Guidance, Support and Mentoring	85
Being Kept Well Informed about what was Happening in the School	86
Involvement in School Planning	86
Opportunities to Develop Skills in the Job	88
Particular Challenges of their Position	88
Support Staff Perspectives on the Issue of Funding.....	89
Summary Comments	93
Chapter Nine: Reflecting on the Roles of Teacher Aides — Principal and Teacher Aide Perspectives	95
Deciding on the Key Role that Teacher Aides should Play in the School	96
Planning for Effectively Including Teacher Aide Input.....	97
Induction for Teacher Aides	97
Targeting the Work of Teacher Aides	99
Including Teacher Aides in Professional Discussions Regarding Student Learning Needs	99
Teachers and Teacher Aides	100
Supporting the Work of Teacher Aides with Appropriate Resources or Time for Planning	102
Targeted, Timely Professional Development Opportunities for Teacher Aides	103
Regular Feedback and Support for Teacher Aides	104
Continuity of Work with Students	106
Funding Matters for Teacher Aides.....	107
Summary Comments	108
Chapter Ten: Support Staff Suggestions on How Schools Could Better Use their Input and Minimise Issues and Concerns.....	109
Facilitate Clear Understandings within the School of Different Roles and Contributions; Foster a Culture of Cooperation and Support.....	110
Include Support Staff in School or Departmental Planning	115
Better Understand and Use Support Staff Skills and Experience	116
Include Support Staff in Professional Discussions and Information Sharing Sessions	117
Allow More Time to Accomplish Given work	118
Increase Relevant Professional Development Opportunities	119
Schedule Formalised Feedback and Support Meetings.....	119
Provide Sufficient Resources for the Role	119
Other Feedback	120
Address Gaps in Induction of New Support Staff.....	120
Suggestions for Providing Information and Support for Support Staff New to their Positions.....	121
Enhance Communication.....	123
Summary Statements	125
Chapter Eleven: Planned Changes in Participating Schools in How Support Staff were Used.....	127
Changes being Made to How Teacher Aides were Used: Principals' Commentary.....	127
Changes being Made to How Support Staff (other than Teacher Aides) were Used: Principals' Commentary.....	129

Support Staff Feedback on Steps being Taken in their Schools to Change the Way they Worked	131
Summary Comments	134

Chapter Twelve: Some Concluding Comments 135

List of Tables

Table 1: Positions held by participating support staff	15
Table 2: The number of hours support staff were employed per week	15
Table 3: Length of experience in a support staff role among survey participants.....	16
Table 4: Qualifications held by participating support staff	17
Table 5: Best things about their positions mentioned by support staff	48
Table 6: Principals' views on extent to which support staff (other than teacher aides) were being used in the best ways to achieve optimal student learning outcomes	62
Table 7: Principals' views on extent to which teacher aides were being used in the best ways to achieve optimal student learning outcomes	66
Table 8: Support staff views on whether their schools could make better use of them to achieve good learning outcomes for students	68
Table 9: How helpful support staff found information and support received when they began their positions	84
Table 10: Whether support staff had up-to-date job descriptions.....	84
Table 11: Whether support staff had regular appraisals/performance reviews	84
Table 12: Whether support staff had the opportunity, at least once a year, to formally discuss goals for their development and contribution to the school.....	85
Table 13: Whether support staff had regular meetings with more senior staff to discuss their work and solve problems	85
Table 14: Whether the school did a good job of keeping support staff well informed and up-to-date about things happening in the school.....	86
Table 15: Extent to which support staff were involved when school leaders and teaching staff planned for the year/term ahead?	86
Table 16: Challenges of their positions mentioned by support staff.....	89

Report Overview

Surveys of principals and support staff in a random sample of schools were conducted in late 2010. Data from the surveys showed that among both participating principals and support staff members there was considerable overall satisfaction regarding the work and roles of support staff members in New Zealand schools. There were many very positive views expressed about the contributions that support staff make to the day-to-day running of the school and to achieving good learning outcomes for students, and about what it is like to work in a support staff position within a school.

However, at the same time, helpful information was obtained which indicates where issues and concerns in relation to support staff may be most likely to occur. Participants' feedback yielded suggestions for steps that schools and others could consider when seeking to address identified issues or concerns, and when wishing to capitalise more effectively on the potential of support staff members to further help schools improve learning outcomes for students.

Report Outline

This report complements the May 2011 report *School Support Staff: Collectively Making Resources Count* produced by the Support Staff Working Group. The Working Group was established as a shared initiative between the New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA), the New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa (NZEI) and the Ministry of Education. Its aim was to gain knowledge and understanding regarding support staff in schools.

The findings have been presented so as to showcase the on-the-job experiences and views of support staff in a variety of roles. As much as possible, this has been done using the participants' own words. Principal views on the contributions made by support staff in schools are also discussed.

In broad terms, the present report contains the following:

- § 'Highlight Findings' — a summary overview of key findings from the surveys of principals and support staff;
- § a description of the study: its purpose, participants, and what led to the study;
- § support staff accounts of what they do to help their school operate effectively and efficiently, and to achieve good learning outcomes for students;
- § support staff views on the 'best things' about their positions;
- § principals' views on support staff, including perspectives on the extent to which support staff were being used in the best ways in their school to support leadership and teaching staff achieve optimal learning outcomes for students;
- § challenges identified by principals in ensuring that support staff are used in ways that best support teaching and leadership staff to achieve optimal learning outcomes for students;
- § issues, concerns and challenges associated with their roles and responsibilities identified by support staff overall;
- § issues, concerns and challenges specifically in relation to teacher aides from the perspectives of both principals and teacher aides;
- § suggestions for positive change offered by participants.

A Note about Reading/Using this Report

The 'Highlight Findings', on pages 5 to 10, are intended as a self-contained summary of the key findings from the surveys of principals and support staff. Following a description of the study and what led to it in Chapters One and Two, Chapters Three to Eleven present the evidence on which the key findings are derived, and may be dipped into or read in their entirety as required.

Highlight Findings

"I think every position in the school, regardless of what that job is, adds to the success of the school and therefore learning outcomes for the students as a whole. It is a team effort."

Executive officer (secondary school)

"They are all valuable staff members and are willing to support everyone."

Principal (primary school)

Key findings from the surveys of principals and support staff members are listed below under relevant headings.

Support Staff Responsibilities

§ Support staff in schools carry out a very wide range of tasks and responsibilities on a daily basis. These include:

- administrative and financial tasks;
- providing direct back-up support for principals and other leadership staff;
- being a 'welcoming face' for all parents and visitors to the school;
- helping prepare school newsletters and notices and maintaining the school website;
- ensuring provision of resources for use in the classroom;
- developing and maintaining assessment and attendance databases and IT systems and procedures;
- ensuring that the school facilities are in good order.

Support staff also:

- handle a great variety of student enquiries and requests;
- provide support and back-up for students and teachers both in the classroom and in the school as a whole;
- maintain well-functioning library and information retrieval systems;
- ensure that science laboratories and other practicum learning areas within the school are safe and appropriately set-up and resourced for each teaching-learning situation.

As well, support staff:

- care for students when they are unwell;
- administer first aid;
- reinforce a school's policies and procedures for behaviour;
- follow-up on students who are absent from school;
- provide a link between students, parents and teaching staff;
- encourage and support students in extra-curricular achievements through sports and other activities;
- provide careers advice and guidance, including arranging for students to have real-life work experience;
- take responsibility for specialised projects, according to particular needs or priorities nominated by the school.

Positive Views and Experiences of and about Support Staff Roles

§ Overall, among survey participants, there was a high level of positivity expressed about the work, roles and responsibilities of support staff in schools, from both principals and support staff members themselves.

§ Key reasons given by **support staff** for feeling positive about their roles included:

- being able to work with and support students in their learning and achievement and in other aspects of their lives;
- being able to work with and support the work of teachers and school leadership staff;
- enjoying the variety and daily challenges that are integral to a school environment;
- being a valued member of the school's staff and respected for their particular contributions;
- enjoying the interaction with a wide variety of people;
- having paid employment with conditions of work that fitted well with other demands in their lives — for example, being able to work part-time, having school holidays free to spend with their families, having some flexibility in when they worked their allocated hours during a week, having a position that was close to home;
- the satisfaction that comes from making a difference within their school and community.

§ In the case of **principals**, reasons for being positive about their support staff included:

- that support staff carried out duties and responsibilities crucial to the smooth running of a school that would otherwise have to be undertaken by leadership staff and teachers, taking them away from their primary teaching and learning responsibilities within the school;

- that support staff frequently demonstrated that they had the best interests of the school and its community at heart, often ‘going beyond the call of duty’ in terms of extra hours worked, tackling additional tasks beyond the scope of their immediate positions, and willingness to take part in the wider life of the school;
- the valuable skills, attributes and personal qualities that many support staff possess, especially their ability to be flexible and adaptable, multi-task, problem-solve, and be proactive;
- that support staff who worked with teachers and students in teaching and learning contexts provided essential support that facilitated improved learning and other outcomes for students.

Issues, Concerns, Challenges

§ Despite the high level of positivity overall, both principals and support staff expressed a range of issues, concerns and challenges to do with the work, responsibilities, contributions and management or supervision of support staff in general.

§ **Issues, concerns or challenges most often identified by principals** were:

- not being able to employ support staff for sufficient hours to enable them to take on all required duties, undertake certain duties to the desired level, attend whole school staff meetings held after school, or to have paid planning time;
- not being able to remunerate support staff at an acceptable level that reflected their skills and expertise, qualifications and commitment;
- finding that some support staff were unwilling to change to meet changing school needs;
- difficulties in ensuring enough time to provide regular, systematic mentoring and support for support staff rather than the more ad hoc approach which often predominated;
- difficulties in ensuring appropriate training or professional development opportunities for some support staff when required;
- inconsistencies in how teaching staff worked with support staff;
- insufficient preparation by (some) teaching and other staff in the school for effectively including support staff;
- a lack of appreciation being shown at times for the contributions or potential contributions of support staff.

§ **Issues and challenges identified by support staff across all types of positions:** in general, between a fifth and just over a quarter of participants identified various matters to do with their current role that were of concern for them. Two key ones were:

- the school not making best use of them to help achieve good learning outcomes for students;

- workload issues — including too many competing demands which interfered with ability to effectively complete tasks, lack of time to tackle the amount of work and/or insufficient back-up (ie, not enough support staff colleagues to help).

Other main issues and concerns for support staff included:

- their ideas not being sought or listened to, and/or not being included in departmental or wider school staff planning meetings so they could contribute ideas, experiences;
- insufficient training or professional development opportunities that were targeted to their work;
- being left outside the communication networks in the school;
- irregular and/or inadequate support and mentoring and insufficient feedback from leadership staff or the teachers they worked with;
- lack of induction (information and support) or insufficient induction when first beginning their position and in the following weeks or months;
- not being sufficiently valued in the school as a support staff member;
- their particular skills and attributes being under-used;
- being employed for insufficient or variable hours per week — which, depending on individual circumstances, represented a personal financial or sense of security issue, or was a source of frustration or concern when unable to provide more input for students who needed it, or to complete or tackle all the tasks that they knew needed to be done.

And for 17 percent or more of support staff participants, an underlying issue — even among those who expressed many positive views about their position, including the satisfaction that came from doing worthwhile work — was that of low rates of pay, especially in light of their level of input, and, in some cases, their particular skills and qualifications.

§ **Issues and challenges in relation to teacher aides:** there was evidence from both principals and teacher aides themselves that there were sometimes particular issues in relation to teacher aides and their roles and responsibilities. These included:

- ‘philosophical’ differences in how teacher aides could or should be best used in schools and classrooms — for example, whether teacher aides are primarily to support (individual or small groups of) students, or to support a teacher’s work with the class as a whole;
- difficulties in working relationships with teachers, including teachers not preparing for the inclusion of teacher aide input into their programmes, or not communicating adequately with teacher aides about learning goals for the class as a whole and/or for individual students being worked with. Such difficulties could make it difficult for a teacher aide to know how to contribute. It also led to teacher aides sometimes being under-utilised in the classroom, or to a lack of recognition or appreciation of teacher aide contributions;

- teacher aides not being included in planning meetings (eg, Individual Education Plan — IEP — meetings) regarding the needs of individual students that they are assigned to, making it more difficult to know how best to work with the student;
- teacher aides not having (paid) time for lesson planning or preparing resources;
- uncertainty about hours of work, and how long they would be employed for, especially when funding for a teacher aide's hours of work is linked to a specific student and 'lost' to a school if the student moves to another school;
- teacher aides being asked to work with different students with assessed special needs at short notice, giving little or no time to prepare for the change;
- teacher aides being thrown in at the deep end with some students — that is, finding themselves in a situation where they feel they do not have adequate knowledge, skills, or experience to effectively address a student's needs, especially when that student's behaviour is very challenging.

Addressing Issues and Concerns: Participant Suggestions and Positive Practices

§ From the feedback provided by **principals**, suggested 'best practice' for schools as employers of support staff included:

- fostering a spirit of cooperation, support, and respect within the school, in which all roles are recognised, understood, and valued;
- purposefully addressing, in all school-wide planning activities, how the input of support staff would be incorporated;
- streamlining and regularly reviewing support staff, and all, positions in the school to ensure that they complement each other effectively;
- providing targeted professional development opportunities as much as possible, especially for teacher aides new to their positions and for staff who need to keep up with technological advances for efficient school systems, for example;
- in the absence of readily available external professional development opportunities, ensuring that support staff are able to receive support, mentoring and feedback from appropriate staff in the school on a regular basis;
- ensuring that staff (teachers, support staff and others) are prepared and supported to work together effectively, and supported to adapt to necessary changes in systems and approaches within the school.

§ **Support staff** themselves made suggestions directly related to the issues and challenges they had experienced in their positions. Closely paralleling the recommendations made by principals, their suggestions for how schools could facilitate best use of them and other support staff included:

- developing a clearer understanding of the tasks and responsibilities carried out by support staff;
- promoting a culture of inclusiveness within the school so that all roles are recognised and valued;

- facilitating effective working relationships between support staff and teachers and leadership staff through appropriate systems and processes;
- inviting support staff participation and input in planning meetings and professional learning discussions, especially those that directly impact on their work;
- gaining a better knowledge of the skills and experience that support staff possess with a view to using their input more effectively;
- formalising processes to ensure that support staff receive regular and effective feedback on progress, and can receive support or further training as required;
- ensuring that support staff, particularly those who work part-time, are kept up-to-date with new information in the school and are not left out of the information loop (some participants however emphasised that this was very much a joint responsibility, with a need for support staff to also be proactive about keeping themselves well informed);
- providing more substantive induction for new support staff, particularly those new to working in a school environment;
- rationalising tasks and duties where possible to reduce the workload burden on many support staff.

Some Concluding Comments

Results of the surveys of principals and support staff simultaneously indicate high levels of overall positivity by and about support staff in schools and the work that they do, and emphasise the importance of conclusions arrived at by the Support Staff Working Group in Phases One and Two of their programme of work.

The Working Group's conclusions, which form the basis of the Recommendations presented in their report *School Support Staff: Collectively Making Resources Count* (May, 2011)¹, included a need to pay particular attention to the factors listed below, to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of support staff and help schools achieve optimal learning outcomes for students. The factors are:

§ role definition;

§ induction and training of support staff;

§ provision of guidance, feedback, support and mentoring; and, above all,

§ the nature and quality of working relationships between different staff — ie, teamwork and culture within the school.

¹ This report can be viewed online at the Educational Leaders website:

www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/Managing-your-school/School-support-staff

Information about the report and the Support Staff Working Group can also be found on the following websites:

www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/Schools/PublicationsAndResources/SupportstaffWorkforceStrategy.aspx

www.nzei.org.nz/Support+Staff/Workforce+Strategy.html

www.nzsta.org.nz/board-as-employers/employment-conditions/support-staff/support-staff-workforce-strategy

Chapter One: Introduction

Support staff are employed by boards to deliver effective and efficient support services for teaching and learning and the day to day running of schools. Their work contributes to education services equipping all students with knowledge, competencies and values to be successful citizens in the 21st century.²

There are close to 22,000 support staff in New Zealand schools, around 30 percent of the total school workforce.^{3,4}

In August 2009, a Support Staff Working Group was established. This was a shared initiative between the New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA), the New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa (NZEI), and the Ministry of Education.⁵

Using a process of research and consultation, the tripartite Working Group undertook a programme of work which sought to:

- § ‘identify and assess whether there are potential workforce issues which are seen to hinder the effective use of support staff [in schools]’;
- § ‘identify attainable workforce change initiatives that will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of [this] support staff workforce’.

The Support Staff Working Group’s Programme of Work

Research in the first phase of the Working Group’s programme of work largely consisted of a review of workforce data available from the Teacher Payroll Datawarehouse, the Department of Labour and the Census, and relevant literature of workplace productivity and some international research literature on non-teaching staff in schools. On the basis of this research and related activities, the Working Party concluded that:

‘...school systems and practices needed to enable leaders, teachers and support staff to “collectively make resources count: to optimise student learning outcomes”.’⁶

² As stated in the Terms of Reference for the Support Staff Working Group, reproduced in Appendix 2 of its Phase Two report, *School Support Staff: Collectively Making Resources Count*, May 2011 (p.40).

³ The Ministry payroll snapshot (April 2009) indicated that there were 21,769 support staff (ie, headcount rather than full-time equivalents) in New Zealand schools; the equivalent figure for teachers, as stated on the Ministry’s Education Counts website, was 51,974.

⁴ Support staff are funded through the Operational Grant to schools. The Support Staff in Schools Collective Agreement sets out minimum rates that must be paid to support staff. Schools can choose to pay above those rates.

⁵ More about the establishment of the Support Staff Working Group, its membership, terms of reference and findings can be found through the following weblinks:

www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/Schools/PublicationsAndResources/SupportstaffWorkforceStrategy.aspx
www.nzei.org.nz/Support+Staff/Workforce+Strategy.html
www.nzsta.org.nz/board-as-employers/employment-conditions/support-staff/support-staff-workforce-strategy

The systems and practices that the Working Group identified as being important in relation to support (and all staff included 'induction and training', 'role definition, guidance, support and mentoring', and 'teamwork and culture'.

The Working Group also concluded at the end of their Phase One work that little data were currently available on these and other key practices in schools for support staff, and that little was known about the work-related experiences of support staff or even about the nature of the support staff workforce. The Working Group therefore proposed that Phase Two of their programme of work would consist of research 'to provide better information on the basis of which judgements about possible strategies to enhance the productivity of the workforce' could be made.⁷

The Support Staff Working Group's proposal for research resulted in the Ministry's Research Division overseeing two separate but parallel surveys, one involving principals and the other support staff members, on behalf of the Working Group. (These surveys, which also form the basis of the present report, are described in greater detail on pp.13–14.) The research was also the impetus for a second (Phase Two) Working Group report, the purpose of which was to be '...centrally about the characteristics of support staff in New Zealand schools and about management capability and practices in schools with respect to the employment of support staff.'⁸

The information obtained in the Working Group's Phase Two report — *School Support Staff: Collectively Making Resources Count* (May 2011 — is primarily derived from the data collected through the surveys of principals and support staff referred to above. In addition, the Phase Two report contains information from seven case studies commissioned by the Working Party to showcase selected schools' good practice in relation to their support staff.⁹ These sources of information, together with what was learned during Phase One, collectively form the basis for a set of recommendations for future action, aimed at improving how efficiently and effectively support staff are used in schools. These recommendations, put forward by the Working Group, are presented on page 6 of *School Support Staff: Collectively Making Resources Count*.

Purpose of the Present Report

The purpose of the present report is to complement the Working Group's Phase Two report, *School Support Staff: Collectively Making Resources Count*, by presenting findings from the surveys in such a way as to showcase — as much as possible in the participants' own words — the on-the-job experiences of support staff in a variety of roles in New Zealand schools. The report also provides further insights into the views of both principals and support staff members about how, when, or if consideration should be given to improving systems, practices, attitudes and beliefs concerning the best use of the skills and abilities of school support staff.

Because relatively little information is otherwise available on the views and experiences of support staff in schools, the report has a predominant focus on the responses provided by support staff participants. Principal responses are then discussed to provide a broader commentary, especially in relation to the contributions made by support staff in schools, and to the issues and challenges that can arise in managing and deploying support staff.

⁶ The Working Group's *Phase One Report* can be viewed on the websites of the Ministry of Education, NZEI Te Riu Roa and NZSTA as detailed in the previous footnote.

⁷ This is from page 9 of the Support Staff Working Group's Phase Two report, *School Support Staff: Collectively Making Resources Count*, May 2011. This report can be viewed online at:
www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Managing-your-school/School-support-staff

⁸ As stated on page iii of the Working Group's Phase Two report referred to above.

⁹ The case studies can be found at the Educational Leaders website address given above in footnote 7 in relation to the Working Group's Phase Two report.

Chapter Two: The Study

Surveys of principals and support staff members were conducted in a randomly selected sample¹⁰ of 250 New Zealand primary and secondary schools in October and November 2010.

The support staff survey sought demographic information from participants (eg, type of position held, hours worked per week, qualifications held, length of experience as a support staff member). It also sought information about what they thought and felt about their current position, including best aspects of the job and biggest challenges. Support staff were asked too how they felt they contributed to the overall running of the school and, more specifically, to the school being able to achieve good learning outcomes for students.

Principals were asked for their views on whether support staff were being well used in their school, about the challenges facing support staff, and what they considered would most help them in the management of support staff.

Both support staff and principals were also asked about systems and processes in the school related to the management of support staff, particularly: recruitment; job descriptions; induction; performance appraisals; development plans; and professional development and learning.

The principals of all schools selected to take part in the survey were initially sent an email late in term 3 of the 2010 school year telling them about the project and to ask them to participate by completing the online survey form¹¹ for principals. They were also advised about the upcoming survey of support staff in their schools, which would occur in the second week of the fourth school term.

A subsequent reminder letter to principals who had not yet responded offered the option of completing and mailing back a paper copy of the survey form in case they preferred that over the on-line participation option. The majority of those who responded chose the 'hard copy' option (sometimes because they had experienced technical problems with the online survey).

With the exception of one school which indicated from the outset that it did not wish to take part in the surveys, a package of survey forms for support staff members was mailed out to all schools selected to take part in the study. The number of survey forms for each school varied according to the information available¹² on how many support staff were currently employed in that school. A covering letter to the principal asked that the survey forms be distributed to all support staff within the school. As for the principals, support staff were given the option of responding either online or by completing and returning a paper copy.

¹⁰ While schools/principals were randomly selected to take part in the study, the sampling processes employed meant that selected schools were representative of schools across New Zealand for the key variables of size, location, and decile. The exception is that kura and Māori immersion schools have not been included in the present survey. It was felt that these schools would be likely to use support staff in substantially different ways from English-medium schools, and that the questionnaire format and time-frame of the present survey would not be able to do justice to their particular situations.

¹¹ The SurveyMonkey' software package was chosen for the purposes of this project. Participants could access our particular survey forms via the unique address developed for each of the two surveys.

¹² Figures — as at April 2010, the latest available prior to the surveys — on the total number of support staff (headcount) per school were obtained from a Ministry of Education database.

The data from hard copy forms for the principal survey were subsequently entered into the database containing the online responses from principals. The same process was followed for the support staff survey.

Principal Survey

Of the principals approached in the 250 schools selected for the study (excluding the school that declined), 110, or 44 percent, participated. While the participation rate is quite low, the principals who did respond are from schools which closely reflect the overall profile of schools in New Zealand in terms of size, decile and geographical location.¹³

The numbers of (full-time and part-time) support staff employed in participating schools ranged from two to 53, with the 23 secondary schools represented typically employing higher numbers of support staff than the 87 participating primary schools¹⁴.

Principals in the study had been in the teaching profession between six and 26 or more years, and had held the position of principal from between 'up to one year' and '26 or more years'.

Support Staff Survey and Participant Demographics

A total of 588 staff members participated in the survey of support staff, approximately 21 percent of the entire group of support staff employed in the 249 primary and secondary schools that were invited (and had not declined) to take part in the research project. The staff who responded were from around¹⁵ 144 schools — 92 primary and 52 secondary schools. (In 75 cases — 55 primary and 20 secondary — there were both principal and at least one support staff response from within the same school.)

Type of Support Staff Position Held

Table 1 shows the numbers of participating support staff by the type of overall role they fulfilled in their schools.^{16,17}

¹³ Further details about the sample of schools are provided in Appendix 4c (p.98) of the Working Group's Phase Two report — see footnote 7.

¹⁴ For example, whereas only three of the 23 secondary schools in the study had total support staff numbers fewer than 10 (most employed between 12 and 19), almost two-thirds (56) of the primary schools employed between two and nine support staff workers, with the remaining third employing up to 26 support staff (these figures are based on headcount rather than full-time equivalent numbers).

¹⁵ It is not possible to be exact about the number of schools support staff responses came from. This is because 35 participants had removed the covering page of their survey questionnaire, not realising that their school's ID number was included on that page: for this reason, we were unable to identify which type of school their particular response had come from.

¹⁶ In our sample, the proportion of administrative/executive staff to all support staff is consistent with the national figure for staff in this grouping. However, the proportions of those in the other groupings nationally may not be as well mirrored by participant patterns: for example, it is likely that teacher aides (both categories) may be relatively under-represented in the present study.

¹⁷ Non-teaching staff who maintain and manage the physical environment of the school — for example, caretakers/grounds staff, and staff with responsibilities such as staffroom hostess or cleaning duties — are outside the scope of the Support Staff Working Group's programme of work, including the surveys of principals and support staff discussed in this report.

Table 1: Positions held by participating support staff

Type of role	N	%
Administrative/executive	172	29.3
Teacher aides with a focus on students with assessed special education needs	147	25.0
Teacher aides with a focus on general teacher/classroom support	83	14.1
Specialist support staff (eg, librarians, laboratory technicians and IT specialists)	77	13.1
Student and whānau support (eg, nurses, attendance officers)	16	2.7
'Combined positions'	41	7.0
Other positions ^a	37	6.3
Missing data — position type not specified	15	2.6
Totals	588	100.0

^a For example, careers administrator, arts coordinator, school archivist.

Employment Status

A large majority (78%) of participating support staff were in permanent full-time or part-time positions. Most of the remaining participants were either in a position for the current (2010) year only (66, 11%), were employed according to 'some other arrangement' — eg, term by term, depending on the status of the particular student(s) they were working with, or a mix of permanent and casual hours (33, 6%), or were working on a 'casual, as required basis' (13, 2.3%).

Hours of Work

Just over half (52%) of participating support staff worked between 16 and 30 hours per week (Table 2). A further 11 percent were typically employed for between 11 and 15 hours, and 29 percent for between 31 and 36 or more hours.

Table 2: The number of hours support staff were employed per week

Normal paid hours per week	N	Percent
Up to 5 hours	9	1.5
5–10 hours	21	3.6
11–15 hours	66	11.2
16–20 hours	97	16.5
21–25 hours	104	17.7
26–30 hours	106	18.0
31–35 hours	71	12.1
36 or more hours	97	16.5
Other (eg, "varies")	13	2.2
Missing data	4	0.7
Totals	588	100.0

As shown in the analysis below, teacher aides were generally employed for fewer hours than support staff in other groupings.

Administrative/executive support staff most often worked between 31–35 hours (22%) and '36 or more hours' (34%) in the course of a week. A further 26 percent worked between 21 and 30 hours, while not quite five percent worked between 11 and 20 hours. Only three of these staff members worked 10 hours or less. (Four gave an 'other' response.)

Teacher aides with a focus on students with assessed special education needs were most likely to work either 16–20 hours (30%) or 21–25 hours (30%) per week. A further fifth (20%) worked between 26 and 30 hours weekly, and 10 percent between 11 and 15 hours. Three respondents worked ‘up to 5 hours’, five between 5 and 10 hours, with just three working 31 or more hours.

Teacher aides with a focus on general teacher or classroom support: approximately two-thirds of this group worked between 11 and 25 hours per week (11–15 hours = 23%; 16–20 hours = 19%; 21–25 hours = 23%), with a further 16 percent working 26–30 hours. Two were employed for ‘up to 5 hours’, seven for 5 to 10 hours, and six for 31 or more hours.

Specialist support staff participants generally worked between 26 and ‘36 or more hours’ (26–30 hours = 19.5%; 31–35 = 21%; 36 or more = 18%). Most of the remainder worked between 11 and 20 hours (25%). Two staff members worked up to 5 hours, and two worked between 5 and 10 hours.

Student and whānau support: half of this small group of 16 worked either 31 to 35 hours or 36 or more hours (4 people in each case). Three of these support staff worked 11 to 15 hours, two worked between 16 and 20 hours, and one ‘up to 5 hours’. (Information was unavailable in two instances.)

‘Other’ support staff: None of this group (total N=37) worked for fewer than 11 hours per week. The largest number (10) worked for 36 or more hours, three for 31 to 35 hours, and seven in each case worked 26–30 or 21–25 hours. Eight worked for 16–20 hours and two for 11–15 hours.

Support staff in ‘combined positions’: Of this group (N=41), most worked either 16 to 20 hours (10; 24%) or 21–25 hours (10; 24%), with a further seven working 26–30 hours, and seven working 31 to 36 or more hours. Three worked between 5 and 15 hours.

Length of Employment in a Support Staff Role

The data in Table 3 show that support staff who participated in the survey had worked in a support staff role from up to one year to 25 or more years. The majority (around 63%), however, had worked in a support staff position for between three and 15 years.

Table 3: Length of experience in a support staff role among survey participants

	Length of time worked in current position in present school		Length of time worked as a paid support staff person in any school	
	(N=562)		(N=557)	
	N	%	N	%
Up to one year	31	5.3	17	2.9
1–2 years	100	17.0	60	10.2
3–5 years	161	27.4	107	18.2
6–10 years	141	24.0	149	25.3
11–15 years	72	12.2	122	20.7
16–20 years	30	5.1	55	9.3
21–24 years	16	2.7	27	4.6
25 or more years ^a	11	1.9	20	3.4
Missing data	26	4.4	31	5.3
Totals	588	100.0	588	100.0

^a Seven support staff members had worked in the same school for more than 30 years, while six respondents had worked as a support staff member in more than one school for a total of 30 to 38 years.

Thirty-one percent (182) of the support staff participants had worked in a different position than the one they currently held in the school. And 27 percent had worked as a volunteer in the school before taking up their current support staff position.

Qualifications held by Support Staff

Some support staff positions require staff members to have specific, high-level skills and/or qualifications (eg, nurses, librarians, IT and other technicians, certain administrative/executive positions). Other positions, while they may require less emphasis on specialised skills or qualifications, at least initially, nevertheless require amongst other things the ability to relate well to a wide-range of people, as well as flexibility, adaptability, and ability to problem-solve.

Table 4 shows the qualifications held by support staff who participated in the survey.

Table 4: Qualifications held by participating support staff

Highest qualification held	N	%
University degree/postgraduate qualification	82	13.9
Vocational diploma	63	10.7
Trade or national certificate course	81	13.8
Bursary/NCEA ^a level 3 secondary school qualification	19	3.2
University Entrance/NCEA level 2 secondary school qualification	67	11.4
School Certificate/NCEA level 1	158	26.9
Completed up to the end of Year 10 (Form 4)	31	5.3
Something else	59	10.0
Missing data	28	4.8
Totals	588	100.0

a NCEA is Aotearoa New Zealand's National Certificate of Educational Achievement.

Just over 60 percent of participants also added that they held particular educational qualifications or training certificates (eg, teacher aide qualifications, nursing or librarian qualifications, diplomas in business management or administration, qualifications in office skills) that were directly related to their current position.

Limitations of the Study

The Sample

It is not known how comprehensively the survey forms for support staff were distributed within the sample of schools in the study. How the distribution was managed in each school may have affected who was most likely or able to take part in the survey. For instance, it is possible — or even likely — that at least some of the support staff who work on a more part-time or short-term basis in schools were less likely to have received the survey forms and been able to participate than support staff in more regular or established positions. Such staff members may have different views about school culture and communication networks, remuneration and tenure, support and mentoring, for example, than longer-serving colleagues. The possibility of a disproportionately high number of support staff in more 'secure' positions compared to those in more casual or part-time roles (and compared to the national picture) should be kept in mind when considering the results from the survey of support staff, especially given the high levels of positivity about work and conditions expressed by those who participated (even given the issues and challenges also raised).

Although principal responses came from schools whose characteristics quite closely mirrored the national distribution, a higher participation rate among principals would have been preferable as it is likely that a broader

or deeper range of responses about support staff in schools from a leadership perspective would have been obtained.

'Teacher Voice'

While not detracting from the results of the surveys as presented in this report (and in the Working Group's Phase Two Report), it is nevertheless the case that a teacher perspective would have given an added dimension to the findings and provided deeper insights about certain issues — for example, working relationships between teachers and teacher aides.

A Note about 'Open-ended' Questions and Responses

Many of the survey questions were open-ended¹⁸ rather than closed-response in nature.

The purpose of the following comments about open-ended response data is to explain that while we are confident that the analysis of survey results overall means that the themes identified are a valid representation of the information obtained, it is not always appropriate to use percentages or numbers to describe response patterns because of the nature of open-ended questions and responses.

With responses to open-ended questions, it is not possible to know whether omission of certain ideas or views by some respondents meant that they definitely did not have that view or experience or whether it meant that they had forgotten to mention it in the context of the particular question, had misinterpreted the question, were tired of providing written answers by a certain stage of the survey, or felt that they had already adequately made the point elsewhere in the survey and didn't need to mention it again.

For this reason, data resulting from any given open-ended question are less able to be regarded as 'definitive counts' of the different categories of responses obtained than might be the case with data which results from participants' selecting answers from a list of options provided that apply from their point of view, or rating the extent to which they find different, named, aspects of their positions as either positive or particularly challenging (for example).

However, despite this limitation, a strength of open-ended questions is that they give participants the opportunity to comment more expansively on matters that may be at the forefront of their minds when responding to a particular question, rather than being restricted by the more narrow format of closed-response questions — especially when the options provided might not include quite the best answer from their point of view.

Next Pages

Chapter Three now presents participant responses that exemplify the wide range of tasks and responsibilities that support staff in their various roles fulfil within New Zealand schools on a daily basis.

¹⁸ Open-ended questions are those to which survey participants are free to contribute any views or ideas they care to make, rather than responding by choosing from a list of options provided (as in a typical closed-response question format).

Chapter Three: How Support Staff Contribute to Schools' Ability to Operate Efficiently and Effectively — Support Staff Perspectives

"I am a link between parents and teachers/ management."

Receptionist/administrator (secondary school)

"Being part of the senior management team I am able to assist in all administrative ideas, ideas that look outside the curriculum perspective. Being responsible for the financial and property management of the school I ensure that all budgets are adhered to, and property matters are dealt with efficiently and effectively to comply with legislative compliance."

Business manager (secondary school)

"By working one-on-one, or with small groups, children receive more focused instruction either with the teacher or myself. Sharing ideas. Helping children with high needs — either behavioural, learning, or maturity — enables the classroom teacher to focus more fully on teaching [the whole class]. Making resources allows teachers to have more time for classroom planning."

Teacher aide — special needs (primary school)

"The library maintains a high standard of presentation at all times. Computers are well managed, topic information always available. Years 5/6 students are trained to be monitors and assist in the library."

Librarian (primary school)

As one of the Support Staff Working Group's aims for Phase Two of their programme of work was to find out more about the work-related experiences of support staff, several questions were included in the survey for this purpose. The first of these asked support staff: *'In your opinion, what are the main ways in which you personally help your school as a whole operate efficiently and effectively?'*

The large majority of participants (540, 92%) provided a response.

Some support staff gave very specific detail about aspects of their particular roles or made reference to being efficient at their job, and that they were punctual, reliable, and flexible. Others mentioned being generally obliging and prepared to do their best to help colleagues and staff and students in the school as a whole — including donating their own time, and knowledge and skills, over and above the levels required by their positions.

There were also many responses that provided deeper-level insights into the range of work and level of responsibility undertaken by support staff in schools, emphasising the importance of their overall input into the smooth running of the complex organisation that is a school.

A sample of support staff accounts of how they helped their schools operate efficiently and effectively follow. The comments are ordered according to the different groupings of support staff; however, it is of note that there were often similarities and overlaps in the ways that staff in the different groupings contributed within their particular schools.

Contributions to School Effectiveness by Administrative/ Executive Staff

“The office is an extremely important part of the school.”

Office manager (primary school)

“The administration functions of the school are, in many ways, the glue that cements many operations throughout the school. We are involved in most aspects of the school in varying degrees.”

Office manager (primary school)

The ways in which administrative/executive support staff contributed to the efficient and effective operation of their school included:

- § ensuring that parents and all other visitors to the school experienced friendly, helpful, and appropriate responses from school office staff, often the first point of contact with the school;

“I try to be as helpful and friendly as possible. It is important that the first contact [with the school] is a positive, friendly one.”

Office staff (secondary school)

“[I help the school operate more effectively] by courteously meeting and greeting our students’ families and any other visitors to the school by phone or face-to-face. [I also contribute by] meeting deadlines — creating smarter ways of working and recording data, sharing ideas of improvement.”

Receptionist (secondary school)

- § setting up and maintaining efficient systems and procedures for vital functions within the school (eg, for handling finances, including prompt payment of accounts; and for school record systems, such as attendance, school timetables, and student assessment and other data);

“Finances do play a large part in the running of the school and so if I can help direct the funds in the right areas and get the best value for money this certainly helps. There is never enough money and often peoples’ ideas are great but just not practical or possible with the funds we have available. We try to keep the office area running smoothly and efficiently. Having efficient staff in the office is definitely a calming influence on other staff during busy times.”

Executive officer (secondary school)

“I set up the programmes staff use for adding grades, comments, etc, for school reports, help set up and maintain the timetable and manage the practical side of NZQA entries, verification, etc.”

Academic records administrator (secondary school)

“I ensure all accounts are paid promptly so staff do not have any difficulty placing orders with suppliers, therefore [ensuring that] what is needed in the classroom, or by administrative staff, is supplied promptly.”

Accounts payable/cashier (secondary school)

“I pay the bills. I look after sick children. I deal with all money coming into the school.”

Executive officer (primary school)

§ ensuring a safe, well-maintained physical environment for students, staff and others at all times;

“Ensuring building maintenance is done — to provide a warm, safe environment for learning. If buildings are repaired and graffiti, etc, removed then students respect the facilities more. Handle funding applications for improved capital items — eg, to get data projectors into most classrooms. Manage the budget to try to afford better furniture for students and teachers — people learn more if they are comfortable. Manage the budget to increase support staff hours — more support staff hours means less work for teachers so they can concentrate more on students.”

Executive officer (secondary school)

§ providing appropriate, timely back-up for the school leadership team, and for the teaching staff, and generally helping out staff in any way they can;

“By following up on requests from parents, staff and students. By following up on teachers’ absence reports. By having a good rapport with students and parents, being willing to listen and try to remedy mistakes that have been made. To remind teachers and senior leadership team about deadlines — eg, for trips, money to be paid, for course preferences to be in, for leaving forms to be done, etc, etc.”

Student Services Reception/First aid officer (secondary school)

“Providing support in any way I can. Apart from my position here as administrator I sometimes help out in a pastoral role and coach sports teams.”

Executive officer (primary school)

“Supporting senior management, teachers, students and parents with day-to-day things — payments, newsletters, enrolments, appointments, etc.”

Principal’s PA (secondary school)

“I market the school to the parents, students and staff via the website, planners, daily notices; fielding phone calls and face-to-face queries; enrolment and prospectus. I look after the directions or ‘how to’ situations for school photos for staff, students and parents.”

Receptionist (school sector not known)

“Getting photocopying out on time.”

Admin assistant (primary school)

§ being approachable, flexible and supportive in response to student support and student issues and concerns.

“I take care of the tasks that help the students settle and [become] ready to learn, leaving the teachers time in the classroom.”

Administration/unit support (secondary school)

“I liaise between school and parents and school and colleges; timetable meetings; organise vision testing, immunisations, RTLB visits, and [arrangements to do with] Court, truancy, and students’ physical, mental well-being “

PA to principal (primary school)

Contributions to School Effectiveness by Teacher Aides with a Focus on Students with Assessed Special Education Needs

“I think as support staff you not only look after the special needs child in the class, but you help out where you can with other children who struggle. The teachers do a fabulous job, but can't always get to everyone’s needs, so you help where you can.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I guess I help [my student] achieve her potential by assisting her to get to class on time and having all her equipment ready for her. I can assist the teacher organise or create any modified resources she needs and can explain any maps/diagrams which saves the teacher having to do it. I also think having a blind student mainstreamed helps overcome some of the stereotypes people may have about what blind people can and cannot do.”

Teacher aide (vision) (secondary school)

Teacher aides with a focus on special needs indicated that important ways they contributed to the efficient and effective operation of their school included:

- § being able to work with individual students or groups of students who need more intensive input for their learning in order to free up teachers to spend more time with other students in their classes;

“I work with a small group of students who have low reading ages and some have behavioural problems too. By taking these students out of class the teacher can focus better on the other students in the class and the students I work with can work at their own speed doing work that is set at their correct reading age.”

Learning assistant (secondary school)

“[I help the school by] attending mainstream classes to help individual students so the teacher can work with all the class. Also by providing a positive environment and being a friendly face for special needs students to help them learn and develop skills.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“I am able to deal with a lot of the problems that arise because of the child I help. Thus giving more time for the teacher/deputy principal to do their jobs. The child constantly plays up and needs to be assisted/redirected.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

- § being able to provide extra, or different, support for individual students so that they are more settled and engaged in class and at school generally, which lessens the demands on other staff in the school and leads to better outcomes for the students (and their families);

“Taking students who are achieving below average, one-on-one. A new face they can tell things to. Able to do fun things with them.”

RTLB teacher aide (primary school)

“I support special needs children to achieve in technology (eg, woodwork, metalwork) using tools, etc, to ensure they achieve a project to completion. This greatly helps them in what can otherwise be a stressful environment.”

Teacher aide, technology department (primary school)

“As an aide my role is to help students be a part of the ‘inclusive’ policies towards students working in wider school classes. I help mainstream students accept the students I work with.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“I support students that have ORRS¹⁹ funding as well as [support] other non-funded special needs students. I support the teachers by taking on areas of responsibility — organising (in my own time) extra opportunities for our students such as camp, work experience.”

Teacher aide in a Learning Support Centre (secondary school)

“Supporting and encouraging students and thus enabling them to work effectively within the classroom setting. Adapting work for special needs students so class teachers can focus on teaching the whole class. Contributing to planning for school programmes and for individual students.”

Special needs teacher aide/support administrator (secondary school)

§ being able to work effectively with their assigned students without having to depend on the class teacher for assistance and take time away from the class overall;

“Through being a reliable person and able to work with a child with little or no supervision once given the programme for the child.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I ask for as little help [as I can] so it is less interruption for the teacher. I take the child out of class when the student (special needs) is having bad day.”

Teacher aide — special needs (primary school)

§ being able to act as ‘extra eyes and ears’ for the teacher so as to more effectively identify learning or other issues a student may have;

“I keep my supervisors informed regarding information/incidents that have affected the children I work with. Also talk to class teachers and AP [Assistant Principal] regarding observations on children that need attention.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

¹⁹ ORRS refers to Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes, managed through the Ministry of Education: Special Education which provides funds for individual school students throughout New Zealand with verified high or very high special education needs. (Note that from April 2011 ORRS have been changed to the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) – the Reviewable scheme no longer exists. Children who were in the Reviewable scheme at the start of the 2011 school year have been moved to ORS. Children who receive ORS will continue to receive this support for as long as they are at school. For more information go to www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/SpecialEducation)

“I assist students in the classrooms, helping them understand the work. I support the teachers’ programmes. I also assist with classroom management and I am an ‘extra pair of eyes’ for the teachers. I assist with reading/writing duties for students during exams.”

Teacher aide (numeracy) (secondary school)

§ providing general support and back-up for the teacher in class, and reinforcing key messages from the teacher;

“I help keep the class on task. Often, having an extra adult in the room changes the dynamics.”

Teacher aide (school sector not known)

“Reinforce the teachers’ material, help children with special needs, develop their literacy skills — oral, written.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“By helping teachers when asked, thus spreading the workload to make things easier for them.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“By working alongside the teachers to boost the low learners within the classroom setting.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

Contributions to School Effectiveness by Teacher Aides with a Focus on General Teacher or Classroom Support

“We do tasks that would otherwise take the teacher a long time to do — photocopying, laminating, putting books away, etc. I know my main tasks everyday, so just get stuck in and don’t have to interrupt the teacher.”

Teacher aide (primary school)

“As I support classes to help raise achievement, I can fill gaps for teachers when students need extra support. I create resources targeted to specific classes. I can observe from the students’ perspective and report back to teachers over perceived difficulties. I can liaise over different learning areas.”

Teacher aide – learning support (secondary school)

This group of teacher aides reported contributing to the efficient and effective running of their schools by:

§ taking on a wide range of general, day-to-day tasks important for the smooth running of a classroom — including photocopying, preparing, making or repairing resources, preparing notices, tidying up — that would otherwise have to be undertaken by teachers, reducing their ability to spend optimal time on teaching and learning;

“I am a small cog in a large machine, that is how I see myself. The work I do has a knock on effect for other staff — I help them to free up time for other things they have to do around the school.”

Teacher aide in technology (secondary school)

“My role includes lots of ‘little jobs’ that keep the school working efficiently — eg, kitchen duty, putting books away, class teacher help (photocopying, pasting, etc), school garden club, archives, newsletters, notices.”

Teacher aide (primary school)

“I support students' learning, working one-on-one or with groups. I help with behaviour management. I help in organising teaching resources — photocopying and laminating — freeing up the teacher. Reinforce teachers' instructions in learning areas. I attend and help out at after-hours functions. I set up morning tea daily and keep staffroom tidy, organise school lunches. Until recently, did four playground duties per week. Occasionally do office duty, reception, etc.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

- § spreading the workload within the classroom during lessons by taking small groups of students for reading, mathematics or other learning tasks or activities; helping individual students who may be struggling with a particular learning concept or activity;

“Filling in the gaps that teachers can't meet — working with individuals and small groups to reinforce and extend classroom learning.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“By providing support to teachers and students. By assisting students I free the teacher to teach the lesson to students who work faster, allowing the lesson to flow while helping slower students to achieve.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

“Assist in numeracy, literacy and writing in junior school. The flow-on effect into senior school is efficient [judging] by results.”

Teacher aide – teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I work with Years 11 to 13, concentrating mainly on literacy and numeracy. I work one-on-one with students who are having difficulty keeping up with work in a classroom situation. I assist many students who without one-on-one support would not pass some of their assessments.”

Teacher aide – NCEA support (secondary school)

“By having time to spend with children needing it. By supporting teachers emotionally and with workload.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I help targeted students who fall below (or above) standards, reducing load on teacher.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

§ bringing particular knowledge and skills (eg, artistic skills) to either help the school overall or add to the pool of knowledge and skills for students and teachers within individual classrooms;

“By providing daily support to children and their learning. Providing support to teachers in any way I can. I have a passion for computers so have kept myself skilled up in all areas of the computer system used at the school and will quite often be asked to help teachers sort issues.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I take pressure off teachers who have students in their classes who cannot focus and cause disruption. I also contribute knowledge as an artist — the students really benefit.”

Teacher assistant (secondary school)

§ undertaking a range of other responsibilities, including: being a role model for students and reinforcing the school’s/teachers’ messages about behaviour; caring for sick children while they wait for parents to collect them; ensuring that individual students with identified needs receive the particular or extra support they require (eg, help with taking prescribed medicines or pastoral care); and helping out with school extra-curricular activities such as after-school sports, school camps and other outings.

“I help in translating between the school and ESOL students or parents. I comfort those students who aren’t fluent in English when there are emotional conflicts between them and other students who can speak English well.”

Teacher aide — general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“Being male and Māori contributes to being a good role model for a lot of the children attending the school.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I look after two diabetic students and take different groups for learning — eg, alphabet groups, sounds and recognition, high frequency word groups, maths groups, reading groups, auditory memory groups, blends groups. Also general (duties): help teacher, photocopy, take reading/maths groups. Help with school soccer team, help at gala.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I believe my work in ESOL helps students to integrate into the school quickly as they learn English. I also feel due to the small size of ESOL classes I can offer the students pastoral care which helps the school cater for their needs efficiently and effectively.”

ESOL teacher aide (primary school)

Contributions to School Effectiveness by Specialist Support Staff

This support staff grouping includes librarians and technical staff such as science technicians and IT specialists. As these roles tend to be quite distinct from one another in a range of ways, it seemed more appropriate to discuss the contributions to the school of those who hold these roles separately rather than collectively.

Librarians

“The library is an important part of the school. I purchase books so we have suitable books for each upcoming topic and various reading styles and ages. The library is open all day so everyone — children and staff — has access to books for research or just a place to hang out.”
 Librarian (primary school)

School librarians help their schools operate effectively and efficiently by:

- § sourcing up-to-date resources that can be used by students in and beyond the classroom and by teachers preparing lessons;
- § adding to class learning programmes through organising complementary activities and events in the library;
- § ensuring that the school — teachers and students — has access to the best possible information, through keeping abreast of appropriate internet search software (and liaising with IT staff in the school to ensure that the library computers are suitable for the task), and by being knowledgeable and efficient in helping library users find information they require in the library’s books and other resources;
- § providing teachers and students with training in research and information retrieval skills;
- § ensuring that the library is a vibrant, attractive hub within the school where people want to spend time and learn;
- § assisting other staff in the school with a wide range of other tasks and responsibilities as required.

“The library is an integral part of teaching literacy in its many guises.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“I do my best to keep up with the latest information on curriculum subjects and provide the students and teachers with the material they need, while keeping a track on not only library but resource books.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“By running an excellent, exciting library.”

Librarian (primary school)

“... I will step in and help anywhere if necessary. At busy times of the year I also help out in the office with new enrolments, stationery, first aid, etc, as the library usually opens in the second week of the year, once the office has class details finalised. I'm one of the longest serving staff here, and am often asked for my opinion on various matters. I think support staff here are well regarded and our input is valued.”

Librarian (primary school)

“[As well as the library] I run a book club and chess club, a lot of this is done in my own time. I assist all staff at school with a large array of extra jobs.”

Librarian (primary school)

Science and Other Technicians

“I am a shoulder to cry on, a sounding board, a person to share successes with. I provide guidance and ideas. I run my department — without me everything falls apart and no practical lessons take place.”

Science technician (secondary school)

Technical staff in schools provide particular, specialised support which includes:

- § ensuring that science and technology laboratories are kept supplied with materials and resources necessary for practical learning activities;
- § maintaining equipment to a standard which meets health and safety and other regulatory requirements;
- § preparing laboratories in advance (eg, ensuring that equipment, chemicals, etc, for particular, planned experiments or activities are at hand) so that teaching and learning can proceed as soon as teachers and students arrive for the class.

“I enable the science teachers to concentrate on their teaching by preparing for practical lessons and cleaning up after, thus giving students optimal learning time and opportunities. I ensure that stocks of material are always on hand when needed and are put away safely when not, and equipment is in good working order. I make sure that safety measures can be implemented in the labs, which then extend to the safety of the whole school. I help to make sure that the department spends within its budget, which thus contributes to the financial health of the school.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“I provide and prepare equipment and chemicals required for teaching practical work, and ensure that equipment is cleaned and repaired after use. This helps to reduce the workload of, and stress to, the teaching staff. I'm responsible for processing orders. Ensuring that chemical hazard labelling is in order to comply with Health and Safety requirements. To help the Bursar with the audit, I am responsible for the annual stock-take of all chemicals and equipment in the Science Department. I'm also responsible for putting our school's video collection onto ClickView so that it can be easily accessed.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“The main ways [I help the school operate effectively] are to keep stock levels in the pantry flowing, maintain equipment in the 12 kitchens and make sure equipment is where it should be and to be present when classes are operating to help students.”

Food technician (secondary school)

IT Support

“School can’t run otherwise.”

Computer technician (secondary school)

IT specialist staff have an important role in today’s schools, with the increasing use of and demand for effective, efficient computer hardware and systems, both for administrative processes in the school and for teaching and learning.

IT staff are often variously responsible for:

- § maintaining current IT systems in the school in the best possible working order;
- § researching new systems and recommending appropriate upgrades for the needs of the school;
- § providing training and ongoing support for teachers, support staff, and others in the use of IT.

“I train staff in the use of new technologies and at times I have introduced technologies or methods to enhance their teaching practices, whilst trying to make learning fun and engaging for this generation of skilled ICT learners. I try to organise the school network and ICT equipment to work in a fashion that works best to suit them and is easy to understand by the users and make it accessible to all. I liaise with our external network administrators and the management staff to ‘get the best’ from our network and technology. I liaise with MOE [the Ministry of Education] and our managers to keep informed about MOE initiatives so as to develop our resources and comply with standards to ensure our school can keep up-to-date and make decisions that will have positive impacts in the years to come.”

IT support (secondary school)

“I provide the tools for all staff and students to more efficiently communicate and carry out their day-to-day tasks and provide support to staff and students to ensure that they are confident and knowledgeable in using IT. I also develop and integrate new tools for the staff to help them better manage their workloads and keep track of information.”

IT engineer, IT help desk, web designer (secondary school)

“[I contribute to the effective running of the school] by keeping the computer network and machines at 100 percent operation and attending to breakdowns as soon as possible and assisting staff that need IT help and support.”

Computer technician (secondary school)

Contributions to School Effectiveness by Student/Whānau Support Staff

"I know the community well so can easily liaise with school, parents, etc."

Special needs advisor (secondary school)

This grouping of support staff in schools includes:

§ **registered nurses** who in the school context have a particular focus on ensuring students' health and well-being so that they can be engaged and successful learners; they also provide back-up and support for teachers as required;

"As an experienced health professional, I take my job very seriously. The decisions I make can affect the lives of the young people and the families that I work with. I see my role as supporting the teaching staff within the school, by having happy, healthy students in class learning, or being sent home because they are unwell. The health clinic is running efficiently now, with students spending less time out of class due to health issues. The students receive appropriate referrals when required, and many of their concerns are able to be dealt with, within the health clinic, on site."

School nurse, NZRN (secondary school)

"Provide professional nursing care to staff and students. Organise or provide health promotion in the school. Organise clinics with as little disruption to class teaching as I can."

School nurse (secondary school)

"Liaise between teachers, students, caregivers if a student has health issues impacting on their learning/attendance."

School nurse (secondary school)

§ **attendance officers** whose job it is to work with truanting students and their families and teachers to help get them back at school and settled enough to learn and achieve;

"By getting absent students back to school and helping to keep absenteeism to a minimum. By keeping attendance records up-to-date. By keeping staff informed of students' attendance and working to improve it."

Attendance officer (secondary school)

"Keeping in touch with the families of children who are absent."

Student attendance officer (secondary school)

§ **pastoral care staff** who provide support for students and sometimes staff and who liaise between various parties to help ensure good outcomes for students, families, and the school community as a whole.

"[My work involves] communication and liaising between the school, staff, families, Community Services, to the students."

Youth worker (secondary school)

“[I help the school run effectively by conducting] surveys about bullying, [looking out for] new entrants, [and providing] individual consultation — teacher support and student support, grief counselling, considerable parent support and referrals, and following through ‘Seasons for Growth’ programme.”
Pastoral care worker (primary school)

Contributions to School Effectiveness by those in Combined Support Staff Positions

“As well as working with special needs children and working in the library, I also help with school productions, sports activities, calf club day and all other school activities.”

Teacher aide/librarian/cleaner/caretaker (primary school)

As illustrated in the quotes below, the seven percent of support staff in the study who held ‘combined’ positions often took responsibility for a wide range of tasks — from supporting the leadership team, to administrative duties, to care and support of teachers and students — many of which bridged the activities undertaken by the different groupings of support staff already discussed.

“I am the Jill-of-all trades. Because most of my day is up to me to organise, I often do whatever is needed to be done, whether it be working with the principal to repair the OHP, laminator, etc, covering in the office when the secretary is out, finding resources or photocopying, etc, urgently, run reading support programmes with volunteers, do the work for the library, organise uniform sales, keep the staffroom welcoming, organise shopping, sort out any problems with the children I happen to see, first aid, etc. I organise all resources so they are easy to find, and help in the orientation of all new staff to the school by being available whenever.”

General position – many roles (primary school)

“In my role as librarian I am actively involved in helping the girls achieve by teaching them how to effectively search for information and to use the library's resources. In my ancillary role I create and keep up-to-date the school's web pages and maintain the ID card and house systems, ensuring that the girls can fully access the school's services.”

Librarian/ancillary (secondary school)

“Keeping the staff happy and having resources a.s.a.p.”

Reprographics /staffroom hostess (secondary school)

“As Principal Nominee’s assistant I help organise most NZQA [New Zealand Qualifications Authority] paperwork; all the external moderation in our school passes through my hands before being sent away. ... I enter all the students who are applying for financial assistance and I guide many of them and their teachers through the paperwork that is required for NCEA/NZQA. I am also highly familiar with KAMAR and set up Markbook for the majority of the departments in the school.²⁰ [The PN assistant job] is a job that brings a variety of complications and challenges which are almost always different. I guess you could say I pick up a lot of slack from the PN who is under constant pressure. In terms of my science technician role I organise experiments — set equipment up, maintain it, put it away, I do the

²⁰ KAMAR is an IT system/software package designed for New Zealand schools for school administration (eg, for recording students’ caregiver details, staff details, student and class lists). ‘Markbook’ is a part of KAMAR. There are subject, teacher and global Markbooks for recording student results, including NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) and asTTle (Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning) data and results from teacher-designed tests.

purchasing/ordering and am accountable for the budget, I do photocopying, and I do research and development of experiments for our students. I source goods at the lowest possible price and I source people — ie, when [teachers are] running the forensics unit I will get in a community police officer to do a workshop with our students. I also try to keep up with other technicians in our area and the latest techniques being used so our staff and students stay on track with NCEA. As the STAR's²¹ assistant I coordinate events, such as Careers Day, camps, community breaks, as well as organising events”
 Science technician, Principal Nominee's assistant, STAR's coordinators assistant (secondary school)

“[As well as librarian responsibilities] I work with ESOL children in small groups or individually. The teachers always say they greatly appreciate what I do!”

Librarian/teacher aide (primary school)

“[In my] admin position I ensure the student data filing and all student information is correct and up-to-date in the school database and Enrol. I also help in the school's sick bay. [As] teacher aide [I work with] my student who has spina bifida. He has many physical problems which he needs help with during the day. This year he is taking level 1 NCEA and I will be his reader/writer for these exams. I feel I have been a significant helper in this young man's school-life which has enabled him to have reached this stage in his education. I am able to deal with a lot of the day-to-day problems of this student, which has allowed his teachers to concentrate on his education.”

Teacher aide and student data manager (secondary school)

“I assist students to get back into class as quickly as possible, in terms of both health and truancy.”

School nurse/attendance (secondary school)

“I do a wide range of activities. [In my role as] librarian, [I help the school run effectively by] organising and controlling the library and computer area (6 computers), doing all purchasing for the library, [having] excellent knowledge about books in the library to encourage students, continually updating my knowledge on IT matters, blogs, internet, etc. [As] resource manager, [by] maintaining school-wide computers (60+ machines), updating software, organising technical support if required. Maintaining and cataloguing teachers' resources so they are easily located.”

Learning Centre manager (primary school)

Contributions to School Effectiveness by those in ‘Other’ Support Staff Positions

As well as the support staff positions already discussed, important duties and responsibilities — for example, arranging opportunities for students that will help them make a smoother transition from secondary school to further study or work — are fulfilled by staff in a range of ‘other’ positions. Schools also sometimes employ support staff to fulfil very specific roles particular to their situation or needs, such as an archivist to document the school's history.

²¹ STAR (Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource) is a programme designed to help Year 11–13 students move smoothly from school into tertiary study or work. Schools are given a certain amount of funding for STAR; the programme and what courses are offered can vary between schools.

The comments below illustrate some of the contributions that support staff in ‘other’ positions make in schools.

“By helping the teachers with whatever is pressing on them at that time. Helping with planning outside school activities — ie, trips. Helping with extra in-house activities over and above the standard teaching requirements they do. Anything they do not have time for. Keeping teachers informed about outside school events, exhibitions, seminars, etc, they can take students to. Informing them about different artists we can contact who may be able to come into the school and talk with students.”

Arts coordinator (secondary school)

“I have three departments to run. ... I ensure that equipment is available for booking and that it's useable. I teach staff how to use the equipment — I often have to set it up for them as they don't know how to. I purchase equipment for the school that is the best for the situation it's used in. I always complete my reprographics tasks on time, often before they're required. I cater for all student and staff stationery requirements, including subject workbooks — it's a huge job on its own.”

AV/reprographics and stationery coordinator (secondary school)

“As well as doing the bulk of the photocopying for the school, I bind workbooks, cover textbooks, and make laminations. I order in the paper and card stocks required, plus all other consumables used — eg, toners for copiers.”

Printing resources coordinator (secondary school)

“Show concern for fellow staff members and students. Encourage students to use the careers library for quiet study and computer use. Help students with filling out forms, chase them up if they haven't returned forms, sheets, permission notes, etc. Get involved with staff functions/social club activities so teaching staff know who I am and what I do and that I'm available to help students and themselves with queries.”

Careers administrator (secondary school)

“I play a large PR role and have strong sales skills together with marketing skills. I have an eye for detail to ensure we offer top quality facilities.”

Events and facilities hireage coordinator (secondary school)

“By sourcing appropriate work for Gateway²² students; by organising work experience, trips, etc, for students; by helping careers teachers.”

Careers admin (secondary school)

“By assisting the school leavers to apply for tertiary and trade positions. Making sure the students are all interviewed by the careers advisor and have access to the careers centre, during school hours.”

Careers/STAR administrator (secondary school)

²² Gateway supports senior (Years 11–13) students undertaking structured workplace learning opportunities across a range of industries and businesses around New Zealand, while continuing to study at school.

Summary Comments

Support staff identified a wide and complex range of ways that they help their school operate effectively and efficiently. While some of the tasks and responsibilities identified tended to relate more to some support staff groupings than others, there was also often overlap in the ways that different support staff contributed to the overall running of their school.

Information obtained from the survey showed that support staff have key roles in:

- § facilitating positive links (face-to-face, by telephone, and through the school website and newsletters) between the school and its community;
- § setting up, operating and maintaining essential systems in the school, such as attendance and assessment databases, financial systems, information networks (IT, library);
- § contributing positively (both directly and indirectly) to student learning and other outcomes — primarily through the work of teacher aides, librarians, science and IT technicians, careers and sports administrators, but also through the work of support staff in all roles;
- § the care and well-being of students — from administering first aid, to being mentors within and beyond the classroom, following up on truanting students, to providing health care.

Chapter Four: How Support Staff Contribute to Schools' Ability to Achieve Good Learning Outcomes for Students

"A positive approach from all staff helps the students to feel safe and secure in a learning environment."

Admin officer/PA (primary school)

"Without support many of the students I work with would make little or no progress throughout the year. Some students are arriving at secondary school with little reading ability and this can cause a number of issues if this is not addressed."

RTLB teacher aide (secondary school)

"By regularly working with children and seeing their progress and confidence growing, many of the children seem to open up in a smaller group situation and are not afraid of making mistakes or asking questions, whereas often in the classroom they are known to be quite withdrawn."

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

A further survey question designed to investigate the work-related experiences of support staff in schools (as well as to gain a sense of their particular contributions to a key goal for schools) was: *'What is it that you do that most helps the school achieve **good learning outcomes** for the students?'*

Although 12 percent (76) of participants — mostly those in administrative positions — felt that the work they did in their particular role was for a different purpose and did not contribute directly to student learning outcomes, and a few other participants were 'not sure', 86 percent (506) gave an outline of the ways in which they contributed to achieving this overall school goal.

A summary of support staff contributions towards good learning outcomes for students, for each of the support staff groupings, is given below, along with a representative range of descriptive comments. As might be expected, the responses often showed close parallels with those made to a previous question, discussed in Chapter Three, which asked support staff how they contributed to their school running effectively and efficiently.

Contributions to Achieving Good Student Learning Outcomes by Administrative/Executive Staff

“Smooth running of things in the office contributes to things being easier for students. If proper procedures are in place, students and teachers can do their own work properly.”

Office staff (secondary school)

“I think being a positive frontsperson for the school (staff, pupils, parents) helps enormously, especially with new parents coming to the school for the first time as first impressions can be a deciding factor for some people. A welcoming smile and introduction make all the difference: making both parents and present and prospective pupils feel at ease is an essential step to a child feeling accepted.”

Administrative staff (primary school)

“I take responsibility for as many activities/events that occur during the school year as I possibly can and try to help the teaching staff by taking care of the admin side of events — eg, taking charge of permission slips, and chasing up all forms that are outstanding, any fundraising, class events, etc, so that the teaching staff can solely focus on the students, therefore not having to spend their time on creating documents, certificates, templates, etc, for class activities throughout the year. I try to ease their burden as much as I can with the day-to-day admin tasks that they would end up having to spend valuable time on.”

Secretary (primary school)

Administrative/executive staff support their schools to achieve good learning outcomes for students by:

- § helping create a friendly, cooperative, caring and respectful school environment for students, parents, and teachers, which helps students feel positive about being at school and therefore more likely to be positive about learning;

“I am always there for the students if they have any queries or concerns. This, I hope, gives them a feeling of respect towards teachers and staff.”

Student Centre administrator (secondary school)

“Being there when help is needed. Show [students] how to achieve what is required. Encourage self-confidence and well-being — eg, we have students with anxiety issues who can’t leave their parents to go to class. We provide support and steps so that over a period they gain the confidence to go by themselves. Supporting ADD, ADHD and ORRS²³ students with medications, encourage positive behaviour [in students] when coming to the office. This has been very successful this year with several autistic students now being able to wait patiently, talk (ask) for what they want and then return to class without agitation. We teach a rotation of students receptionist skills, and financial skills to those on tuckshop [duty]. And [we teach] manners and communication skills to all students who visit the office.”

PA to principal (primary school)

²³ See footnote 19 on page 23 for an explanation of ORRS.

“I help to enforce our respect programme — explain to the children the way they should speak to everyone in a polite manner. It doesn’t take long for them to know that if you expect a certain standard they are very willing to meet that standard.”

School secretary (primary school)

“Communication between school and families — making a connection. Supporting teachers with time-consuming jobs to allow them more time to teach. Fixing minor issues with classrooms — eg, computers, plus other tasks. Assisting teachers with different tasks, supporting pupils.”

Administrator (primary school)

“Informing staff of local and national events [that may be relevant to what students are learning in class].”

Office manager (primary school)

“Ensuring parents feel comfortable entering our school, therefore passing ‘good feelings’ about school on to their children.”

Secretary (primary school)

“By always being positive with students.”

Secretary (school sector not known)

“I try to keep the teachers happy by dealing with their problems as they arise. I try to keep the students’ learning environment as pleasant and well maintained as funds allow. Often it is disheartening when students damage assets or buildings and good money is spent fixing these. However it is important that positive attitudes are maintained for the 90 percent of students who are working hard and not to give up on the other 10 percent. Students do pick up on the attitudes of staff and it does affect their learning.”

Executive officer (secondary school)

“By doing our administrative work well it relieves teachers of any extra tasks so they can concentrate on teaching. When I first began this job teachers were responsible for collecting money for trips and camps, etc, now it is all taken care of by the admin staff, [as is] keeping up the stationery supplies and classroom consumables, looking after sick children, [and] being the communication link between the parents and the staff and students.”

School secretary (primary school)

§ maintaining and/or creating effective systems and procedures for the smooth running of the school to help ensure that teaching and leadership staff do not get pulled away from the core business of teaching and learning, and so that patterns of student achievement and attendance (for example) can be effectively monitored and reviewed.

“Efficient and effective administrative systems assist in the smooth running of the school, which enables teaching staff to focus on pupil achievements.”

Office manager (primary school)

“I help to ensure that the processes and procedures are in place to ensure that the teaching staff can focus on the students.”

Principal’s PA (secondary school)

“As I am in charge of property I have always been proactive and insistent on all facilities being clean, safe and a pleasant environment to achieve good learning outcomes. I expect that all of my staff have a job description that covers these outcomes.”

Executive officer (secondary school)

“Ensure all classes have teachers — ie, arrange relief teachers when required. Ensure funds are available to support teaching and learning.”

Executive officer (primary school)

“Effectively manage systems within the school so that teaching staff can be focused on their teaching roles and not side-tracked by unnecessary administration work.”

Office manager (primary school)

“Assist with the annual budget planning for teachers to be able to have the resources they need to deliver their lessons, and then providing them with detailed monthly performance reports. I arrange for all students’ fees to be charged and collected to provide additional learning materials.”

Accounts supervisor (secondary school)

Contributions to Achieving Good Student Learning Outcomes by Teacher Aides with a Focus on Students with Assessed Special Education Needs

“Break down information in a way the students can comprehend. Encourage them in their learning. Try to keep children motivated. To make children feel very supported in any learning difficulties they might have. I also hope any worry a child has, I can refer them to the person in the school who could most help them.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“As a teacher aide, my focus is on the students with special needs. Because I work with only a few of the students, I have the time to get to know them and gain an understanding of their learning styles and needs. I can therefore pass on my observations to the teachers, as well as assisting the students with their learning.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“If there were no support staff then our special education children would be unable to be included in their wider school classes. This is now an important and recognised sector of this school’s programme.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

When asked how they helped achieve good learning outcomes for students in their schools, responses from teacher aides with a focus on special needs essentially repeated many of the answers they gave when describing how they contributed to their school’s ability to operate efficiently and effectively (see pp.22–24). This time, however, participants often particularly emphasised their role in terms of the *students* rather than teachers.

For example, they highlighted:

§ being able to work one-to-one or in small groups with students to give them focused support with their learning;

“I work one-to-one with different students in a class situation, targeting any problems they have with their work (in conjunction with the teacher). Under the supervision of RTLBs [Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour] I have been involved in facilitating a literacy programme with small groups of Year 10 students. I have been involved in the programme of a high needs student, taking him outside of school to learn ‘life skills’ as well as taking him for weekly swimming lessons.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Being the support (adult) that they have built a rapport with, they are comfortable asking [me] questions and asking for help to understand the work that they are doing. A teacher often does not have time to go around individual students and go over something time and time again until a student finally gets what is being taught.”

Teacher aide in a targeted learning class (secondary school)

“[I act as] reader/writer for some students in the classroom, [for] internal assessments and external examinations. Work one-on-one with students completing assignments. Work with RTLB student on listening and behaviour skills in the classroom and other IEP [Individual Education Plan for student with assessed special needs] goals. Quick bathroom visits with wheelchair students so they don’t miss too much classroom teaching.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“As a teacher aide I assist those people who need extra help to complete the work set by the teacher. If I can assist them to achieve success then their behaviour will allow the whole class to operate efficiently.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“[I help the school achieve good learning outcomes for students by] working one-on-one with a student, targeting students at literacy time, working in small groups. Also by keeping up my own training — ie, through a phonics course, etc.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

§ helping students set and achieve goals and become independent learners;

“Giving extra targeted instruction to a child/children helps bring the student’s academic success to a higher level therefore giving the student more confidence to succeed higher. For special needs children the students are more settled and confident as work is aimed at their level and a lot of our focus is on encouraging [the students’] independence.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I take an active role in ensuring the students’ work is at a level that they understand and can complete independently, thus allowing them to feel that they too are achieving. I put in place goals that they strive to reach.”

Learning assistant (secondary school)

“I like to have high expectations of children’s learning and encourage independent learners.”

Teacher aide — special needs (primary school)

§ helping students gain confidence through experiencing successes.

“Making great personal connections with students and developing personalised programmes for students.”

Teacher aide – special needs (school sector not known)

“Implementing IEP goals that are set for the child. Making learning fun and enjoyable. Trying to help as many students as I can within the class I am working in.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Support each student by ensuring they have everything they need for each lesson.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Help and encourage students with special needs to participate in all activities and achieve their full potential. By being a good role model (character, attitude, appearance).”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“[The] pre-entry group [we run] with parents and child aims to build confidence and have them settled for school so when they are five they are comfortable with the place.”

Teacher assistant (primary school)

“Provide a caring, nurturing environment for the student to do his best at all times — while being himself. Guiding and counselling when needed. Empathy and fun.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Being able to teach ESOL students topics before they learn them in their own classes gives the students vocabulary and confidence in their classroom which in turn allows them to achieve a good learning outcome.”

ESOL teacher aide (primary school)

Contributions to Achieving Good Student Learning Outcomes by Teacher Aides with a Focus on General Teacher and Classroom Support

“The work I do with some students regularly to improve their maths helps the school achieve learning outcomes. My interaction with the students and my enthusiasm also help create a good learning environment.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I support students who struggle. They benefit from being able to work at their own pace. I help teachers work without constantly having to stop through a lesson to address bad behaviour from these [struggling] students. I am able to relay information about the students to the teachers, so things become clearer for [particular] circumstances. I can help with testing and filing, and other time-consuming matters — photocopying, laminating, preparing lessons, etc.”

Teacher assistant (school sector not known)

Teacher aides with a focus on general teacher/classroom support assist with student learning outcomes by carrying out a range of administrative/housekeeping tasks that would otherwise have to be undertaken by the teachers, taking them away from lesson planning and preparation and teaching and learning time in the classroom.

This group of teacher aides also support their schools to achieve good learning outcomes for students more directly by:

§ encouraging students in class (especially reluctant learners) to actively participate and complete learning activities;

“I help students in the classroom to achieve good results in whatever activity they are partaking in. If I didn’t encourage them to take part/finish the activity there would be no outcome. I also encourage them to achieve the best mark that they can and not settle for a low mark.”

Teacher aide in technology (secondary school)

“I supervise the work sent out by the Correspondence School and make sure that it is completed and sent back regularly.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

“I enjoy my work. I care about my students and take the time to get to know them, their strengths and weak areas. I help them set goals and encourage them to reach them.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“By encouraging reluctant/hesitant learners — am perceived as less threatening than teacher (not a ‘real’ teacher).”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

- § providing extra support to students who have trouble understanding class content first time around; reinforcing what the teacher has been teaching/communicating;

“Being present during lessons and then having students on my own to ensure they understand the course work.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

“Literacy support. Teach children at their own personal level in a variety of ways. Don’t move on until they have really grasped a concept. Fill in any gaps in foundation learning. Able to work with small groups or individuals that may get ‘lost’ in a classroom situation.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I continually reinforce what I hear the teachers expressing to their students. [Clear, consistent] communication is the most valuable asset so there is not confusion for the pupils.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I routinely pick up on the strugglers and stragglers of the classes I attend and try to show them how to do the tasks. I am the chief science/maths revision person for the international students of the school. I regularly get students — Year 13 students included — coming for help who have not understood the class work. I think I do a good job. Our NCEA performance in these subjects has been steadily rising since I came. I believe that in smiling and greeting students, in showing them I care about their learning, I add to the perception of warmth and desire for excellence in this school. “

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

- § working with/supporting behaviourally challenging students so that they are as settled and ready for learning as possible, and are less of a distraction for the teacher and the rest of the class;

“Mentoring and role-modelling good behaviour patterns amongst behaviourally challenged students.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

- § providing feedback to the teacher on students’ learning needs;

“Circulating in class means I can identify learning gaps and help students immediately or alert the teacher to a need.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

- § providing general backup for the teacher in meeting the learning needs of the class as a whole.

“Speaking Te Reo at all times and making sure the children are understanding it. Also working with small groups of kids daily on other subjects.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“Giving help to junior students during story writing — building on letter and word knowledge.”

Teacher aide — general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

Contributions to Achieving Good Student Learning Outcomes by Specialist Support Staff

Librarians

“The most important role is ensuring the girls leave this school as confident and capable information searchers and users, and that they will have a joy of reading that will last their lifetime.”

Librarian (secondary school)

Staff in school libraries contribute to schools' ability to achieve good outcomes for students by providing knowledge, skills, time and appropriate resources to support student learning generally and to help students carry out effective research for themselves. They also play an important part in encouraging an interest in and love of reading, which can strengthen both everyday and more specialised literacy skills, as well as stimulate a range of other important qualities and abilities.

“Computer access for students at this school is still fairly limited so the library is still the main source of information for independent student learning and research. By making sure that the library maintains a current and relevant variety of resources I feel like I personally help students to learn effectively.”

Assistant librarian (secondary school)

“We run an extensive and sophisticated Library User Education Programme mainly for Year 9 [students] but also Years 10 and 11. This is above and beyond keeping our fiction collection bright and current to support reading for pleasure and the school's sustained Silent Reading Programme. We also maintain a large non-fiction section to support the curriculum and general non-fiction reading.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“I assist students with their research and help them get relevant information from books, databases and the internet.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“By being positive with the students and encouraging them to read/research, etc. By ensuring the students know what is available and by making myself available to them.”

Librarian (primary school)

Science and Other Technicians/IT Support

“Because science is based on observation and experimenting it helps the students to understand the theory behind what they are being taught by doing things for themselves.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“My expertise is often translated into good learning outcomes for the students either directly by helping a student with a specific IT-based problem or through the support and training I provide to the teaching staff, allowing them to create interesting and engaging classroom lessons.”

IT (secondary school)

A key way that technical support staff help their schools achieve good learning outcomes for students is to enable students to carry out the experiments and other ‘hands-on’ activities in class that bring theoretical concepts to life and often more clearly demonstrate links between in-class learning and real-life.

They do this by ensuring that the laboratories, workshops, kitchens, etc, that they are responsible for in the school operate smoothly and are ready for each new class or learning situation. Technical staff also facilitate students’ ability to conduct independent study and research through the use of up-to-date technology and by sometimes working alongside teachers to provide extra guidance and support within classes focusing on practical applications. As well, technical staff support teaching and other staff through their specialised knowledge and skills (eg, assisting teachers’ use of technology to create innovative approaches to teaching and learning).

“I provide a good standard of experiments for all students and have used my past work experience to help and provide information for senior students carrying out independent study and experiments.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“Efficiently prepare practicals and set these out well for an easy transition from written work. Practical needs to work well.”

Science technician (primary school)

“I try to keep our technologies and software up-to-date with today’s standards and I like to think that I am providing the students with a network infrastructure that they will find in the real world workplace, to make the transition from school to workforce easier for them. Also preparing the students with the ethics surrounding safety and practices involved with ICT in a professional environment.”

IT support (secondary school)

Contributions to Achieving Good Student Learning Outcomes by those in Student and Whānau Support, Combined, and 'Other' Support Staff Positions

“Reinforce to students and parents and teachers that it’s important [for students] to be present [to achieve good learning outcomes].”

Student attendance officer (secondary school)

“By sourcing appropriate industry unit standards for Gateway²⁴ students to engage them in learning that is meaningful for them.”

Careers admin (secondary school)

“Within the sports programme we create an environment in which students can gain confidence and achieve personal growth which can then be transferred to the classroom environment. Students get to operate within structures and rules and gain personal satisfaction from achievement and participation.”

Sports coordinator (secondary school)

Support staff in a variety of other roles in a school also contribute to achieving good learning outcomes for students. They do this, for example, by attending to students’ health needs and working to ensure students attend school regularly so that they can access learning opportunities. They also raise students’ awareness of possible career paths which can help them become more motivated learners and to make more appropriate subject choices. As well, they provide opportunities for students to extend their abilities, skills and confidence by undertaking sports and other extra-curricular activities and challenges through school.

“I utilise efficient assessment skills and am able to prioritise a student’s needs fairly quickly. I am able to get most students back to class in a timely manner. To be learning, students need to be present in their classrooms. If they are not in class, then they are probably not learning.”

School nurse (secondary school)

“Provide confidential, youth friendly, accessible health care to students for free. Can refer to health specialists if needed. Build on resiliences to overcome any risk factors students are living with. Offer neutral support to the students — not a teacher or parents but another adult who cares. Promote connectedness with the school for students — for some students school is a safe place, and help them cope with life outside school so they can concentrate more on learning.”

School nurse (secondary school)

“I arrange for individual learning plans for each student to go with their work placements. Organise the units and encourage the students to get their work done. Work with work-broker to get placements that suit each student’s needs and career paths.”

Gateway administrator (secondary school)

“I teach confidence: motor skills, teamwork, initiative, leadership, self-esteem, competitiveness, thinking, awareness, etc.”

Sports director (secondary school)

²⁴ For explanation of Gateway, see footnote 22 on p.32.

Summary Comments

Although a small number of participants were unclear how their particular role impacted on student learning outcomes — *“I don’t honestly know how the work that I do does make a difference. How is it measured?”* — the large majority of support staff participants had a strong awareness that their input contributed directly and/or indirectly to the overall work in the school towards achieving good learning outcomes for all students.

Key support staff contributions were: the part that they played in fostering a positive school culture and environment for staff and students and for parents and the community at large; supporting teaching and leadership staff in a multitude of tasks so that they could devote more time to teaching and learning; and supporting both teachers and students by working directly with students in the larger classroom situation, or reinforcing key learning concepts/class goals for students in one-on-one or small group situations.

As well as ‘core’ classroom and associated activities, support staff assisted with student learning outcomes within the contexts of the library, IT, and practicum areas (eg, science, technology), within ESOL and other targeted learning classes, on the sports field, through management of transition from school to work employment experiences, in a health/pastoral care context, and in a range of school-related extra-curricular activities (eg, school camp; chess club).

Chapter Five: Best Things about their Positions: The Views and Experiences of Support Staff

"I am here because I like the working environment. I like the challenge of getting the best out of the resources we have. I like being part of the education of our youth."

Executive officer (secondary school)

"I enjoy the collegiality, being part of the school and local community. I like walking to work. There's lots of variety in my work and the people I work with. It's very satisfying when our students succeed."

Executive officer (secondary school)

"A supportive and efficient principal. A supportive, positive and friendly work environment."

Secretary (primary school)

"Seeing the light go on when a student realises how to work something out and you see how proud they are of themselves."

Teacher aide (secondary school)

"I am able to work independently, and have a good working relationship with students, and teaching and admin staff. I feel well supported."

Administration, Student Services/Deans' assistant (secondary school)

"I love working with the students, contributing to their education and teaching them the life-long information literacy skills they need and fostering their enjoyment in reading."

Librarian (secondary school)

"The life that flows through the school. Helping to make a difference to students' lives. The camaraderie with other staff and students. I love the constant busyness of the job and the variety and challenges."

Attendance officer (secondary school)

Of the 588 support staff who took part in the survey, 521 (89%) provided a response to the question *'What are the best things about your current position?'*.

Participants individually referred to between one and four best things, with the greatest number identifying one or two different aspects of their positions that they particularly liked or valued. The most frequently mentioned 'best things' were coded into the nine categories shown in Table 5.

A further 11 percent (63) of participants made very general statements of job satisfaction, for example: “*I enjoy the work I do*”; “*Satisfaction when tasks are completed*”; “*I love my job*”; “*I enjoy my current working environment*”.

The participant responses presented throughout this chapter serve to illustrate the various best things that support staff overall identified about their positions. They also provide further insights into skills and qualities of the support staff workforce in New Zealand schools, the range of tasks and responsibilities they undertake, and some of the key reasons they remain in their positions and continue to contribute to schools’ achievement of their goals.

Table 5: Best things about their positions mentioned by support staff

Response category	N	%
Satisfaction that comes from seeing students progress/achieve and develop as a result of your contributions	160	27.0
Working with colleagues; working as part of a team; being able to share ideas and work and communicate professionally/cooperatively with teaching and leadership staff	152	26.0
The variety, busyness, and challenges within the job, make it interesting/satisfying	135	23.0
Interacting with or working with children/young people	109	19.0
Being trusted and being appreciated for the work you do; having the autonomy to organise your work in the way you consider appropriate	109	19.0
The conditions of work, including hours and holidays, the flexibility, and convenience of location to home	84	14.0
The overall school environment: positive and supportive, where staff get on well generally and where a strong sense of allegiance to the school, students and community is fostered	75	13.0
Having the opportunity to meet/interact with a range of people, including parents and other community members, students and teachers	57	10.0
Making a positive difference within the school	37	6.0
General statements about job satisfaction, enjoying their work	63	11.0

Note 1: As respondents could mention more than one ‘best thing’ about their position, the total number of comments adds to more than the total number of participants in the survey.

Note 2: The percentages shown are the proportion of the total number of participants (N=588) to the survey who identified the particular type of ‘best thing’.

Satisfaction from Seeing Positive Results of their Work with Students

“I get satisfaction in knowing that my help goes towards making it possible for special needs children to be mainstreamed.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

*“[A ‘best thing’ about my role is] students progressing from asking for an answer to asking **how** to do it. Our school has respect for non-teaching staff as an integral part of student learning.”*

Teacher aide – learning support (secondary school)

“I love the interaction with willing learners/readers and also the break-throughs with those who ‘hate’ the library/computers, etc.”

Library assistant (secondary school)

As might be expected, support staff who gave this sort of response most often worked directly with students in a learning situation and/or a pastoral care capacity — teacher aides, librarians, careers advisors, sports

administrators, school nurses, and attendance officers, for example. After looking at participants' survey responses in their entirety, it was also evident that, for many, seeing positive results of their work with students or being able to interact with students generally (as per the fourth category listed in Table 5) was a key reason for being positive about their role, even among those who identified one or more work-related issues or concerns they would like to see addressed.

"[A best thing is] knowing the students because I have worked with them for the last seven terms. I understand their learning needs and how to help them — [for example], how to break things down into smaller bits and to use appropriate language for the student to get them to understand the teacher."

Learning support assistant (secondary school)

"Helping students reach their potential by helping them through the language barrier."

ESOL teacher aide (secondary school)

"Seeing the students I work with achieve a better learning outcome from one-to-one working — seeing them leaving feeling they have accomplished reaching a new level."

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

"Seeing the achievements by the students that I help. Knowing that the student enjoys their learning."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

"Helping more needy children get through. Building their confidence and watching them grow into valued members of the community."

Teacher aide – teacher/classroom support (primary school)

"Working with individual students and watching them grow in confidence and understanding."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

"To see the children have progressed in all areas, and that you have invested a lot of time and effort into making that happen."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

"Ensuring that our students learn both educationally and in life skills for when they leave school."

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

"The contact with students, feeling that I am making a difference to those students I see three times a week on my own."

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

"A smile from a student who you have helped and they have success at that job."

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

"Knowing that I am assisting young people to achieve good study habits and learning outcomes."

Librarian (secondary school)

"The contact with the students, seeing them achieve at a sport either at a high level or giving sport a go for the first time. Achieving, organising a great sports exchange for the whole school to be involved."

Sports coordinator (secondary school)

“Helping students decide their future careers.”

Gateway coordinator (secondary school)

“Working with young people and helping them use the resiliencies they have to overcome any risk factors in their lives and seeing them develop into healthy, well educated adults.”

School nurse (secondary school)

“Love contact with the students. Great to know that by phoning home to get a student to school I am helping them.”

Attendance officer (secondary school)

Working Collaboratively; being a Valued Member of the Team

“I am included as part of a team.”

Teacher aide/office admin/library assistant (primary school)

“Great school and staff to work with. Lots of room for personal initiatives which I really enjoy. Positive and encouraging environment.”

Teacher aide – special needs (school sector not known)

Feeling they were part of a unified, supportive team that was working towards a common purpose and where all team members felt they were making valid, and valued, contributions was an important factor affecting the extent to which a range of support staff enjoyed working in their current position. (Just over a quarter — 152 — of participants spontaneously mentioned this when asked to nominate ‘best things’ about their position; support staff often referred to how important it was to them to be part of a collaborative team in other responses throughout the survey form as well.)

“Great leader and awesome team, we all work well together. We discuss what our day is going to be like.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

“My colleagues are great people to know and work with.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“My input is sought and valued. Management team is approachable and collegial.”

Management assistant/Principal’s PA (secondary school)

“Feel empowered by the principal. Given opportunity to develop skills. Encouraged to ‘be involved’.”

Executive officer (primary school)

“Staff contact. The principal operates and manages so that you enjoy your job.”

Office administrator (primary school)

“Staff make me feel part of the bigger picture/team.”

Teacher aide/Reading support (primary school)

“Being listened to, having a great principal and great staff who are very caring, and of course being with the students of all ages.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Working with good people. People appreciate me.”

Principal’s secretary (secondary school)

The Variety and Challenges of the Role

“The variety of the job is amazing, I am never sure what to expect from one day to the next.”

Executive officer (secondary school)

“Every day is different and rewarding.”

Teacher aide (primary school)

“I enjoy my job, demanding at the best of times. Am able to set my own achievable goals.”

Food technician (secondary school)

The busy, complex world of a school, where ‘something is always happening’ is reflected in comments from support staff who enjoyed the varying opportunities that came up in their roles and the frequent challenges for them to be flexible and adaptable, problem-solve, and to extend their existing skills or learn new ones.

“The challenge of learning to understand the problems many students face and how to handle them. Being more compassionate. Watching them achieve at a higher level.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I am always busy, there is plenty of variety. I like the contact with students, staff and the public.”

Office assistant (secondary school)

“I have always enjoyed a challenge and the people that I have worked with over the years have been great. This position has given me so much for my learning and enhanced my skills over the years. There have been many opportunities to up-skill and I have been grateful to have been given these.”

Executive officer (secondary school)

“I have good interaction with students and parents. I get to play nurse to sick and injured students. I have varied duties on and off the computer. I get to venture to other places in the school — not stuck in front of the computer all day. I get on well with my co-worker, and most of the staff.”

Student Services Reception/First aid officer

“Working with the teachers and the varied jobs I am asked to help with.”

Arts coordinator (secondary school)

“Always something to challenge; everyday is very different.”

Computer network admin (secondary school)

“It is challenging and constantly changing, and we have a very good core group of support staff who all get on very well and a number of really nice teaching staff too.”

AV/reprographics and stationery coordinator (secondary school)

“The variety of work, the daily challenge, working with a neat principal and teachers.”

Executive officer (school sector not known)

“The range of different tasks in my role. I do not do the same things every day and each period in the day can be working toward a different learning outcome. This in turn can mean more preparation. Enjoy being able to work with a range of staff throughout the school.”

RTLB teacher aide (secondary school)

“The variety. I work with students aged between 7 and 16 years old. I assist the students in a number of subjects, such as English, maths, science and music. I have been in my position for just over a year, and I have been able to witness the progress my students have made over that time. It is very rewarding.”

Teacher aide – special needs (school sector not known)

“Every day is different. I have a good rapport with the teacher. I enjoy the challenge of assisting the learning of children with learning difficulties. I also enjoy the other children in the class.”

Teacher aide — general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“The variety that each day brings, eg, toileting, showering [students], helping teachers, supporting children in the classroom, reader/writing, [involvement in] IEPs [Individual Education Plans for students with assessed special needs], communication with parents. Working with the other wonderful, compassionate teacher aides in our department.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“The teachers I work with and the variety of the job, I love it.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“The variety of work to be done. Personally, for me, being able to combine my science and admin skills in the one role.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“It has a variety of work, meeting students, teachers, employers, tutors and all that goes with this, as well as administration work.”

Gateway administrator (secondary school)

“Variety — working in a classroom for one hour per day, then work in office after morning tea. Learning lots of different skills. Seeing children improve from week to week — it is rewarding seeing children progress forward.”

Teacher aide/office admin (primary school)

“The job is interesting as no two days are the same and I learn something new regularly.”

Office manager (primary school)

Interacting with Children/Young People

“The students! Definitely. If somebody working in a school doesn’t count the students as the best things perhaps they are working in the wrong environment.”

Office manager (secondary school)

Support staff in all groupings, from administrative/executive staff, to teacher aides, to technicians and others, often simply stated that a best thing about their work was *“The students”, “The kids”* or *“Working with the students”*. Examples of comments which express this same point in a slightly fuller way follow.

“As an ex-teacher I enjoy the interaction with students. I love books and reading. I enjoy helping the students.”

Library manager (secondary school)

“Students are wonderful, staff is amazing. Lots of laughs and fun.”

Student Centre administrator (secondary school)

“Having an awesome rapport with children and most parents.”

Office administrator (primary school)

“Been doing it for so long and love seeing the children progressing through from New Entrants to Year 8.”

Office manager (primary school)

“Seeing the tamariki happy.”

Administrator (primary school)

“Working with fascinating and inspiring young people.”

Teacher aide – special needs/Support administrator (secondary school)

“Love working with the kids, and the time off and hours suit me as I have a school-aged child myself.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I enjoy working in the school, mostly I enjoy working with the student I’ve got.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I love the kids and I am really enjoying the extension classes.”

Teacher aide – teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“Getting to know all children in the school, as librarian. Seeing children grow in confidence.”

Librarian/teacher aide (primary school)

Being Trusted and Appreciated for their Contributions

"[Best things are] the autonomy to work alongside staff and the trust that all staff place in my ability to get the job done."

School secretary (secondary school)

"Working with my students. Some excellent teachers that I interact with and who give me autonomy and authority to work with their students."

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

An important aspect of their role specifically mentioned by around a fifth of participating support staff was being trusted and valued within their schools, to the extent that they had considerable autonomy to develop their positions and use their skills in ways that they felt best benefited the school, teachers and students. Support staff who answered in this way were often in quite specialised positions (suggesting that they had been appointed because of particular skills and experience) and/or had worked in their schools for a considerable period of time.

"I work independently, setting up and monitoring data systems which I love. There is always an opportunity to learn."

Enrolments and database administrator (secondary school)

"I can work independently, prioritising what is required."

Executive officer (primary school)

"I am responsible for property and finance. I am left to run these areas uninterrupted and achieve good outcomes."

Executive officer (secondary school)

"[I enjoy] that no-one is looking over my shoulder — I work independently in my own office."

Executive officer (primary school)

"Flexibility of the day. I can manage my priorities and workload."

Admin assistant (primary school)

"I am basically left to get on with my job and if anyone wants me to do anything for them then they just ask and I will do it."

Payroll and HR administrator (secondary school)

"Variety of challenges to help students. Freedom to introduce ideas/materials to help special needs and ESOL students."

Teacher support/office relief (primary school)

"I plan my own programmes under minimal supervision and have my own utility room."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

"I have the freedom to use my initiative."

Teacher aide – teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I work independently and can choose and prioritise my tasks. I can implement my own systems and make changes within my role as it suits.”

Manager textbook library (secondary school)

“My independence and being able to organise my work. Doing a whole variety of things in the day. My colleagues are great people to know and work with.”

Science technician/laboratory manager (secondary school)

“The HOD allows me to work in my own way.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“Helping students. Having the responsibility of buying books for the students.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“I am trusted to work using my own initiative and I feel I am providing a service to my community.”

IT support (secondary school)

“The relative autonomy — flexibility to take ownership of the role.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“I love my job, I love being trusted — I am left to do my job as senior staff know I do a good job.”

Librarian (primary school)

“Freedom to operate programme as I see fit. Positive contact with students. The ability to positively affect student development.”

Sports coordinator (secondary school)

Conditions of Work

“Plenty of variety, hours that suit me, school holidays, close to home.”

Office manager (primary school)

Although for some participating support staff part-time work and variable hours meant unwelcome uncertainty and/or financial difficulties, for other support staff, these were particular benefits of their positions, given their particular life circumstances. Some participants also particularly appreciated the school being close to where they lived, or valued having flexibility in their conditions, such as being able to choose which days/time periods they worked (within their overall working allocation each week).

“The working hours and school holidays are good for me.”

Enrolments registrar (secondary school)

“The short, flexible hours. Being a useful member of the community.”

Admin assistant (secondary school)

“The people I work with, the flexibility to go to appointments out of school when needed.”

School secretary (primary school)

“The staff I work with are great, good work conditions, great hours, lovely school.”

Office manager (primary school)

“Working part-time and the flexibility that gives me. Working in a child-focused environment. I enjoy my current working environment.”

School secretary (primary school)

“The working hours in term time, the flexibility of the working environment given that I have children of my own who can get a cold, gastric bug during term time. Working with the children.”

Teacher aide (primary school)

“The hours, as I have lots of commitments outside of school. Very helpful and caring staff. Working with children from so many different cultures and backgrounds. [The school is] very close to home.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I enjoy the children I work with, the hours, holidays (great with a family), and lovely colleagues.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“The flexibility — I only work four days per week and usually don’t have to be at work on specific days, etc.”

Resource Room manager (secondary school)

“[The work is] term time only, [which] allows me to spend school holidays with my children. I use my background knowledge and skills daily which I enjoy.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“Flexibility, close to home, school hours.”

Librarian (primary school)

“Able to job-share and so work part-time. Many interesting facets of the job.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“The flexibility to help elsewhere in the school if needed.”

Librarian/teacher aide (school sector unknown)

A small number of participants also specifically mentioned valuing certain physical aspects of their working conditions, given their particular role. For example:

“I have office space.”

Pastoral care worker (primary school)

The Positive and Supportive Environment within the School

"[Best things are the] staff, students, parents and working in a fantastic environment — love my job."

Admin officer/PA (primary school)

"Being part of a vibrant, respectful and passionate learning community."

Business manager (secondary school)

Among participants who expressed particularly positive views about their support staff positions, a common theme throughout their responses to the survey was that they enjoyed and valued working in a school which was characterised by a friendly, caring, stimulating and inclusive environment, and where there was a clear focus on the well-being and learning needs of students.

A sample of support staff comments specifically identifying a positive school environment as a key 'best thing' about their position follows. These comments have close links with a number of other response categories on best things about their positions, such as participants' references to valuing working with supportive colleagues who listened to and included their views, and who trusted them to carry out their responsibilities to a high level.

"I love it! Great team, great leadership, excellent communication, friendly, fun, and fabulous community support."

Office administrator (primary school)

"The staff and the school environment as a whole. It is a very positive place to work in."

Accounts clerk (secondary school)

"The support and encouragement received by all staff."

HR manager (secondary school)

"A supportive and efficient principal and senior management team. A supportive, positive and friendly work environment."

Secretary (primary school)

"I love being the hub of the school and love the contact with children. We have a great staff."

Admin officer/office lady (primary school)

"Hours of work, flexibility when requested due to the nature of the school. The positive working relationship I have with all staff. The great pupils we have! And parent support for the school as a whole."

Admin staff (primary school)

"Working for a great principal and senior management team. Flexibility of the position, friendly staff, working as a team."

PA (secondary school)

"The fabulous people I work with who all value each other's contribution to our school."

Office manager (primary school)

“The variety, the welcoming and friendly atmosphere, the small school environment where everyone is known on a first name basis and knowing all the children by name.”

Office manager (primary school)

“Fabulous, inclusive environment, supportive teachers to work alongside.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Working with wonderful teachers in a happy environment where the needs of children are met.”

Teacher aide – teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“The great classes I work with, the supportive staff as a whole.”

Teacher aide – teacher/classroom support (primary school)

Meeting and Helping a Diverse Range of People

“I love the interaction with the students, teachers and parents.”

Office manager (primary school)

“Meeting people. Helping people. Diversity in the role. Autonomy.”

School nurse NZRN (secondary school)

As already shown in many of the other comments from support staff in all groupings, support staff often particularly enjoy the day-to-day opportunities provided within their positions to have contact with a wide range of people.

“Having the day-to-day contact with people from all levels — from parents, teachers, staff, students, and other institutes.”

Student Office manager (secondary school)

“Working with a variety of people, having contact with families.”

Office manager (primary school)

“Love the interaction with families.”

Secretary (primary school)

“I enjoy the contact with so many people, [including] the students. Changes all the time.”

Office staff (secondary school)

“The boss (in Learning Support) is great. The boys I work with are brilliant. Most of the families are delightful.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Working with a wide variety of other staff and young adults.”

Teacher aide – teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

“I enjoy working with the students and mixing with the staff.”

Librarian (secondary school)

Making a Positive Difference within the School

"I love everything about my job. I enjoy the staff I work with and the children, some who can be very challenging at times. As a mother of three adult children and a background in administration I am able to contribute in a very holistic way to school life."

Executive officer (primary school)

"Just love the challenge to make everything better for the school."

Executive officer (secondary school)

In addition to the many comments from support staff showing that 'best things' about their positions were being able to help and support students, teachers and others in the school, six percent (37) of participants also specifically stated that they gained satisfaction from feeling that they made a positive difference to their school community as a whole.

"I enjoy helping the staff and lightening their load."

Assessment and data assistant (secondary school)

"I enjoy the variation in my work and the satisfaction of feeling like I make a difference in the lives of the people at the school."

IT engineer/Help desk, web designer (secondary school)

"My role allows me to form relationships with some of our families. Meeting new families that come into the school. Organising school visits and paperwork for new students. Being available for staff and children."

School secretary (primary school)

"Feeling like you have made a difference and seen progress made with the students you have put in time and programmes with."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

"The enjoyment of seeing students achieve and pass the learning goals. The respect that I get from the teachers when they see how I have helped their students."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

"Being constantly praised by visitors/parents on the warm, welcoming atmosphere of the library. Parents of library monitors thanking me for teaching the children extra skills."

Librarian (primary school)

Summary Comments

Participating support staff readily identified between one and four best things for them personally about their current positions. Predominant themes in responses centred on the satisfaction gained from seeing students make progress in their learning and behaviour, seeing that their particular technical and other skills and expertise complemented well the skills and expertise of others in their team/school, and feeling that they made an important contribution to the work of the school and were seen as a valuable member of the school staff and community.

Chapter Six: More on Support Staff in Relation to Student Learning Outcomes: Principal and Support Staff Perspectives

An aim of the study was to understand more about the ways in which support staff contribute to the effective and efficient running of schools and, in particular, to how they help schools achieve best possible learning outcomes for students.

Support staff accounts of their contributions within the school are covered in Chapters Three and Four. This chapter now focuses on different but related aspects of this overall aim: firstly, principal perspectives on the extent to which support staff were being used in the best ways in their school and, secondly, support staff perspectives on whether their school could make better use of them to achieve good learning outcomes for students.

Principal Views on whether Support Staff were Being Used in the Best Ways to Achieve Optimal Learning Outcomes for Students

Principals commented first on all support staff in their school not employed as a teacher aide (eg, administrative/executive staff; specialist staff) and then, separately, commented on teacher aides as a group.

Principals Commenting on Support Staff (other than Teacher Aides)

"They make the place function."

Principal (secondary school)

"They are very efficient and go the extra mile."

Principal (primary school)

"Having an office administrator/executive who is familiar with all facets of school, including the curriculum, is of enormous benefit when the principal is also a teacher in a small school setting."

Principal (primary school)

"Support staff man the office and this indirectly helps provide optimal learning conditions for students."

Principal (primary school)

"We have just one admin staff member who does a wonderful job with showcasing children's work in our weekly newsletter. Her opinions and ideas are valued at staff morning teas and she plays an integral part in our school."

Principal (primary school)

Table 6: Principals' views on extent to which support staff (other than teacher aides) were being used in the best ways to achieve optimal student learning outcomes

Support staff other than teacher aides used in best ways in their school?	N	%
To a large extent	56	50.9
To a moderate extent	35	31.8
To a small extent	6	5.5
Not sure	1	0.9
Missing data	12	10.9
Totals	110	100.0

Just over half (51%) of principals answered 'To a large extent' (Table 6) to the question, 'In general, do you consider that support staff (*other than teacher aides*) are currently being used in the best ways for helping teaching and leadership staff achieve optimal learning outcomes for students?'.

The principals expressed appreciation of the work put in by different support staff. They also referred to processes or approaches in place in the school which they considered important for maximising the benefits of their support staff.

More specifically, the views expressed by the group of principals who gave a rating of 'To a large extent' included that:

- § their support staff (not counting teacher aides in this instance) freed up leadership and teaching staff from tasks and duties that would otherwise take them away from working more directly on achieving optimal learning outcomes for students;

"We have as many [support staff] as we need to do what we have to do. Their skills are well utilised and they take a large load from teachers and senior management, effectively freeing them to provide effective leadership and management."

Principal (secondary school)

"Administration staff free principal's and other leaders' time from admin and compliance and ensure they can focus on professional leadership."

Principal (primary school)

"We have just restructured our office to employ staff with higher competency levels, that is, a bursar and principal's PA. The school is growing rapidly and the principal has carried a lot of the admin load over the past eight years due to lack of funding and inability to attract staff with these skills based on the salary levels we have been only able to offer. We hope we can sustain the increased cost of this new structure — we can't afford any full-time support staff; we have support staff who work between 10 and 35 hours because of above reasons. Many do far more hours out of their goodwill."

Principal (primary school)

"They provide support and deal with non-teaching work to allow leadership personnel to get on with the teaching component."

Principal (primary school)

"The work the administrator does frees up the principal so that the principal can spend more time in the classrooms and support teachers and students."

Principal (primary school)

“Their contribution to the school is around a non-teaching focus, which frees all teaching staff to focus specifically on their primary role.”

Principal (primary school)

§ for best outcomes, the school needs to plan well for its use of support staff and regularly review how things are going;

“They are acculturated with school-wide expectations at the beginning of the school year and know the direction of the school and why. Therefore requests for support and materials are recognised for what they are. There is a school-wide commonality of learning.”

Principal (primary school)

“[Leadership] staff regularly review the way support staff are used within the school and are very happy with the way support is delivered.”

Principal (primary school)

“[We are very happy with their contributions], however there are always ways to refine and reflect on how things are working so this is an ongoing process.”

Principal (primary school)

“Positions are reviewed through appraisal and specially when someone leaves and the position is reviewed completely.”

Principal (secondary school)

§ the school needs to encourage and actively use input from support staff to improve systems and processes and promote an inclusive environment;

“We encourage support staff to contribute their ideas and opinions about how we can optimise tools such as our SMS [Student Management System].”

Principal (secondary school)

“Support staff (other than teacher aides) are involved in full staff professional development from time to time (eg, charter, Treaty of Waitangi).”

Principal (secondary school)

“Support staff who show an interest have opportunities to have input into most decisions and are a useful resource for the school.”

Principal (secondary school)

§ support staff (other than teacher aides) in their various capacities contribute directly to student learning outcomes in a range of important ways.

“Our library is organised and attractive. Librarian is available three days a week — teachers may use her to assist with reading projects.”

Principal (secondary school)

“Support staff are involved with the activities of a large number of students.”

Principal (secondary school)

“Our secretary is very efficient and completes work that gives me time to spend in the classroom. Librarian supports school literacy programmes as well as running the library.”

Principal (primary school)

“Our office manager having responsibility for maintaining the SMS [Student Management System], including all assessment data, [is of great benefit].”

Principal (primary school)

A further 32 percent of principals gave a rating of ‘To a moderate extent’ to the question on best use of support staff, adding comments to suggest that while they were generally happy with the contributions of their support staff (other than teacher aides) in helping the school achieve good outcomes for students, there were at times certain barriers.

These barriers included:

§ lack of finances to pay for as many support staff hours as they required;

“Again, if we had more money we could employ them for longer and they could finish the jobs allocated to them. At the moment they often finish stuff in their own time (donation). If we had more hours of support staff there would be less pressure on SMT [senior management team] and teachers.”

Principal (secondary school)

“As it is a sole charge school all support staff time is highly useful in supporting the leadership of the school as many of the basic administration tasks, etc, can be completed by the office administrator. However again the challenge is that there is such limited funding for this role that the hours allocated are minimal and the pressure ends up going back to the principal. Too much time is spent by the ‘leader of learning’ in schools completing tasks that could be done by someone else because the operational funding doesn’t allow for adequate support staff in small schools.”

Principal (primary school)

§ support staff being unable to take on duties or responsibilities that could contribute more directly to achieving optimal learning outcomes for students because they are already carrying too high a workload.

“They are working hard already and it is difficult to decide what ‘extras’ to give them [ie, in terms of student learning outcomes] and what ‘less necessities’ to remove.”

Principal (primary school)

A small number of the principals who gave a rating of ‘To a moderate extent’ also noted that while they were very satisfied with their support staff overall, there were sometimes some individuals who were not working in the way that was desired — “[One person] is not meeting the needs of leadership and staff and this position is currently being reviewed”, “At times, some show that they are unable to perform ‘higher order’ tasks”, “They need a willingness to up-skill” and “adapt to changing needs”, and that sometimes there were “inefficiencies” in the ways that staff worked or in the systems that they operated.

As well, two or three principals referred to difficulties in finding suitable people for some positions in the school, for example, *“It is difficult to find a qualified person for the library area”*.

The need for appropriate professional development was also mentioned:

“Administrative support staff need to receive further PD to understand the full extent of their role and [we also] need to review how they could assist/support leadership staff more.”

Principal (primary school)

Five percent of respondents felt that support staff (other than teacher aides) in their school were able to assist leadership and teaching staff bring about optimal learning outcomes for students to only ‘a small extent’. This was again said to be mainly due to funding issues and support staff having insufficient time to carry out all the tasks that needed to be completed.

“Our office administrator doesn't have enough hours. She only has five hours per week and that puts the pressure on the teaching principal to complete administrative tasks. She works many extra hours voluntarily.”

Principal (primary school)

“We have a librarian whose time is mainly spent processing books — we can't afford more hours for other things we would like her to do.”

Principal (primary school)

But in a small number of instances there also seemed to be a view that if support staff members' work was not directly related to teaching and learning, they did not really have an impact on learning outcomes for students.

“I feel they are required to be more day-to-day administrators. There is little time for them during the day to help me achieve outcomes for students. Also their knowledge of teaching and learning can hinder this. By the time they deal with mail, letters, newsletters, lunch orders, banking, phone calls and other day-to-day aspects of school offices, very little time is left. If we could afford to employ another administrator or increase hours I think we would have more impact as a team on student learning”

Principal (primary school)

“The office administrator deals more with the 'office' side of the school rather than the student's learning.”

Principal (primary school)

One principal, who answered ‘not sure’, expressed a similar view:

“The school secretary looks after our school resources which indirectly helps teachers achieve optimal learning but she has very little opportunity to work with children's learning directly.”

Principals Commenting on Teacher Aides

“They give vital assistance to students with needs of all sorts”.

Principal (secondary school)

Table 7: Principals' views on extent to which teacher aides were being used in the best ways to achieve optimal student learning outcomes

Teacher aides used in best ways in their school?	N	%
To a large extent	67	61.0
To a moderate extent	34	30.9
To a small extent	2	1.8
Not sure	2	1.8
Missing data	5	4.5
Totals	110	100.0

The data in Table 7 show that most principals (67, 61%) answered ‘To a large extent’ to the question ‘*In general, do you consider that teacher aides in your school are currently being used in the best ways for helping teaching and leadership staff achieve optimal learning outcomes for students?*’, some adding such appreciative statements as:

“Our teacher aides have all been here for 10 years or more and are valued staff members. They attend PD that is appropriate for their interests and field of expertise. They are flexible and willing to assist and support any teacher. They work beyond their hours — for example, school trips, attending shows.”

“Our teacher aide and her teaching programmes are very effective. The impact of the teacher aide programmes is measureable in terms of student achievement.”

A further 31 percent (34) of principals felt that teacher aides helped teaching and leadership staff achieve optimal learning outcomes for students to a ‘moderate extent’.

Like the principals who gave a rating of ‘To a large extent’, this group of principals expressed very favourable views about the input provided by the majority of teacher aides. They added comments, however, which indicated that other factors often had an impact on how well teacher aides were able to contribute, such as how well set up the school itself was to make best use of the teacher aides it employed.

The principals highlighted areas for attention in order to maximise teacher aide input towards best possible learning outcomes for students.

These areas included a need for schools to:

- § ensure that teachers are well prepared for including teacher aides within their classrooms and that if necessary they receive support to do this;

“[Teacher aides being used in the best ways] depends entirely on the classroom teacher — if teachers are well organised and programmes are considered with support staff in mind, then these are the classes where teacher aides are being used more effectively.”

Principal (primary school)

“Sometimes, I think teacher planning or expectations for teacher aides are not as well thought through as they should be.”

Principal (primary school)

§ take into account the knowledge, experience and skills of teacher aides when planning, developing and implementing learning programmes for students;

“I don’t think we liaise with them enough or ask their opinion.”

Principal (secondary school)

§ provide teacher aides with regular, ongoing mentoring and support within the school to help them with any issues concerning their roles, and to clarify their roles and responsibilities in respect of particular students and in relation to the wider learning goals of the school;

“They need to know what is going on and what the teachers are trying to teach.”

Principal (primary school)

§ provide appropriate training and development opportunities.

“Some teacher aide staff could do better with more training.”

Principal (secondary school)

Constraints to do with funding — for example, an inability to employ teacher aides for as many hours as required to meet school needs — were also mentioned by some of the principals.

*“We really need **two** full-time teacher aides, one for Years 1–6 and one for Years 7–13. We do not have the budget for this.”*

Principal

“We really don’t have enough funding to use them to support teachers in the admin tasks that can take up so much time — we would love the teacher assistant model from England. For this reason we prioritise teacher aide support to the most at-risk students and to programmes that we have researched and monitored and found to have high impacts on change.”

Principal (primary school)

Principals least likely to feel they were able to make ‘best use’ of their teacher aides variously attributed this to: a need to attend to one or more of the areas listed above (eg, teacher–teacher aide working relationships, provision of sufficient mentoring) in order to get the most from having support staff available; funding issues; and, on occasions, to some teacher aides being unwilling or unable to adapt in response to changes in their role or in the school overall.

Some of these points are discussed further in Chapter Nine which focuses on teacher aides.

Support Staff Views on whether their School Could Better Use them to Help Achieve Good Learning Outcomes for Students

Principals' views on the extent to which they felt their schools made best use of support staff to help leadership and teaching staff achieve optimal learning outcomes for students have been discussed in the previous few pages. To gain a support staff perspective on this matter, support staff participants were asked a similar question: "*Do you think the school could make better use of you to help achieve good learning outcomes for the students?*"

While Table 8 shows that the largest proportion of support staff overall (46%; 270) felt that their schools were making good use of them in order to achieve desired learning outcomes for students, a significant minority — just over a quarter (27%) — indicated that their schools were not using them as well as they could for this purpose.

The data further showed that of the different groups of support staff represented in the survey, administrative/executive staff were least likely to give this response (23, or 13.4% of the 172 represented in the study).²⁵

Most likely to give this response were teacher aides working with students with assessed special needs (54, or 37% of the total group of 147), specialist support staff (29, or 38% of the 77 in the study), and teacher aides who provide general teacher/classroom support (26, or 31% of the 83 in the study).

Table 8: Support staff views on whether their schools could make better use of them to achieve good learning outcomes for students

Could the school make better use of them to achieve good learning outcomes for students?	N	%
Yes	161	27.4
No, things are all right the way they are	270	45.9
No, because learning outcomes for students as such are not really relevant to what I do	80	13.6
Not sure	37	6.3
Missing data	40	6.8
Totals	588	100.0

Support staff who answered 'Yes' to the question offered suggestions for how their schools could use them better to achieve good learning outcomes for students. These are covered in Chapter Ten.

²⁵ Those in the administrative/executive support staff grouping were instead most likely to answer that 'things are all right the way they are'. They were also more likely than other support staff to suggest that their work did not directly contribute to or influence student learning outcomes: that their role was to achieve other functions within the school.

Summary Comments

Principals generally expressed very positive views about the contributions of support staff members to their school's ability to achieve optimal learning outcomes for students. Principals attributed the level of contributions to the qualities and skills of the support staff themselves and to particular steps taken within their school to think about, plan for, and incorporate the contributions of their support staff as effectively as possible. Where there was less than ideal practice, this was most often said to be due to shortfalls from time to time in the school's ability (systems and approaches) to use its support staff to best advantage, and to funding issues, although in some cases reference was also made to the need for some staff to better accommodate to change.

Support staff — particularly teacher aides and specialist support staff — tended to be less positive than principals about their opportunities for effective input into student learning outcomes, with more than a quarter of participants expressing the view that their schools were not using them as effectively as they would like in this area. Support staff suggestions for how their school could use them better are given in Chapter Ten. As will be seen, their suggestions often reflected what principals who were most satisfied that their support staff were being used in the best ways said was important for bringing this about — for example, the need for clear definitions and understandings within the school of different staff members' roles and responsibilities, and planning to ensure support staff contributions are effectively incorporated into the school's work towards key goals.

Chapter Seven: Challenges in Relation to Support Staff: Principal Perspectives

“Regular discussions with HOD Learning Assistance ensures that we place teacher aides in those areas most needed. However, funding dictates how many we can employ (we could always do with more). This applies to all support staff.”

Principal (secondary school)

“Finding suitable professional development opportunities is difficult—for school office staff, for example.”

Principal (primary school)

“[A challenge is] ensuring that support staff continue to reflect on their practice and meet the needs of the leadership team placed on them. Often they revert back to the way it was and do not maintain the current focuses for support staff.”

Principal (primary school)

“Ensuring job descriptions are clear and that support staff have defined roles when working with teachers. Ensuring they [support staff] feel satisfaction in the workplace.”

Principal (primary school)

For a slightly different focus on understanding support staffing in schools, principals were asked, *‘What are your main challenges in ensuring that support staff roles overall best help leadership and teaching staff achieve the highest possible educational outcomes for students?’*.

While four principals commented that they did not currently have any challenges — *“No challenges perceived at present”*; *“Don't have any challenges. All support staff are willing and flexible to help in any way they can”*; *“None! Generally they are all highly supportive. (Would be great if Ministry gave us staffing for support staff)”*, and some omitted to answer the question, most principals (82%; 90) identified several main issues.

In identifying these issues, principals reiterated key points made when reflecting on the extent to which they were able to make best use of their support staff to help achieve optimal learning outcomes for students. The identified issues, as discussed below, primarily concerned funding, the supply of professional development opportunities, staff adapting to change, communication within the school about different people's roles and responsibilities, leadership staff having sufficient time to work with support staff, and aspects of recruitment and retention.

In addition to the issues highlighted by principals, the latter part of the chapter covers principal views on the biggest challenges faced in their positions by support staff themselves.

Funding

“As I only have a secretary and two part-time teacher aides I have to be efficient in how we operate to get the best value for staffing. We work closely with the RTLBs to support classroom programmes.”

Principal (primary school)

“It is hard to pay really good people enough.”

Principal (secondary school)

Funding issues were nominated as a key challenge in relation to support staff by 37 percent (41) of the 110 principals who took part in the study.²⁶

The principals noted that their school faced challenges due to:

§ inability to employ existing support staff for as many hours as required to enable them to do all of the work that needed to be done, and/or to not being able to employ additional support staff to relieve leadership and teaching staff of some of the tasks that took them away from a focus on student learning outcomes;

“Main challenge is time. We do not have funds available for extra support staff or extra hours for current staff.”

Principal (primary school)

“Basically it comes down to money and funding — although we receive our grants for special education, etc, the BOT [board of trustees] does need to put quite a chunk into our permanent teacher aide so that we can employ her for the hours required to work with our children or support the classroom teacher with children who need help to raise their achievement in their literacy and numeracy. Almost all her time is allocated to these children with only a small part of time for things like photocopying, library work, etc. These things as you know are time-consuming for teachers who could be using their time more effectively on preparing programmes of learning. It’s a juggling act at times even in our small school to provide time for all the things that teachers would like a teacher aide to help with.”

Principal (primary school)

“In a small school, we cannot afford to pay for full-time support staff. More administrative help allows me, as a teaching principal, more time to focus on planning and teaching. In a sole charge situation you are often forced to have many ability groups. It is impossible to see every group each day so a teacher aide is essential in providing quality teaching time each day as opposed to providing 'busy work' for students.”

Principal (primary school)

“Never enough budget to employ enough support staff. We can't push things back onto the teachers so things get left or not finished.”

Principal (secondary school)

²⁶ Support staff are funded through the Operational Grant to schools. The Support Staff in Schools Collective Agreement sets out minimum rates that must be paid to support staff. Schools can choose to pay above those rates.

“Having the \$\$\$\$ to pay them for their time. People resources are critical in any school — having to balance ‘people’ against having ‘things’ like photocopying paper is a constant tension.”

Principal (primary school)

“Funding the number of hours needed to support students with identified needs is our major challenge for teacher aides.”

Principal (primary school)

“Funding. We really struggle to maintain adequate levels of support staff and have to invest a significant amount of time and effort as a school community in fundraising to be able to have what we believe is a basic level of support for effective student learning.”

Principal (primary school)

“The biggest challenge is financial. It would be useful to get a designated staffing entitlement for principal support staff — ie, a principal’s PA — particularly if we are to be ‘educational leaders’ in our schools.”

Principal (primary school)

§ not being able to provide support staff with paid time to attend meetings in the school or undertake training;

“Allocation of resource from external agencies, ie, Ministry of Education: Special Education for ORRS²⁷ does not meet level of need. Paying [teacher aides] for non-contact time — ie, morning tea, professional development, attending meetings — [is difficult].”

Principal (primary school)

“Funding for teacher aides — they are only here during class-time.”

Principal (primary school)

§ difficulties in paying highly skilled and experienced support staff at a suitable level;

“The main challenge is being able to pay good quality people what they are worth — especially in administration. I can’t pay my office manager what she is worth!”

Principal (primary school)

“Capability of support staff. Support staff deserve to be better paid. If there was more training and qualification expected, along with every school being funded for a guaranteed amount of support staff, then more people would see this as a viable career.”

Principal (primary school)

“The funding given for teacher aides is less than what we actually pay them for. We have very good experienced teacher aides and there is a shortfall of what we get and what we pay out. We are constantly having to juggle how we can spread the limited funds.”

Principal (primary school)

²⁷ Refer to footnote 19 earlier in this report (p.23) for a definition of ORRS.

§ inconsistency of funding, or funding being targeted for specific students — which can mean that if the student leaves the school, the teacher aide’s position cannot be guaranteed.

“Ensuring that the funding that employs them is consistent from year to year to enable ongoing support.”

Principal (primary school)

“The part-time nature of most of their contracts. The fact most are funded by ESOL grant.”

Principal (primary school)

The Supply and Take-up of Professional Development Opportunities for Support Staff

“Professional learning time is a challenge for all of them. The need to pay for that time and still retain the services they are employed for makes it challenging when training does become available.”

Principal (primary school)

“Being in a rural area and trying to ensure the provision of targeted, quality professional development to support both the support worker and the classroom teacher — eg, ESOL — [is problematic].”

Principal (primary school)

The supply and take up of professional development opportunities for support staff was a concern mentioned by 13 percent (14) of the principals. Issues included finding (external) professional development opportunities for staff that were both relevant and timely, being able to schedule professional development opportunities for staff at times that suited (this was especially problematic in the case of part-time staff), and being able to fund sufficient professional development to meet identified needs.

“Ensuring training for support staff — both time for it, and finding good PD [is a challenge]. On-the-job experience is best but support staff being waged and not salaried means paying by the hour if we would like support staff at [training] meetings after school. (The cost of this should come from good operational grant funding.)”

Principal (primary school)

“Ensuring appropriate professional development — eg, in finance, new systems, as we have a new administrator — is always a challenge.”

Principal (primary school)

“To provide professional development comes at a cost and obviously funding is an issue.”

Principal (primary school)

“Supporting [support staff] with travel costs to any main centres for training [is a challenge]. This applies more with the office administrator.”

Principal (primary school)

“For teacher aides — [would like to see] a willingness [on their part] to undertake professional development outside of normal work hours.”

Principal (primary school)

“Finding time for training staff meetings, etc, because of the hourly nature of their [support staff] employment. This is often done on a goodwill basis.”

Principal (primary school)

It is of note that in response to the question, ‘*To maximise the benefit of your support staff, which of the following [options] would your school find most useful?*’, three-quarters (83) of principals indicated that the option of ‘Increased training opportunities for support staff in carrying out their regular duties (eg, for administration staff, so they can free up principals from certain administrative tasks)’ would be of considerable value.

Support Staff Adapting to Changes within the Role/School

“Difficulty sometimes, when people stay in a position for a long time, in being able to adjust to the needs of the school. And without going through a formal restructure (quite nerve wracking for everyone) it’s hard to change this (eg, maybe school processes change, technology moves on, but the employee is not able to up-skill).”

Principal (secondary school)

An important challenge for a further 12 percent (13) of principals was how to effectively address some support staff members’ unwillingness to change or update their approaches, to show initiative, or to take on different tasks than they were used to that would better assist leadership and teaching staff. (The inability or disinclination of some support staff to adapt to necessary change was also previously referred to — refer Chapter Six — by several principals as a factor that limited the extent to which their school could make best use of *all* support staff to help achieve optimal learning outcomes for students.)

“Not all support staff have the skills to provide optimal support needed for the direction our [school] is headed. Although encouraged and PD is available, some have no desire to up-skill, especially for ICT.”

Principal (secondary school)

“Support staff who have set ways because of the length of time they have been in the school: it becomes hard for them to move with the times and the way a school might naturally move.”

Principal (primary school)

“Some individuals are reluctant to change or learn new systems.”

Principal (secondary school)

“It is a challenge getting some support staff to follow directions, work with new ideas and show initiative, understand their role/tasks.”

Principal (primary school)

“Efficiency and effectiveness — [ensuring support staff are] completing tasks well and in a timely manner. [This is] especially important in admin.”

Principal (secondary school)

“Motivating administration support staff to change and develop effective systems to support and enhance productivity within their areas, which would assist the leadership team and staff. Lack of motivation by [one or two] to develop and change — lack of knowledge and understanding of resources which can assist teachers and students.”

Principal (primary school)

“Some support staff show no willingness to up-skill themselves and grow with the [school]. Some who have been here for a long time have become complacent in their ways of doing things the some old way, and it is hard to break this attitude because they see this as personal attacks, etc. We have tried with their input to develop PD plans for each individual — although some have taken up the challenge others do not see the relevance.”

Principal (primary school)

“The person has been in the position a long time and changing her practice without upsetting this person and other staff is a challenge.”

Principal (primary school)

Effective Communication about Roles and Responsibilities

“Unfortunately, on our site the interactions between support staff and teaching staff are a little tenuous. Greater appreciation of roles would rectify this.”

Principal (secondary school)

Ensuring appropriate understandings within the school about different people’s roles and contributions was a challenge emphasised by 12 percent (13) of principals in the context of the particular question (as stated on p.71).

The principals identified effective communication and understanding about roles and responsibilities as important because of how it could impact on support staff opportunities to use their abilities and skills to best advantage. They also highlighted that it could influence the extent to which teaching and leadership staff either took on tasks that were the domain of support staff or, alternatively, risked overburdening support staff with duties beyond the boundaries of their position.

“[Achieving] communication [between different staff] and effective systems and procedures that ensure children's opportunities are optimised [is often not straightforward].”

Principal (primary school)

“It is good for all staff to know what our students' outcomes are, especially [when working towards] enforcing the key competencies.”

Principal (primary school)

“[Support staff] positions are not always valued by school community members, and sadly some students.”

Principal (primary school)

“We need to ensure that they [support staff] feel valued. We also need to know what their interests and capabilities are.”

Principal (secondary school)

“The professional etiquette issues or the relationships that support staff have within the school — most are related to each other.”

Principal (primary school)

“Trying to avoid curriculum leaders and other personnel spending time on activities that can be easily done by support staff. Currently I as the principal do a lot of so called dog work. Hence I am not doing what I should be doing.”

Principal (secondary school)

“[It is challenging ensuring] appropriate and consistent use of these wonderful people.”

Principal (primary school)

Time to Adequately Work with Support Staff

“As a small school and a small management team it is at times hard to work alongside these staff — by the time you deal with your day-to-day requirements, staff needs, student needs, parent needs, etc, it is hard to find long periods of time to support and keep them in touch with new educational trends.”

Principal (primary school)

Nine percent (10) of principals referred to the perennial challenge of being able to free up enough time on a regular basis so that they, or their nominees, could work with and consult their support staff properly, and provide sufficient feedback and support.

“Finding the time to work with support staff or finding the funding to allow them paid time to work with the teachers or school leader is an ongoing difficulty.”

Principal (primary school)

“Availability of time for training and explaining additional duties that administrative staff could take on from professional staff.”

Principal (primary school)

“Ensuring teacher aides are familiar with roles they have with special needs students.”

Principal (primary school)

“Finding the time to consult, work with them, etc — both my time and theirs — particularly with the very low rates of pay some get. The administrative demands on office and teaching staff continue to increase, leaving less time in the day to do more strategic things.”

Principal (secondary school)

“A challenge is ensuring that support staff appraisals, etc, are completed regularly so that they feel supported and empowered to work with [teaching and leadership] staff.”

Principal (secondary school)

“Finding the time to develop and put systems in place in consultation with staff [is challenging].”

Principal (primary school)

Recruitment and Retention

“Special needs teacher aides are often 'trained on the job'. Sometimes the reality of working with a challenging child or children results in high turnover [of these staff].”

Principal (primary school)

“[A challenge is] attracting and retaining staff of the highest calibre and being able to pay them what they are worth.”

Principal (primary school)

Although the majority of participating principals reported in response to an earlier survey question²⁸ that they generally did not experience problems with the recruitment and retention of support staff, six percent (7) of principals raised the issue of recruitment and retention of suitable support staff as a particular challenge for them.

“Retention of support staff (mainly teacher aide) is problematic. We were employing a younger teacher aide but she was unreliable and often stated it is easier on the dole. I have heard this from other principals.”

Principal (primary school)

“Because of lower pay and perceived low status many staff are relatively short term (2–3 years). No 'career' structure also limits the time many high quality support staff spend in the role.”

Principal (primary school)

“Not enough money to pay good staff, salaries too low to attract the best applicants.”

Principal (secondary school)

“At present no problems but would have a problem if the current teacher aide was to leave as in a small community it is not always possible to get someone to do 15–18 hours per fortnight for the salary rate, who is also empathetic to children and to the school community.”

Principal (primary school)

²⁸ When specifically asked about their ability to recruit and retain appropriate people for support staff positions, most principals said this was generally not a problem. However, some added that there were potential difficulties in attracting suitable applicants for some positions (eg, more specialised or technical positions — especially in smaller centres or rural locations, certain positions involving more high needs students, and some part-time or limited tenure positions). Additionally, as exemplified by one principal, “It depends on the economy as a whole. We have had some great staff who do the job because their spouse is employed locally or just want to get out of the house and at other times we have few applicants.”

Principal Views on the Biggest Challenges Typically Faced by Support Staff

When conveying what they considered to be the biggest challenges faced by *support staff*, principals' comments focused on the themes identified below for each of teacher aides and other support staff. These themes correspond closely with what support staff themselves identified as most challenging about their positions (see Table 16 in the following chapter) and align with their own challenges as principals in effectively managing support staff.

Challenges Faced by Teacher Aides According to Principals

Main themes in principals' comments regarding challenges for teacher aides included that they experienced issues or difficulties to do with: being kept well informed within the school; being recognised as a valued member of the wider school team; pay rates/ job security; the nature of their relationships with some teachers, students, and parents; having time to complete what they were asked/expected to do; and, to some extent, getting to grips with curriculum and other learning-related matters in their work with students.

“Being kept informed. It is hard to be in the loop about everything when you work part-time. Being provided with adequate PD/training. Feeling like ‘part of the team’.”

Principal (primary school)

“Not being appreciated (verbally) by teaching staff, or staff do not communicate with them enough.”

Principal (primary school)

“Misbehaviour of children. Being considered by some students as having less authority than teachers.”

Principal (primary school)

“Students who play hierarchy games. However, bad behaviour towards a support staff member is treated in exactly the same way as towards a teacher, so it happens infrequently.”

Principal (secondary school)

“Uncertainty of employment. Dealing with children who can be difficult! Constantly learning new teaching programmes and methods and [juggling different demands]: school says–, RTLB says–, Special Education says–, doctors say–, etc.”

Principal (primary school)

“Getting to know how schools work, then finding their place in the system. Teachers often have different understandings of what each role entails and this can cause issues.”

Principal (primary school)

“There is often a very high workload with high expectation on outcomes, along with challenging behaviours. This is not always reflected in the monetary value placed on the work.”

Principal (primary school)

“Teachers not having programmes set up for teacher aides.”

Principal (primary school)

Challenges Faced by Support Staff (other than Teacher Aides) According to Principals

Predominant themes were: heavy workload; competing demands; constant interruptions; unrealistic or unfair demands from some teaching staff and others; keeping up with changes, new systems, etc; being insufficiently valued by some other staff.

“[Support staff are] often in the frontline and have many tasks to complete and asked of by many. [Some teaching/management] staff not following school procedures [when making requests to support staff].”

Principal (primary school)

“Workload and changing expectations.”

Principal (primary school)

“In our school it is completing the tasks in the time allocated — everything is stretched.”

Principal (primary school)

“Interruptions. Having to multi-task, mind sick children, answer phone, take minutes, receive goods, complete financial reports ALL AT THE SAME TIME!”

Principal (primary school)

“Coping with change and the interpersonal/intrapersonal skills (or lack of) of the community they interface with.”

Principal (primary school)

“Overwork — in the case of this school with only a school secretary she has a huge workload and works way beyond the hours we can pay her.”

Principal (primary school)

“Keeping up-to-date with administrative changes and technology.”

Principal (primary school)

“The administrative workload that schools now face and the expectation to complete more in the same timeframe. (However, the subsequent increasing responsibility certainly has empowered and made each respectively feel more valued.)”

Principal (primary school)

“Being [sufficiently] appreciated for the multitude of good things that they do.”

Principal (secondary school)

“Feeling valued, having importance of the role they play recognised by others. Being included in the school, and lack of remuneration.”

Principal (secondary school)

“Being accepted as colleagues, as staff members. I’m trying hard to include them in most of the things we do here.”

Principal (secondary school)

“Demanding teachers, each thinking their job is the most important and all others are in place to serve them!!”

Principal (secondary school)

Summary Comments

Key challenges for principals in deploying support staff to best help leadership and teaching staff achieve optimal learning outcomes for students included:

- § managing available funding to maximise (for example) ability to employ support staff for sufficient hours to handle the range of work to be done;
- § trying to ensure that relevant, good quality professional development opportunities were available to support staff in a timely, affordable way;
- § seeing that all support staff were encouraged and supported to respond positively and effectively to necessary changes in thinking, procedures and approaches within the school;
- § fostering a school culture in which all staff developed a good understanding and appreciation of each other's roles and responsibilities in order to better work as a team.

Finding sufficient time to work effectively with support staff was a further, and constant, challenge.

According to principals, particular challenges faced by support staff in their schools included: workload; competing demands on their time; and having their skills and contributions appropriately valued by others.

Chapter Eight: Support Staff Perspectives on Aspects of their Work and Conditions

Information about the tasks and responsibilities support staff undertake on a day-to-day basis, including those they find most satisfying, has been reported in previous chapters. The Support Staff Working Group also wished to gain insights into support staff experiences of how their schools both prepared them for the requirements of their positions, and kept up with how they were getting on.

Support staff were therefore asked a series of questions to do with how helpful they had found the information and support received when they first began in their position, whether they had an up-to-date job description, and whether they had regular, scheduled meetings with leadership staff to talk about their roles and responsibilities and receive feedback.

Their views were also sought on how effectively they were included in communication networks within the school, and whether they were customarily included in wider departmental or school meetings for planning purposes.

Support staff were further asked what main opportunities they had had to develop skills in their job during the year, and what they considered to be the biggest challenges posed by their current position.

Participant responses relating to each of these matters are discussed in the following pages.

Induction; Role Definition; Appraisals, Guidance, Support and Mentoring; Communication; Involvement in Planning; Professional Development

The data in Tables 9 to 15 show that the majority of participants answered in a mainly positive way about each stated aspect of their positions. However, there were also notable levels of concern in each case.

Table 9: How helpful support staff found information and support received when they began their positions

	N	%
Very helpful	218	37.1
Quite helpful	178	30.3
Not very helpful	60	10.2
N/A — did not really receive particular support	80	13.6
Other answer ^a	14	2.4
Missing data	38	6.5
Totals	588	100.0

^a Not surprisingly, there were a number of participants who commented that they had been in their positions for so long they could not remember any details about early induction into their role.

during the year that need to be organised in a timely fashion, therefore I had a lot to do and I had to make sense of it all myself. I only made sense of it all after a complete school year had passed.”

Support services administrator (secondary school)

Table 10: Whether support staff had up-to-date job descriptions

	N	%
Yes	398	67.7
No	136	23.1
Other	24	4.1
Missing data	30	5.1
Totals	588	100.0

Table 11: Whether support staff had regular appraisals/performance reviews

	N	%
Yes	394	67.0
No	110	18.7
Other answer	41	7.0
Missing data	43	7.3
Totals	588	100.0

Induction

Just over a third of support staff (Table 9) rated information and support received when they began their present position as ‘Very helpful’. (This third included those who were already familiar with ‘how schools worked’.) In contrast, between 24 percent and 54 percent felt at least a bit more information and support would have been beneficial. This was particularly the case for support staff who reported that they had received little or no support in the first days of their new position:

“I had to learn the whole position as I had not been in this type of role before. There are a lot of procedures and paperwork in this role and there are many events

Participant suggestions for providing information and support to help support staff adjust well when new to their positions are outlined in Chapter Ten.

Job Descriptions, Appraisals, Formal Discussion of Goals for Development

Job descriptions and performance appraisals are important for helping staff know what is required of them in their positions. They also provide a formal structure for understanding how well they are doing in their roles, what their particular strengths are and where they may need further training or support to achieve a change of perspective.

Approximately two-thirds of participants in each case (Tables 10–11) answered that they had an up-to-date job description and received (or, if new in their positions, expected to have) regular performance appraisals/performance reviews.

Table 12: Whether support staff had the opportunity, at least once a year, to formally discuss goals for their development and contribution to the school

	N	%
Yes	384	65.3
No	126	21.4
Other answer	41	7.0
Missing data	37	6.3
Totals	588	100.0

formal, performance appraisals noted that these omissions sometimes detracted from their ability to do their work as well as they would like. From their perspective, not receiving regular appraisals and so on seemed symptomatic of wider issues in their school or particular department (eg, insufficient valuing of different people's roles and contributions).

"I would like to have a more in-depth analysis of my strengths and weaknesses but support staff don't get given this."

Meetings for Guidance, Support and Mentoring

Table 13: Whether support staff had regular meetings with more senior staff to discuss their work and solve problems

	N	%
Yes	231	39.3
No	253	43.0
Other answer	62	10.5
Missing data	42	7.1
Totals	588	100.0

However the data in Tables 10 and 11 also show that a significant minority reported not having an up-to-date job description or regular appraisals. A similar proportion (Table 12) did not have an opportunity, at least once a year, to formally discuss goals for their development or how they might contribute to the school.

Some of these support staff added comments to say that even when they had received (occasional) appraisals these had seemed of little point because 'nothing ever changed' as a result. But other of the participants who did not have an up-to-date job description or did not receive regular,

An issue for a larger number of support staff overall (Table 13) was that they did not have regularly scheduled meetings with more senior staff to discuss issues or concerns. It should be noted, though, that while 43 percent of participants answered 'No' when asked if they had opportunities for regular meetings with more senior staff, not all of this group felt this was a problem. Instead, some said that in their particular situation they were able to consult with colleagues on a day-to-day basis if they wanted to talk things over, and that having ready access to advice and support from colleagues usually met their needs.

Nevertheless, responses to several questions in the survey showed that increased opportunities to formally discuss work-related matters with more senior staff and receive professional feedback was an important consideration for many support staff.

Principals, too, while acknowledging that it was a challenge to ensure that it happened because of other calls on their time, often referred to the importance of regular meetings between leadership and support staff. They felt that such meetings were necessary for clarifying support staff roles and responsibilities in the context of the wider goals of the school, for keeping in touch with support staff views and experiences, and for providing formalised feedback.

“It’s very much a student first priority around a school when working for teaching staff and this means there isn’t really time left for anything other than the most perfunctory of comments or interactions with support staff even though we are expected to keep a lot of things running smoothly — which actually happens most of the time!”

Receptionist (school sector unknown)

Being Kept Well Informed about what was Happening in the School

Table 14: Whether the school did a good job of keeping support staff well informed and up-to-date about things happening in the school

	N	%
Yes, definitely	136	23.1
Yes, mostly	303	51.5
Not really	110	18.7
Definitely not	23	3.9
Not sure	1	0.2
Missing data	15	2.6
Totals	588	100.0

The data in Table 14 show that three-quarters of participants felt that their school did a good job keeping them informed and up-to-date about what was happening in the school. However, over a fifth (23%) of support staff indicated that in their experience their school did not do this well.

Support staff who were mostly dissatisfied with the extent to which they were kept well informed within the school most often attributed this to teachers and leadership staff ‘forgetting about them’ or putting them at the ‘bottom of the list to be told’. Not having up-to-date information to hand about activities or changes in the school was reported to be particularly problematic for front-line office staff who are frequently the first to field enquiries from parents and visitors to the school.

Some support staff also referred to inadequate or missing systems for communicating well across the school as a whole, but especially for part-time staff who are not in the school for the full week and are most likely to be left out of the communication loop.

Involvement in School Planning

Table 15: Extent to which support staff were involved when school leaders and teaching staff planned for the year/term ahead

	N	%
I’m involved in all school-wide staff planning over a broad range of matters	20	3.4
I’m often involved in planning but only in areas that are relevant to my role	184	31.3
I’m hardly involved at all	153	26.0
I’m never involved	199	33.8
Other answer	16	2.7
Missing data	16	2.7
Totals	588	100.0

Comments in support of answers as shown in Table 15 indicate wide variation within and between schools in the extent to which support staff are involved in planning for the year/term ahead. For example, while ‘office managers’ in some schools mentioned considerable involvement in planning, those in equivalent positions in other schools had little or no such involvement.

Extent of involvement in planning also differed according to position held, with certain administrative/executive support staff more likely, overall, to be involved in school planning, and teacher aides least likely. (However, as discussed further in Chapter Nine, for teacher aides, a generally more relevant type of planning is that which involves opportunity to work with teachers and others to establish learning and behaviour goals for students and develop appropriate programmes to help the students meet

those goals, rather than ‘school planning’ per se.)

A considerable number of support staff who reported little or no involvement in school planning either didn't see a particular need to be involved — ie, they were happy not to be or, in the case of teacher aides in particular, realised that they didn't have enough work hours available to enable them to be involved in school planning meetings.

In contrast, other support staff emphasised the importance of including support staff in at least some school planning exercises. Their chief reasons for wishing to be involved in planning included gaining a greater understanding of the work they were asked to carry out, and getting the opportunity to contribute their particular perspectives, skills and experience to help the school gain broader insights on matters under discussion.

“Strictly speaking it [being involved in school planning] isn't part of my role but as admin staff institute ‘The Plan’, our input would sometimes be beneficial. Many processes could [then] be streamlined for efficiency.”

Admin assistant (school sector not known)

“I would not mind to be more involved [in school planning]. I get asked questions about this and cannot answer them. I do the admin side after the planning is done.”

Principal's PA (secondary school)

“I produce Planners, etc, as a result of staff planning so am reliant on information being accurately reported and updated with me. Support staff meet horizontally but I think a more vertical meeting situation is also needed through the working and reporting levels. The management approach is not consultative with support staff — it is quite hierarchical within a school compared to the commercial world. I feel I have perspectives and insights to offer.”

Receptionist (school sector unknown)

“It would be to the school's advantage if support [staff] were involved in planning, etc, in order to plan for/purchase in advance relevant library books and resources for their units.”

Teachers' resource manager (school sector unknown)

“I am very aware that I have heaps to contribute but planning is done ‘out of hours’ and I'm not paid to be present at those times. I might also add that since I am good at maths, I do most of the departmental annual report statistics so I tend to see the patterns of our successes and failures.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Beyond booking the library for class use there is little involvement [in school planning] — except when departments are doing promotional weeks. One department gives me their teaching goals so I can provide resources. Otherwise I have to seek guidance, even from the English department!”

School librarian (secondary school)

“In my time at this school, the librarians have had to initiate involvement [in school planning] in most cases — asking for research assignments, struggling for IT upgrades, offering our services, encouraging staff to become library savvy.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“The specialist teaching roles of teachers get, and deserve, greater emphasis, but there is a need to recognise the ‘front line’ public relations service provided by support staff, a different discipline from the [teaching discipline]. We also need to be included in school planning.”

Pastoral care worker (primary school)

“I let them know what I plan, gain permission from SLT [senior leadership team] and check dates, but never included in school planning which can cause me extra work, cancelling clinics and turning away community health providers, eg, physio, public health nurse.”

School nurse (secondary school)

Opportunities to Develop Skills in the Job

Eighty-five percent (500) of the 588 support staff who took part in the survey responded to the question ‘*This year, what main opportunities have you had to develop skills in your job?*’. Of those who responded, 121 (21% of the total group of 588) answered that they had had no such opportunities in the last year.

Although most staff (just under two-thirds) reported having received some sort of professional development in the last year or so²⁹, other responses throughout the surveys indicated that support staff — especially teacher aides — would often benefit from more professional development targeted to the requirements of their current position. Professional development provision is further discussed in each of Chapters Nine (on teacher aides) and Ten (suggestions on how to better use support staff).

Particular Challenges of their Position

Towards the end of the survey, support staff members were asked ‘*What are the biggest challenges that you face in your current position?*’ Of the 485 (82% of all survey participants) who provided a response to this particular question, 25 specifically noted that they were not experiencing any particular difficulties (challenges) with their present positions. Remaining participants, however, each identified between one and four of the ‘challenges’ categorised in Table 16 as a reality for them.

It is of note that a ‘biggest challenge’ for a quarter of participants was a heavy workload, and, often, the lack of sufficient (paid) hours in which to tackle it. This response corresponds to comments from participating principals regarding the workload of many support staff and the difficulties involved in employing support staff for additional hours.

The other challenges listed in Table 16 repeat the main issues already raised by support staff participants in response to many other questions throughout the survey, including by those generally happy with their positions. Some suggested solutions from participants to address the issues or difficulties identified are discussed in Chapters Nine and Ten.

²⁹ The professional development received ranged from ad hoc, relatively informal opportunities within the school (eg, working alongside RTLB [Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour] for a couple of hours), to participating in school-wide professional development, to courses of study undertaken by individuals (sometimes partially funded by the school), to attendance at workshops or longer courses beyond the school. (The external workshops or courses were wide ranging, and included first aid courses; courses for librarians, IT and other technical staff; office-related or admin/executive/financial-related courses; and courses for teacher aides in working with students with autism, or physical disabilities, for example.)

Table 16: Challenges of their positions mentioned by support staff

Biggest challenges of position	N	%
Size of workload; keeping on top of the workload; juggling multiple tasks/timelines; time constraints/lack of time; constant interruptions	146	24.8
Insufficient guidance and/or support from senior management	71	12.1
Inadequate resources for doing the job, including insufficient support staff numbers, inadequate technology/poor access to technology, lack of spaces to work with individual children outside the classroom	63	10.7
Working relationship with teachers, including difficulties arising from inefficiencies, inadequate planning, inconsistent practice and procedures, and lack of teacher feedback	60	10.2
Managing poorly behaved students, and coping with student disengagement from school/their learning; dealing with the diversity of student behaviours	58	9.9
Poor, inadequate communication within the school — eg, support staff not kept well informed, or lack of understanding by teachers and others of what is involved in support staff members' roles and the difficulties that result from this	52	8.8
Adequately fulfilling/managing the needs of students with special needs	51	8.7
Lack of appreciation from teaching/leadership staff, and/or parents and students for the work of support staff; lack of 'status'; not being included in school discussions/planning	47	8.0
Aspects of the working conditions or environment, including uncertainty about available hours each week, how long their position will exist, or day-to-day timetable changes	32	5.4
Keeping up with new procedures, policies, curriculum changes, and keeping up with technology	30	5.1
Lack of opportunity for career advancement/promotion, or lack of opportunity to better use their particular skills within the position to improve outcomes	28	4.8
Communicating/dealing with difficult staff members; difficult relationships with key individuals on staff	25	4.2
Poor pay	22	3.7
Lack of professional development opportunities (including networking) to up-skill; professional isolation	17	2.9

Note 1: As respondents could mention more than one challenge of their position, the total number of comments adds to more than the total number of participants in the survey.

Note 2: The percentages shown are the proportion of the total number of participants (N=588) to the survey who identified the particular type of challenge.

Support Staff Perspectives on the Issue of Funding

The data in Table 16 show that only a small number specifically raised the issue of 'poor pay' when asked to indicate the biggest challenges faced in their present position, but support staff responses to the 'summing up' section at the end of the survey — *'If there is anything else you would like to add about your work as a support staff member, please do so'* — revealed a different picture.

Just under half (46%, 268) of participants provided a 'final comment'; of these, 99 or 17 percent of participants overall expressed concerns or dissatisfaction about their pay rates, often in conjunction with other key themes evident in responses to previous questions, such as the need to be recognised as a professional, and valued for their overall work and input, and for their particular abilities, skills and qualifications.

Some representative comments on funding and pay rates follow:

“I love working with the kids. I have had a wide variety of occupations over the years but this is by far the most enjoyable. It is unfortunate that it is such a struggle to survive on low wages and no pay during the holidays and will probably not be able to stay here forever because of this.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Don’t get me wrong, I love my job! But the cynic within me believes that I help out the school financially, since I am such cheap labour to (help) achieve ‘good learning outcomes for the students’. If in the future (and I hope not) performance pay would be introduced, I want a share of it. Certainly so far the teachers identify which children have a problem, but guess who is fixing it! Or so it feels to me! In my maths and reading, etc, groups I often identify other problems a child might have, usually related. I might point out to the teacher that a child doesn’t understand the difference between 12 and 20 or 13 and 30, and is therefore not adding, or that a reading book is too high a level after all. Or that they pronounce the ‘th’ as an ‘f’ and therefore have problems spelling certain words. Not to mention no breakfast or late nights for the child. My biggest asset is my common sense and my own judgement. Luckily I have proven that these two values are worthy of the teachers’ trust over the years!”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Would appreciate earning more as am on the basic scale as a teacher aide. Having been a primary teacher and earning a reasonable wage in the past, it is humbling. (But I appreciate the work!)”

Teacher aide – special needs/librarian (primary school)

“Office staff today need to have more extensive office skills than was the case many years ago. I feel this has not been recognised in providing schools with sufficient funds to employ staff who have the necessary skills and to work the hours required. Reporting, paperwork and other activities have increased for all staff in schools and if support staff can take some of the burden off the teachers then this must lead to more effective teaching.”

Office manager/accounts (primary school)

“On the whole it is a great job. But I have found that we keep getting more and more work with an expectation that it be done in the same working hours — our support staff numbers are being cut as operational funding becomes squeezed. This has happened for the last couple of years and is set to happen again this year. The funding for support staff needs to be specified.”

Finance manager (secondary school)

“Support staff have in the past often been regarded in a ‘mother help’ capacity — the actual situation now is that they are often highly competent, skilled people who deserve recognition as such, both in terms of pay and workload.”

Resource Room manager (secondary school)

“The support staff work very hard in all areas around the school. I am fortunate to receive a good rate of pay but I think the pay rate of teacher aides, etc, needs increasing.”

Student Centre Receptionist (secondary school)

“Just reiterate that it would be good to be able to employ more support staff but unfortunately due to financial constraints we are unable to do this.”

Executive PA (secondary school)

“Teacher aiding is a very challenging but rewarding job. It’s a pity that the hourly rate of pay does not value the amount of work and effort that goes into our daily work.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Teacher aides are cheaper than prison officers, so if teachers had more support in class maybe fewer students would be stood down or expelled thereby losing out on education and turning to crime. I grizzle and moan all the time, however, I do believe I AM making a difference and actually love my job.”

Teacher aide – learning support (secondary school)

“Even if your hourly rate is reasonably good, the limited hours available and the lack of work in the holidays means that it is not possible to earn a liveable wage. For this reason, schools’ expectations of the skills-level of support staff is at times unreasonable. For example, you are expected to have high levels of ICT skills but no provision of training to achieve this, you are expected to up-skill in your own time. You have to be flexible and have many varied skills — all for a take-home pay in my instance of \$236 per week. Add to this no job security and it becomes clear just how undervalued the workforce is.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“It is a wonderful job, really bad pay, very low hours, but it is still wonderful. It’s the kids I enjoy the most and hope I can do it again next year!”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I enjoy my work as a teacher aide and value the contact with both students and teachers. Although the pay is poor, especially given the unpaid extra hours I put in to develop lesson plans and resources, I get a genuine kick out of seeing the students’ progress.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

“With the level of responsibility it is sad that the remuneration does not reflect this. Now at the top of Grade C, I am really too expensive for the school to fund. My job should be funded through the same channel as teachers.”

Librarian (school sector unknown)

“Pay scales are very low for support workers on the whole. Because the salary of support workers is included in the department's budget, if a science technician is qualified, then there is less money available for resources. It should come out of a Ministry of Education account as for teachers, not the working budget.”

Science technician (primary school)

“My job is a specialist job with a heavy workload and does not reflect appropriately anywhere in the support staff pay scales. I know I am paid significantly less for my work as a support staff member in a school than what I would get in the private sector. I stay with the school because I believe I have a certain level of job satisfaction that I get from working here that I would not get working for a corporation. I feel that there should be some form of update to the pay system to put IT professionals on a suitable scale as the growing emphasis on IT in schools and the branching out of IT into many different fields brings the need for people with specialist skills to carry out work reliably. Then, on the current scales, the school might find it difficult to attract desired applicants in the future.”

IT engineer/helpdesk/web designer (secondary school)

“If I am away for a period of time and teachers need a specific solution most of them do not have the knowledge to do the work required to prepare it. I advise them on safe handling of chemicals as again most have no experience outside teaching. I have worked in the science industry for 25 years prior to working as a school technician and feel a technician's job in a school carries a fair bit of responsibility that is not reflected in the salary scale.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“I feel that nurses and the running of health clinics should be paid for by the Ministry of Health, not Education. I don't feel that the MoE adequately appreciates the expertise that nurses have to offer the students and staff of schools. I feel that this is reflected in our low pay rates. I think nurses should be recognised as professionally qualified employees, just as teachers are, who offer an important contribution to the running of any school. Currently nurses are seen as general support staff and our qualification barely recognised at all.”

School Nurse, NZRN (secondary school)

“The school nurse position should not be part of the support staff. We should be an essential role in all secondary schools like the teaching staff, with a national collective agreement and paid accordingly. We are professionals as registered nurses, often with post-graduate qualifications in youth health.”

School nurse (secondary school)

Summary Comments

The majority of participants indicated being generally satisfied with the particular aspects of their positions they were asked to rate.

However results also showed that a significant minority of support staff (around one-fifth) would like to see gaps addressed in the nature and extent of induction provided for support staff new to their positions, particularly when also new to working in a school environment.

Similar proportions of support staff underlined too the need for up-to-date job descriptions to give them a better understanding of what was expected of them, and more feedback on how they were progressing, including their strengths and where they might need to up-skill or receive additional support and mentoring.

A quarter of support staff felt that there needed to be better ways of keeping them informed about latest developments in the school, especially those that directly impacted on their work. And a considerable number of support staff particularly emphasised the gains that would result for both schools and support staff if at least some support staff had more opportunities to effectively contribute within a range of school planning exercises.

In addition, while it was shown in Chapter Five that many support staff identified a range of best things about their positions, a major challenge for a quarter of support staff participants was that of heavy workload.

Lastly, funding matters were often an underlying issue, even for those who were largely happy with other aspects of their work, such as the positive rewards that came from working with students and assisting teaching and leadership staff.

Chapter Nine: Reflecting on the Roles of Teacher Aides — Principal and Teacher Aide Perspectives

“Although teachers appreciate my being in the class, I feel I need more guidance. They acknowledge my experience and what I do, but often it is my perception of what is best and as they are the professionals I think they could direct me more. I am open to direction and instruction.”

Teacher aide – learning support (secondary school)

“I believe a large proportion of teaching staff value the support staff in their schools. There are also a proportion who are threatened by support staff, especially support staff who work in classes. Our biggest issues I believe are [the following]. The way schools are funded to pay our wages — this puts pressure on schools. While schools want good learning outcomes for all students, they also have to balance the books. Professional development is a huge issue and many support staff are not recognised as an equal in education — we too help students to achieve. Workload can also be an issue — there are only so many hours in a day to get work done.”

RTLB teacher aide (secondary school)

“Sometimes it can be a dirty, thankless job and the pay is not that flash, but other days you do make a difference in some children’s learning.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

Like support staff in general, teacher aides make an invaluable overall contribution to schools. They also report high levels of satisfaction about the work that they do. However, it became evident in the wide range of feedback provided by principals and support staff that there is considerable complexity around the roles of teacher aides.

There are many factors to consider, especially in light of the input teacher aides can have into the overall work of the school towards achieving optimal learning and other outcomes for students. On the basis of the feedback received, some of the factors — often closely inter-linked — worthy of particular consideration are outlined in this chapter.

Deciding on the Key Role that Teacher Aides should Play in the School

“There is an expectation here that [as well as teachers] teacher aides provide academic feedback [on students]. We also expect teacher aides to have a very good knowledge of specific children and the aides are very aware of this. They also feel empowered by having input. We have regular termly support staff meetings to make sure all have the opportunity to be informed and clarify where necessary. Their relationship with the teacher is also a priority so that we know the IEP [Individual Education Plan] expectations are indeed being followed and met. Regular meetings with the Leadership Team ensure that learning is occurring and continually being reviewed.”

Principal (primary school)

According to a number of both principals and teachers aides, ability to effectively plan for appropriate teacher aide input in the school means first ascertaining key philosophies in the school on what constitutes ‘best use’ of teacher aides. This would provide a sound basis from which to then develop an agreed, consistent approach for including teacher aide input.

“Some teachers seem to find it difficult to grasp the concept that they should use teacher aides primarily to support their programme and the more able students while they, the teachers, concentrate more on those students at risk.”

Principal (primary school)

“Teacher aides often still identify themselves as student minders, rather than as an aide for the teacher. This mindset is slowly changing. Teachers and teacher aides are beginning to plan more cooperatively for groups and meeting students’ needs in the class. Changing the minder concept is a challenge we are embracing. Both teachers and teacher aides need more support with developing this.”

Principal (primary school)

“Sometimes I feel like a babysitter rather than there for the betterment of the students.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“A lot of the work I do is around relieving teacher workload. I feel I could be used more in working alongside children, individually or in groups. I work in three different classrooms and only one uses me in this way regularly.”

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (primary school)

“Due to the way management has decided to utilise teacher aides in the last couple of years, there are many children at our school not receiving the benefits of teacher aide time that they could be getting. How much help children get is entirely up to how individual teachers wish to use their teacher aide-time. I have a couple of classes where students are most definitely helped with their learning outcomes, but the majority of my time is merely a ‘babysitting’ role.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I think management are sometimes missing the point [in how they assess whether teacher aides are required] — ie, that teacher aide support has benefits, [albeit] less obvious, in [that it provides] moral support and constancy for students who find school learning difficult. An extra pair of eyes and ears in the room is helpful beyond [‘only’] achieving specific learning outcomes.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

Planning for Effectively Including Teacher Aide Input

"[We make best use of teacher aides] because considerable thought and consultation goes into identifying the needs of students, teachers and administration. Regular reviewing of the use of a teacher aide is established practice. The principal and SENCO [Special Education Needs Coordinator] are responsive to the ideas and suggestions about better ways of using support staff (from teachers, support agencies and the support staff themselves)."

Principal (primary school)

As indicated in the previous section, achieving best use of teacher aides should involve first clarifying key purposes of teacher aides within the school (in relation to the teaching and other staff that they work with), followed by steps to ensure that school planning includes a strong focus on the how, what, and when of teacher aide input.

"For us, it is about continually revising timetables and IEPs [Individual Education Plans for students with assessed special needs] so that we know that the children who are being supported by the teacher aides have up-to-date learning goals and teacher aides have the resources to achieve them."

Principal (primary school)

"We have thought very carefully about how to deploy our teacher aides."

Principal (secondary school)

"We clearly identify our needs and have plans to ensure effectiveness."

Principal (primary school)

Induction for Teacher Aides

"I received very little [information and support when I began this position]. Was just put in a class with a behaviour problem child and learnt from my experiences."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

"I met with the principal, who showed me around the school, met with the teacher and children I work with, went over learning outcomes and all about each child. Had workshops in areas that I requested. They have an open door policy here — they are an excellent school."

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support

Because the nature of their work often means working directly with students, careful and thorough induction processes for teacher aides new to this type of work is particularly important — both from their perspective as a new employee and for the benefit of the students, teachers and others that they are to work with.

Some teacher aides reported being essentially thrown in at the deep end when they began their positions, while others noted that whereas they had received initial support, this was not necessarily sustained, at least, not for as long as they would have liked or felt they needed.

"Had to find my own way around the school, didn't get introduced to the staff, did that myself. Got told what I was going to be doing and away you go. Teacher didn't even notice I was there in the class."

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Unfortunately the teacher I worked with when I begin the position was not very forthcoming and I just muddled along.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Was given a map of the school and delivered to my first class!”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Initially received very good information and support but later on was left to my own devices to obtain resources, etc.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support

In contrast, other teacher aides felt well supported:

“Attended an orientation day at the school and felt really welcome there. Met my team and my team leader took time to ensure I knew what was required of me. I also attended an off-site course which included a section of what exactly my role did and did not entail, which was really useful.”

Teacher aide – vision (secondary school)

“I had full support, especially when new students with behaviour and/or learning needs started at the school. Was given past IEP [Individual Education Plans for students with assessed special needs] notes to read, past school records, etc.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I had great support from the principal who guided me in setting up programmes for students, what to include, and how to structure them.”

Teacher aide – special needs (school sector unknown)

“I received a lot of support from HOD and was sent on a course to learn about Down’s Syndrome.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I had a very supportive AP who was in charge of teacher aides. We had lots of meetings with all teacher aides which dealt with any problems [we were having] with children and informing us what was happening [in the school].”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I had someone train me in the first week of my employment. We are in a team and help one another if in doubt.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

Targeting the Work of Teacher Aides

"I timetable the other teacher aides' work and put them into classes where their strength is best suited."

Head teacher aide (secondary school)

Responses from some participants showed that teacher aides can at times find themselves working in quite intensive situations with students whose specific needs they don't always have knowledge or previous experience of. At other times, they may be required to work in situations that are simply not a good match for their particular qualities, skills, or comfort levels. Such responses reveal the importance of taking into account as much as possible teacher aide characteristics when assigning them to particular roles or responsibilities within the school.

"Teacher aides are not 'trained teachers' but are often used to act [as a teacher] or expected to 'know' what to teach or how to manage difficult behaviours or situations. We are trying to be more specific and target usage."

Principal (primary school)

"I'm getting more variety [now] as I'm not with the special needs child all day. I get to help other children as well. It's great."

Teacher aide (primary school)

Including Teacher Aides in Professional Discussions Regarding Student Learning Needs

"I am told what the student(s) need to learn, not just what activity to do with them, so I fully understand the intention behind the task and can reinforce it when the opportunity arises."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

"[Within school] training of teacher aides is very important — ensuring that they understand the 'bigger picture', ie, are not task orientated but are able to respond to the needs of the class/children. Communication."

Principal (primary school)

Principals and teacher aides highlighted the importance of information sharing and teacher–teacher aide liaison regarding needs of particular students and how to plan for and execute programmes of work for those students, in order to better ensure optimal learning outcomes.

"I attend IEP meetings, become informed about [the student's] needs and goals and provide the support and care necessary to provide for and achieve them."

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

"We see it as vital to have teacher aides involved with planning for special needs students."

Principal (secondary school)

"Would like to be informed more of the background of the students you are working with. When you know that, you can understand more why a child is like they are."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Sometimes it would be good just to have time to go over things with the teacher about the child you look after in the class instead of trying to catch them for information in breaks.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“It would be advantageous to be more involved or at least given a plan so that I could locate, copy, adapt, research, alter said work to my student’s level well in advance.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“There need to be clearer child expectations, learning goals passed on to us. Some teachers are very good, others could improve.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

Teachers and Teacher Aides

“The main challenge [in relation to teacher aides] is ensuring teachers plan for optimal use of teacher aides within their classrooms.”

Principal (primary school)

“[In recruiting teacher aides] we believe that it is important that the teacher is a strong part of choosing who will work with them in their classroom — the sound match of teacher with teacher aide is critical.”

Principal (primary school)

“[When I began in my position], it was a learning curve for everyone, as none of the teachers had worked with a teacher aide before.”

Head teacher aide (secondary school)

Frequent feedback from both principals and teacher aides when commenting on different aspects of teacher aide roles emphasised the need to ensure that teachers who have teacher aides in their classrooms are supported to work effectively with them.³⁰ It was emphasised that working effectively would mean teachers first having an understanding of the key contributions that teacher aides would be expected to make within the context of their particular school.

In addition, working effectively together was seen to require that tasks and responsibilities to be allocated to the teacher aide be carefully considered and incorporated from the outset in planning and preparation for the class as a whole and for individual students within the class.

The present study did not obtain teacher views. It would be especially valuable to also have teacher insights and perspectives on the issues raised regarding working relationships between teachers and teacher aides.

³⁰ It is of interest to note that 41 percent (45) of principals considered ‘Increased availability of training to help teachers and support staff best achieve complementary working relationships’ would be ‘Likely to be of real value’ and was something they would like to see receive priority. (The statement was one of several options for principals to consider in response to the survey question ‘To maximise the benefits of your support staff, which one of the following [options] would your school find most useful?’.)

“It is hard to help in classes where the teacher is disorganised. In classes where lessons are well planned and structured there is good opportunity to be involved in good learning outcomes.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Within the mainstream some teachers are better able to differentiate than others and it does make a difference when a teacher caters specifically to a particular student’s needs. Differentiation should be greatest within the special education area but this does not always happen. It is difficult to make a difference with students when the work they are given is not appropriate for their ability and you are expected to make this work.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“My time could be used more efficiently as sometimes I am told by some teachers that I am not needed.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Unfortunately, I’m not able to contribute a lot [to student learning outcomes]. My strengths are maths and phonics, but the way teacher aide time is now used, I no longer have opportunities to utilise these skills. It is mostly up to individual teachers to allocate what is done by their teacher aides and unfortunately a lot of teachers see us as babysitters. There are some that make good use of what I can offer students, but not many.”

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (primary school)

“I work for a great teacher who allows me to adapt, bring fresh ideas and implement them.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I work with really good teachers now which makes me know my job more.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“They [teacher aides] lack some of the teacher strategies/knowledge that help create focused progress. The communication, or lack of it, between aides and teachers can create huge frustrations.”

Principal (primary school)

“They [teacher aides] work alongside teachers to help deliver and support students through programmes that are designed to meet the needs of students in their care. They work in an inclusive classroom environment and have the opportunity to reflect and discuss programmes with class teachers and management. Clear goals are set and expectations are clear.”

Principal (primary school)

“All teacher aides are heavily involved in tight classroom programmes that are totally geared to individual [student] needs.”

Principal (primary school)

Supporting the Work of Teacher Aides with Appropriate Resources or Time for Planning

"I would like to be given worksheets, etc, to look at before classes begin so I can be better prepared to help in class."

Teacher aide – general classroom support/ESOL (primary school)

"There is no allocated time for meetings, checking emails, completing surveys, etc. These things all have to be done in our own time that we are not paid for."

Teacher aide in a Learning Support Centre (secondary school)

Some teacher aides talked about their need to be better supported by the school — specifically, through teachers providing them, prior to lessons, with worksheets linked to learning goals for the students they will be working with.

"Give me a written goal expectations sheet for my reading students."

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

"[Ensuring] more specific programmes for students and more time to be able to do this — eg, reading, spelling and maths."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

"More work supplied by the teacher instead of me having to find things to do with students."

Teacher aide – special needs (school sector not known)

Not all teacher aides however wanted or needed to be provided with resources from a teacher, some finding it more appropriate to prepare these themselves, especially when they had been working with particular students for quite some time. These participants were therefore more likely to say that the form of support they would most like from their school was greater allocation of (paid) time for carrying out their own planning work prior to working with students.

"I need more time without students to better plan activities."

Teacher aide in a Learning Support Centre (secondary school)

"I am willing to do what is asked of me. I also put in my own time quite often, to do paperwork and get resources ready so as not to take away from my paid time with the students."

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

There were as well a number of teacher aides who pointed out certain physical difficulties of their work that needed to be addressed through appropriate resources or processes.

"Tasks which require heavy lifting — ie, taking seats out of school van for wheel chairs are often difficult and hard on the body are an issue. It would be great to have an easier system for this."

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

Targeted, Timely Professional Development Opportunities for Teacher Aides

“Further professional development would be beneficial. We are often unqualified but working with the most at risk or behaviour problem students. Better teacher aide education would result in better, more effective teaching.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Providing time from busy schedules for teacher aides to receive additional up-skilling is difficult but important [especially as] teacher aides are encountering challenging behaviours [from the students they work with] and we need to be able to provide them with training in how to deal with these behaviours.”

Principal (primary school)

On the basis of a wide range of feedback obtained in the surveys, an important consideration is to establish areas in which teacher aides would most benefit from professional development opportunities and to then try and ensure that they receive those opportunities (despite a number of practical difficulties as mentioned earlier in this report). Provision of suitable, timely professional development relates to some extent to the earlier point concerning targeting the work of teacher aides to where their strengths lie.

“[I could be better used if I] received training in the special needs of students, eg, autism, dyslexia.”

Teacher support – special needs (primary school)

“Send me on more courses. It really helps! [To learn] more strategies on anything from physically disabled to behaviour [issues] to [helping students with] maths and reading would be valuable.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Keep me informed and up-skilled on all the teaching focuses used in the classroom, so I am consistent in my approach.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Need training on the job — as well as educational certificate.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Feel that better training should be given depending on the particular circumstances of the class you are assigned to.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Need more workshops for teacher aides to better equip us to work effectively with different groups and have more confidence in the job we do.”

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (primary school)

“I really felt that I was left to ‘learn on the job’. I really needed special training in how to care for children in wheelchairs. Although I had done a Teacher Aide Certificate and had had previous experience teaching in schools, I had not had any experience with lifting, changing and feeding children who are wheelchair bound. For safety reasons alone I felt the quick tutoring I was given was very inadequate. This is a huge need in schools and needs to be recognised.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“It would be great if we could have regular professional development. Things are always changing, the lingo, methods of teaching, etc. Just communicating with the junior students has changed. Senior students are another matter altogether.”

Teacher aide – general and special needs (secondary school)

“Hopefully, next year I will be able to have some further professional development, particularly in working with ESOL children.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“It has been invaluable this year having the SENCO [special education needs coordinator] teacher in an overall charge position as I’m able to ask questions and get support when needed.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“[A challenge is] making sure that adequate professional learning is in place as teacher aides are often the least qualified and we put them with the most at risk children.”

Principal (primary school)

“We have encouraged their [the teacher aides’] ongoing professional development and grade B status means their skills and experience are recognised.”

Principal (secondary school)

“We have evolved the role of our teacher aides over a period of time and currently provide targeted professional development for them and utilise their skills in a variety of ways.”

Principal (primary school)

Regular Feedback and Support for Teacher Aides

“The class teacher keeps constantly updated with progress of their [the teacher aide’s] students on programme — working along with the teacher aide, encouraging and supporting.”

Principal (primary school)

Under this broad heading, participants referred to the importance of clear, regularly reviewed or updated guidelines for teacher aides regarding their roles and responsibilities. The appropriateness of teacher aides having a voice in establishing their roles and responsibilities was also emphasised, as was the need to provide them with regular feedback and support for the work they were doing, including going through relevant information with them on how their students were progressing. As well, there was an emphasis on ensuring inclusive communication in the school and on supporting teacher aides to achieve a balance between the wants and needs of teachers, parents, students and others.

“I’d like some more information on what I’m NOT expected to do. Should I have to clean up vomit? Work out my own schedule of groups from a big list? Suddenly be told that next Wednesday I will be grilling 80 meat patties, or do I prefer BBQing them? How about dealing with a sheltered disabled girl’s first period. Where does my job actually stop?”

Teacher aide (primary school)

“The teacher aide team has a senior leader who meets with them regularly as a team and individually to ensure communication is two-way, and they have support and guidance. Up-skilling is given as needed, input from all is received on where to next, and appraisals are completed.”

Principal (primary school)

“They have clear instructions and expectations. We have support from RTLBs [Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour], RTLit [Resource Teacher: Literacy] and the senior leadership team in assisting with support staff.”

Principal (primary school)

“We are well organised and teacher aides have a voice in roles and responsibilities.”

Principal (primary school)

“We are such a small school, dialogue occurs regularly. We value their input.”

Principal (primary school)

“Trying to satisfy the competing demands of system, teacher, parent and child [is a significant challenge for teacher aides] we need to support them with.”

Principal (primary school)

“Like teachers, no two situations are ever the same. The variations are huge from day to day. Teacher aides find themselves having to manage the variables, manage the partnership between teacher and teacher aide without overstepping the boundaries while maintaining their own integrity too.”

Principal (primary school)

“[They need support] managing the diversity and range of demands of students and teachers in the classrooms: some [teachers] want teacher aides for extra management, some students don’t want to work with teacher aides. They [teacher aides] are often caught in the middle between students and teacher so need to be able to work with both sides in a manner that doesn’t upset the relationships with either.”

Principal (secondary school)

Continuity of Work with Students

"I think I would have been able to achieve more if I had continuity over the year with groups of students."

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

"Often [teacher aides] are faced with making decisions that they are not always trained for. [it is particularly challenging for them] being asked to work with so many children one after the other — 'switching hats'."

Principal (primary school)

Some teacher aides indicated that they would like the opportunity to work on a more consistent basis with particular students or within a particular classroom or subject area. They felt that this would enable them to better achieve work goals, and develop greater confidence in their knowledge, skills and experience to work with particular students. The teacher aides — and also principals — referred to the importance of having some consistency in their weekly timetable of work, and prior warning of change rather than having to work with different students, teachers, or classes at very short notice.

"There are some occasions where I feel I would have been able to achieve more if I had continuity over the year with groups of students."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

*"More regular classes with the groups that I have — taking on the more low achieving students on a **regular** and **often** basis."*

Teacher aide – special needs; general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

"Could contribute more by having the opportunity to be consistently in one class to follow the students' progress throughout the year."

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (school sector not known)

"I would like [prior] consultation when I'm assigned some children, to discuss their needs and prepare."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

The following comments further illustrate how teacher aides may have to move between students with very different needs, which is not necessarily a problem, but has the potential to be, especially in the case of newer teacher aides who have perhaps not yet had the opportunity for training.

"As the student I currently work with is leaving this year, I will be working with a student with different disabilities next year."

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

"Each term a new timetable is written, new students are identified to work with, therefore changes are ongoing. Sometimes, within a term, different names are added to my timetable."

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Working with other children depending on their needs and the budget, my position changes from term to term, or year to year: depends on funding to support other students’ learning to get them more independent in their learning.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

Funding Matters for Teacher Aides

“Some students could do with more help but funding restrictions are stopping them [from receiving it].”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

“I wish I had more time to help, there are children with ‘special needs’ not funded who need extra help and it’s difficult in a class of 25 students.”

Teacher assistant (primary school)

“Our [teacher aide] support staff are highly skilled, valued members of our staff. Unfortunately as demographics impact they are often the most vulnerable; all of our support staff are targeted to meet the needs of the teachers, teams and children they support.”

Principal (primary school)

One aspect of funding limitations for teacher aides is lack of time to spend with all students who need help, or lack of sufficient time to spend with students they are already working with.

Other issues included funding being linked to particular students, which could mean a potential loss of hours or even position for the teacher aide if the student left the school. It can also pose problems when the school is seeking to plan ahead for the effective use of teacher aide staff towards the goal of achieving optimal learning outcomes for students.

“We need money to employ teacher aides in an ongoing way to ensure special needs students are well supported — employing them as we do on a term by term basis based on whatever the agency gives us is very labour intensive and gives no guarantee of employment for some very good aides who may well leave for a more certain work situation. This is not an issue for the students who receive ORRS³¹ funding that is non-reviewable.”

Principal (primary school)

Some principals also raised particular issues as follows:

“Allocation of ORRS hours (funding) is often restrictive and limiting. This is more relevant to staff employed through the ORRS funding. SEG [special education grant] does not provide sufficient funding for students with moderate learning and behavioural needs; this means we are often unable to continue to provide support programmes due to funding. We have a number of students new to New Zealand schooling with moderate learning and behavioural needs which we do not attract extra funding for. Although we would like to be able to continue the current programmes in 2011, current funding levels will not support this.”

Principal (primary school)

³¹ For a brief definition of ORRS, refer footnote 19 earlier in the report (p.23).

“In the case of some students with severe behavioural needs there are issues with funding applications to Ministry of Education: Special Education, Interim Response Fund and Ongoing Support, which make it difficult at times to retain support staff. Funding can be withdrawn and dropped the moment progress starts to be made and this puts it back onto the school. There needs to be a longer timeframe — ie, six weeks of support [for these students] is not enough time to modify and consolidate new behaviours or progress in learning.”

Principal (school sector unknown)

Summary Comments

From feedback provided by principals and reinforced by teacher aides themselves, using teacher aides to best advantage requires:

- § effective communication and liaison between leadership staff, teachers and teacher aides about the desired input from teacher aides within the particular context of their school;
- § actively planning within the school for how tasks and responsibilities will be assigned to teacher aides;
- § providing clear guidelines for teacher aides regarding their role and responsibilities, especially when they are new to their positions;
- § ensuring that the teachers with whom teacher aides work understand the importance of incorporating the work and contributions of teacher aides into their programme and know how to do this;
- § providing support for teachers where needed to enable them to make best use of teacher aides;
- § including teacher aides in wider school professional development opportunities, as appropriate, and also including them in planning sessions which relate to teaching and learning goals within the school, especially when the sessions concern particular students with whom they work;
- § actively demonstrating within the school that the contributions made by teacher aides are valued;
- § providing timely and appropriate professional development opportunities for teacher aides to adequately equip them for their roles — some principals noted that although it was not always straightforward to provide such opportunities due to availability of suitable and timely course provision, location of school, and so on, many training needs could be accomplished within the school by including teacher aides in professional learning meetings, and through appropriate mentoring and support from experienced staff;
- § regularly reviewing plans and processes in relation to teacher aides in terms of how effectively they are used to bring about positive learning outcomes for students.

The discussion in the following chapter shows that many similar points were made by support staff in general when suggesting how schools could better use their input and minimise issues and concerns they experienced within their roles.

Chapter Ten: Support Staff Suggestions on How Schools Could Better Use their Input and Minimise Issues and Concerns

"[The school could] most definitely [make better use of me to help achieve good learning outcomes for students]! I could make a much bigger difference to the learning outcomes of students if what I did was managed and monitored better by management, rather than left to individual teachers. I have skills to offer that could be of great benefit to students, but no chance to use them. Management need to listen to and value my opinions and concerns, even if they don't agree with them."

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (primary school)

"My job would be much easier and more effective if teachers did their [part of the] job, met their deadlines, etc. I wouldn't have to do so much checking and chasing up of missing data."

Data manager (secondary school)

"[I would like the opportunity] to assist more with classroom practicals. Having another experienced science person in a practical class of 26–30 students definitely makes a difference."

Science technician (secondary school)

While the majority of both support staff and principals were very positive overall about the nature and extent of support staff contributions to key school goals, there were, at the same time, more than a quarter (27%) of participating support staff who felt their school could make better use of them to bring about good learning outcomes for students (refer Table 8 on p.68). As discussed in Chapter Eight, a similar proportion of support staff expressed a range of concerns about aspects of their positions.

Participants offered suggestions for how their school could more effectively incorporate their input and skills into the overall work of the school and in relation to student learning outcomes; they also provided suggestions for how their school could *'help [them] carry out the work required by [their] present position?'*³²

These suggestions, which reinforce many of the key ideas covered in the previous chapter on teacher aides, are presented under several main themes in the following pages.

Support staff suggestions on induction and communication processes within the school are also discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

³² Of the 391 support staff who answered the question, 83 (14% of participants overall) indicated that they did not need the school to help them *'carry out the work required by their present position'*. Similarly, to the question *'What two main things would you like your school to do to help you better understand what is expected of you?'*, 132 participants (22% of the total group of 588) stated that they did not need their school to do anything more, as they well understood what was expected of them. (This is perhaps not surprising given that most support staff participants had been in their positions for three or more years.)

Facilitate Clear Understandings within the School of Different Roles and Contributions; Foster a Culture of Cooperation and Support

“Not enough teachers had it explained what my role was and some resented my presence in the classes. Teaching staff need more information.”

Teacher aide and workshop technician (secondary school)

Several key ideas or suggestions are incorporated under this broad theme: from a need to focus on systems and processes to define and communicate roles and responsibilities within the school; to different staff ‘doing their part so others could do theirs’; to appropriate assignment and management of workloads; to school management and teaching staff having a better understanding of and respect for support staff roles.

These suggestions are illustrated below with support staff comments, some acknowledging good practice, others indicating where practice could be improved.

The first suggestion was that the leadership team within a school needs to put in place systems and processes to rationalise — and communicate — the roles and responsibilities of each of support staff, teaching staff, and leadership staff so that they complement each other effectively. The importance of leadership staff simultaneously encouraging and fostering a spirit of cooperation and support within the school as a whole to facilitate positive working relationships and better outcomes was also emphasised.

“[It would be worthwhile having the opportunity to] teach teachers how to use and collate data and read and create graphs, or to assist teachers more with their paper work.”

Receptionist (secondary school)

“At reception, we are the ‘between’ person for teachers and parents. However, I feel that a lot of teachers feel they need to do some administration things that can easily be done by ancillary staff.”

Administration secretary (secondary school)

“If we had more support staff meetings, perhaps the idea of discussing everybody's positions and what they actually do would be beneficial. So we don't a) reinvent the wheel and b) duplicate information already gathered but not available as there is no central admin computer filing area.”

Student office manager (secondary school)

“If I knew more of the slow readers I could be helping them in the time I have available when my class is in their option classes.”

Learning support assistant in a targeted learning class (secondary school)

“Need to use teacher aides to assist children with learning difficulties right from the beginning, not when the problems are bigger.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“School timetabling problems limit the time I can work with students.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Don’t have PE or dancing, etc, while we’re there! It takes away from our time with the students (which usually leads to numerous teacher aides doing at least 30 minutes per day overtime!).”

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (primary school)

“Make me more available to individualise learning. Teachers appear to not have time to help individuals.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Presently, I seem to be more involved in photocopying for the HOD than anything else. [In contrast], the physics teacher uses my knowledge to help her in the development of her practicals.”

Science lab technician (secondary school)

“Have me working with more children rather than just being in a classroom situation assisting where necessary.”

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (primary school)

“Take a walk with us to see what’s happening between the aide and students. Let teachers know we are more than just mother helpers. Our expertise can get results too. [It’s about] communication.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support

“[I would like the opportunity] to work with teachers in small groups, making them aware of resources available. It’s done with Year 1 and 2 teachers — needs to be done with all teachers.”

Librarian (primary school)

“I would be willing to take on more responsibility to help take some of the pressure off teaching staff.”

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (secondary school)

“At present I am likely to have 3–4 students who need support in one class when the students would be better served with a 2–1 ratio.”

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (secondary school)

“Have me be more involved with students with risk factors and poor behaviour as often there are underlying health issues.”

School nurse (secondary school)

“[Leadership team/teachers] to tell us what they are hoping to achieve for the students. To enforce school rules. If we see students out of class and approach them, we are often ignored, sworn at, etc. If all staff enforced the rules, the school would run more smoothly and encourage the students to be in the right place at the right time.”

Careers administrator (secondary school)

Other suggestions relating to the overall theme of clarifying roles, responsibilities and contributions within the school to help ensure that the work of each staff member effectively complements that of their colleagues included the need for:

§ teachers and the senior leadership team to do their part more effectively or in a more timely fashion so that support staff can get on with what they're expected to do (eg, be supplied with required figures from teachers without having to spend a lot of time chasing them up);

"I feel I do what is expected of me and sometimes more. Often admin roles are pressurised as further up the chain decisions are not made in a timely manner."

Admin assistant (school sector unknown)

"Make attendance records part of the teachers' appraisals, so they are more accountable."

Student Services Reception (secondary school)

"Some of the leadership staff better understanding the financial position of our school. To have some understanding of procedures, eg, financial. If they would only listen to me."

Executive officer (primary school)

"Need more input and instructions from individual classroom teachers."

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (school sector unknown)

"Better organisation by teachers."

Science technician (secondary school)

"[I could better carry out my work] if there were clear goals for outcomes for our department and if senior management had knowledge of my role — this would encourage better student attendance, improve students' timeliness."

Careers assistant (secondary school)

"I do my best to 'pick up the pieces' when other staff (teachers, SLT [senior leadership team], etc) don't do their job properly. ... [But] it makes my job a lot harder as I'm constantly trying to fix mistakes. We have a fantastic SMS [Student Management System] and it is not used properly. When students are with SLT or in other parts of the school, the staff members involved don't use the SMS to mark their attendance, so when we text home or contact home re students' absences they are often incorrect, as they've been elsewhere in the school and the staff member involved hasn't entered it into the computer. I try to get back to these parents later and apologise but generally it makes the school look bad.... If I come up with any new ideas [to improve systems] they are never run with and the 'old' way is continued, even though it is flawed. This is an issue for management to address."

Assistant manager, Student Services (secondary school)

§ effective school communication that includes support staff (discussed on p.123 following);

§ ensuring more realistic workloads for support staff — eg, through regular discussions with supervisors/senior leadership team regarding priority areas and content, and specifically considering the impact of school planning and management decisions on support staff workloads;

“Be more considerate in the demands placed on me. I am a hardworking, honest person and feel betrayed if management doubts that and expects more.”

Property manager (secondary school)

“Prioritise the order of important jobs. Get back-up when needed. My hours need extended and better hourly rate!”

Receptionist (secondary school)

“It is common for senior management to give me jobs with very little time to complete them. Sometimes I think it would be beneficial for senior management to be involved in actually doing those jobs. Some of the senior management team do get involved and assist me, which is great.”

Printing resources coordinator (secondary school)

“Ensure that stress and time pressures are reduced to enable me to carry out my job more professionally and in a timely fashion. The school to ensure that I am given uninterrupted time to work on important aspects of the job.”

Office manager (primary school)

“The bar seems to move: just when you think that you’ve got that task in hand from all angles, there’s more required.”

School secretary (primary school)

“Just be aware of the workload that increases every year with either new technology or new requirements from the Ministry of Education (eg, ENROL, SMS, etc).”

Office manager (primary school)

“Be more appreciative of us. Don’t expect us to be superwomen or men on the hours we are expected to work. Don’t overload us, be patient.”

Office administrator (primary school)

“To realise due to my part-time hours there is only so much I can do. I have also been training an assistant and at times I have a very heavy workload. However, due to discussions with the DP this has improved over recent months.”

ESOL teacher aide (primary school)

§ greater respect, appreciation, and status for support staff within the school;

“Treat me fairly, like teachers. Long gone are the days when teachers are more qualified and respected than support staff.”

Property manager (secondary school)

“Our opinions need to be valued. Because we are at the ‘bottom rank’ we become very perceptive and observant and are usually very practical people.”

Office administrator (primary school)

§ teachers and leadership staff to have a better understanding of what support staff roles entail — especially around workload and competing demands in the case of admin/exec staff, and the needs of students with special needs in the case of teacher aides. This suggestion included an emphasis on the importance of schools having effective networks in place to facilitate improved understanding and practice.

“Observe and appreciate the uniqueness of my role, which is not really like any other. I have such a changing and varied set of tasks each day.”

Arts coordinator (secondary school)

“Being my own boss effectively, because no-one understands my job.”

Administrator (school sector not known)

*“Create better relationship between Gateway³³ and **some** teaching staff. There is some resentment because Gateway removes students from class time.”*

Gateway coordinator (secondary school)

“[Teaching and other staff in the school to] understand how special needs work and to understand that teacher aides need help with students as well.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

Some teachers do not heed the need to stick to procedure to enable my systems to work efficiently. It is helpful when my manager supports me at the start of each year: we hold meetings with each HOD and explain precisely what the teachers need to do, and how time/money is wasted if they do not.”

Manager, textbook library (secondary school)

“Both the school board and senior management should show more interest in the library and actively promote it. Support my need for continuing quality assistance instead of using fiscal problems to leave me solo!”

Librarian (school sector unknown)

“My job is to get students into work placements. This means taking the student out of school for this commitment. The students are required to catch up on schoolwork. Some more understanding from some of the teaching staff is needed on occasions.”

Gateway coordinator (secondary school)

“Would appreciate support in dealing with some staff who do not appreciate the health and safety issues involved [in carrying out the science technician’s role].”

Science technician (secondary school)

³³ See footnote 22 (p.32) for a brief explanation of Gateway.

Include Support Staff in School or Departmental Planning

“We are always invited to and made welcome at staff meetings. We also attend the teacher-only days, where future planning is discussed — we are told our input is valued and listened to.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“[I help the school operate more effectively by] attending meetings and voicing my suggestions.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I should be involved with planning that’s relevant to my role but it’s usually an after-thought when things have gone wrong.”

ICT administrator (secondary school)

“I quite often suggest changes myself; some are taken up.”

Science technician/laboratory manager (secondary school)

Although some participants were happy not to be involved, support staff frequently referred to the importance of involving or including support staff early on, and also in an ongoing way, in relevant planning sessions within the school. They felt that this did — or would — increase support staff knowledge and understanding of what was happening in the school, increase a sense of belonging, and, importantly, give support staff the opportunity to contribute their particular ideas and perspectives and have these taken into account to benefit the school.

“More face-to-face time with people I work with — a more collegial approach to tasks. The management team talk about things and make decisions but I think they would benefit from the perspective and experiences of some support staff as well.”

Receptionist (school sector not known)

“[They could improve my input] by involving me at the outset when planning, then planning and finance could work together.”

Executive officer (primary school)

“Take into account admin staff suggestions around cost efficiencies.”

Admin assistant (school sector not known)

“I would like to be included more in decisions and management proposals. I have huge employment and finance experience but am not given a lot of opportunity to contribute.”

Finance manager (secondary school)

“Getting together before the school year begins to talk with teachers about particular needs and how they would like [teacher] aides to work within their classes would benefit everyone.”

Head teacher aide (secondary school)

“Mainstream teachers could discuss the planned class programme with support staff so we are more aware of the lesson’s aims. This would enable us to focus the students more effectively.”

Special needs teacher aide/support administrator (secondary school)

“[I would be able to help more] if I had some involvement in planning.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“I would like to be more fully involved in planning the year, especially for research assignments in each department, so that I know what topics the students need resources for. I can then make a pathfinder to highlight what resources we have and give them a few reputable websites.”

Librarian/ancillary (secondary school)

“We [teacher aides] did not used to be included [in staff meetings] but I have pushed to achieve this for continuity of school rules.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

“Our school has a very unique way of looking at our support staff and so the business manager and myself are both part of the senior leadership team (SLT). This demonstrates the school’s commitment to ensuring there is no ‘us’ and ‘them’. So as well as doing all the practical administration tasks of a principal’s PA I have a voice at a strategic level too. The main areas I am responsible for are communication, HR, support staff (in conjunction with the business manager), school events, administration for BoT and the SLT.”

Principal’s PA (secondary school)

“IT is a big part of the school and I am often involved in planning with teachers of various departments for classroom IT planning and also with senior management in planning for school-wide technology focuses like data projectors in classrooms and future-proofing new buildings/building upgrades.”

IT engineer, IT help desk, web designer (secondary school)

Better Understand and Use Support Staff Skills and Experience

“I actually don’t feel I have much at all to do with making the school operate efficiently and effectively. I can basically only do the work I am given, but could offer much more if given the opportunity to use my skills and help more children.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

A number of support staff emphasised that they would like to see their school become more aware of and make better use of the particular skills and experience that they possessed.

“The school could release me to assist with teaching areas — I have training in school productions, choral and vocal music and could fill in gaps but there is a distinct separation between teaching and support.”

Receptionist (school sector not known)

“I have been on a couple of short trips with an Environmental Class to study birds and fauna. I have knowledge in this area and was on the trips to support the class teacher identify birds.”

Administration secretary (secondary school)

“I have a wealth of knowledge and experience that could be tapped into which would benefit students by updating out-of-date resources.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Senior management should constantly be mining the huge knowledge gathered by support staff. They don’t. Maybe elitist behaviour — support staff generally have no university degrees, but have been to the ‘university of life’.”

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (secondary school)

“Make better use of the skill set I have.”

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (secondary school)

“I could help more [with student learning outcomes] if my services were used to full capacity.”

Resource room reprographer (secondary school)

“Utilise my skills and knowledge in Fine Arts. Ask me to engage with students more.”

Art technician (school sector not known)

“Using my library and task-setting skills (from my teaching years) would allow for more student-friendly research tasks to be set.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“I am good at what I do in the reading programmes, but my degree was strong in maths and science, and I feel I could be used well if the school had similar maths support programmes.”

General position – many roles (primary school)

Include Support Staff in Professional Discussions and Information Sharing Sessions

“[I would like] for there to be consultation more often in cases of truancy and absenteeism. Be able to work more closely with deans and SMT [senior management team] on attendance.”

Attendance officer (secondary school)

Support staff who suggested that schools should ensure that regular, multiple-perspective discussions and information-sharing sessions take place between colleagues (leadership staff, teachers, support staff) about the work in hand felt that this would facilitate improved outcomes for all involved, especially students.

“Attending IEP [Individual Education Plan] meetings for students that I am working with would enable me to know first-hand what the parents want their children to achieve and how the teacher has agreed that this should happen.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“With the help of the teachers, we need to be able to faster identify students who are struggling.”

RTL Teacher aide (secondary school)

“More feedback and discussion about the children in the two reading programmes I am responsible for could lead to better outcomes. I do talk with the principal and am hoping to get organised, through him, regular meetings with the senior syndicate teachers to discuss what is happening with the children I provide reading support to.”

General position – many roles (primary school)

“Yes, absolutely [I could be better used]. I would like to be consulted more on how I can help the student. To be included in planning for the student.”

Teacher aide – special needs/general teacher and classroom support (primary school)

“When working as a teacher aide, I’d like to be given all the relevant information if working alongside a particular student.”

Science technician/teacher aide (secondary school)

“I have regular meetings with speech language therapist, deaf education resource teacher and the class teachers of the students whom I work with. They are all very approachable and supportive.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

Allow More Time to Accomplish Given work

Provision of more time for support staff positions so that a greater amount of the work (including planning work) that needs to be done could be accomplished was a strongly made point by a considerable number of support staff (around 88, or 15% or more of participants overall).

“Because of the hours of employment it is impossible to give the amount of time needed to each individual student.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Need to increase our hours rather than constantly decreasing them.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“We teacher aides are thinly spread — and there are a lot of other high needs/special needs children needing teacher aide help but with limited funding that is impossible to achieve.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Probably the only way to improve results would be for me to be given more hours.”

Teacher aide – NCEA support (secondary school)

“I have a background in computing and internet technology and as students are much more technology-based nowadays I think if I were given more time each week I could expand the library onto the world-wide web.”

Assistant librarian (secondary school)

“I would be better used by increasing hours for preparation for class groups, and giving me time for creating displays which support the curriculum.”

Library assistant (secondary school)

“Employ an assistant for me: I would then have more time to assist teachers and make up new resources.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“If I was offered more working hours I would be able to use the time to keep up-to-date with staff about learning enquiries, so as to be better prepared in the library.”

Librarian (primary school)

“By having the time to help and demonstrate during class time.”

Science technician (primary school)

“The job is very big and more paid hours would help to achieve better goals.”

Sports coordinator (secondary school)

“I do not have enough hours in my working week to finish all my jobs. ... More hours would mean that I could get more done (an assistant would be nice!). Getting more done would lead to more productivity and this can only benefit our students.”

Science technician/principal nominee’s and STAR’s coordinators assistant (secondary school)

Increase Relevant Professional Development Opportunities

As indicated in several places throughout this report, a recurrent theme in feedback from principals, teacher aides, and support staff in general was the need for more targeted professional development opportunities, along with more chances to up-skill within the job.

“Would like to get sent on training for the [attendance] system that I am using — at the moment I am self-taught.”

Attendance officer (secondary school)

Schedule Formalised Feedback and Support Meetings

While participants often expressed satisfaction with their access to day-to-day feedback and support from colleagues (including supervisors), there were also support staff who desired regular, formalised meetings with leadership staff or supervisors for (additional) feedback and support. They also expressed a wish for timetabled planning sessions for general guidance and leadership and for discussions about roles and responsibilities.

“I would like more meetings with the principal and support for when a problem arises. [The leadership team] needs to help us address problems when they arise. It would be nice if the principal (and teachers) would ask how things are going more and give feedback on how you are progressing by speaking to you about it.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“We have a monthly teacher aides’ meeting to discuss problems, reflect on positives, share ideas/information.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

Provide Sufficient Resources for the Role

Some support staff commented on the importance of ensuring that the resources necessary for the tasks and responsibilities required by their role — including up-to-date technology and suitable and sufficient space in which to work — were available to them.

“Keeping up with technology is a must in all schools in today’s environment.”

School secretary (primary school)

“[Would like] an improved system to make resources (eg, comprehension sheets) easily accessible.”

Teacher support – special needs (primary school)

“Having more resources available to me would help greatly.”

Teacher aide – general teacher and classroom support (primary school)

“Improved computer access would allow a more integrated approach to research.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“If the school would purchase a newer computer (it is 6 years old) for my use and replace computers available in my space for student use (also 6 years old), I could work a lot more efficiently and quickly (usually takes 10–15 minutes to log in).”

Careers administrator (secondary school)

Other Feedback

Other desired forms of help from their schools specifically suggested by small numbers of participants in each case were: to be protected from constant interruptions when trying to complete required tasks or meet important deadlines; the school to timetable regular support staff meetings to provide opportunities for problem-solving, shared support and planning discussions; and being given sufficient time and clear explanations to gain adequate understanding of new tasks, policies, or approaches before being required to implement them.

As well as the suggestions for how schools could better use their input covered in the previous sections of this chapter, support staff participants had suggestions to offer in relation to induction processes and style of communication within the school. These are now discussed.

Address Gaps in Induction of New Support Staff

“I had great support from the principal who guided me in setting up programmes for students, what to include, and how to structure them.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“The previous person was here for about 10 days showing me what to do. She left behind a handbook with instructions on how to do my job — what was expected during the year, etc. Would have been lost without it [because] otherwise I was pretty much left on my own.”

Careers administrator

“I have seen the ‘baptism of fire’ begin to change over the last three years. There is now a clearer orientation plan for new-comers (ie, a walk around the school and an information manual is given out). When I started here I virtually had no idea what to do, which I found a little stressful, but I am a person who is lucky enough to pick up new ideas, etc, fairly rapidly, so with regards to finding out what I had to do when I started here, I self-directed, looked for things to do, asked questions, and generally figured it out for myself.”

Science technician/principal nominee’s assistant (secondary school)

Induction of staff into positions, when done well, is an important process for helping ensure that staff members, especially those who have recently joined the organisation, get off to a good start in their new role and are better able to fulfil the responsibilities of the position with confidence and skill.

Work undertaken by the Support Staff Working Group in Phase One of their programme of work indicated that induction of staff into new positions is often done in quite a superficial and ad hoc way, if at all, in workplaces generally and that new staff would often value at least some targeted time from managers or other colleagues to help them learn their role and get to grips with the wider context of the organisation in which they work.

Table 9 in Chapter Eight presented data on how helpful support staff found information and support received when they first began their positions. To further investigate this topic, participants were asked ‘*What further information and support (if any) would you have liked to receive when you first started in your position?*’ Of the 588 support staff who took part in the survey, just under two-thirds (65%; 380) provided a response to this question.

The largest number of comments (from 109 or 19 percent of the 588 support staff participants overall) were to the effect that on the one hand they were satisfied with what they had received and that there was an open-door policy in the school which meant that access to back-up and support was readily available, or, on the other hand, that they did not require more information and support because they were capable of working things out for themselves.

“I was happy with the information and support I received.”

Accounts clerk (secondary school)

“None, any queries were always answered clearly and promptly and support given where necessary.”

Office manager/accounts (primary school)

“I felt the support was adequate as my previous background in a similar role in another school meant I was very familiar with certain areas anyway (ie, student management systems).”

Administrative (primary school)

“I am not sure if there was anything that could have been done differently; we all had to read the department ‘green manuals’ and figure things out for ourselves as we went along.”

Executive officer (secondary school)

“As I had previously worked in a school this [not having induction here] was not an issue. Also, any training, etc, was and still is readily accessible to support staff at my school — if and when required. I worked alongside the woman I was replacing for one week so any questions I had were answered by her or the principal. The system works very well.”

School secretary (school sector not known)

However, although the majority of participants were largely satisfied³⁴ with how things had gone when they first started their current positions, a considerable number of others would have valued receiving more information and support.

Suggestions for Providing Information and Support for Support Staff New to their Positions

As well as the factors mentioned earlier in relation to teacher aide induction (Chapter Nine), support staff suggestions for how induction into their roles could have been more effective included:

- § being introduced to other staff in the school early on, especially those they would be working with most closely;
- § being given an introduction to the ‘workings of a school’;

³⁴ This level of satisfaction may perhaps also be partly explained by the fact that many participants had been in their positions for quite some time — their present level of knowledge and understandings about their positions may therefore have ‘got in the way’ when thinking about what more they may have needed when they began in the position.

- § having access to up-to-date, clear desk-files (or similar) relating to their positions which documented key systems and procedures in the school and described how and where to find out more if necessary;
- § a more extensive hands-on training period, together with ongoing support from senior staff;
- § a clear outline of their roles and responsibilities and how their work and contributions fitted into the overall work of the school;
- § knowing who to take queries or issues to on a daily basis.

The following comments illustrate some of the suggestions that participants put forward for more effective induction of new staff.

“A more thorough introduction to the systems and workings of the school and what expectations they had. Being given more time to connect with people outside the school [as part of my role]. More meetings to plan how best I can help teachers with their work. A lot of the position seems to be reactive instead of proactive because of time restraints and teachers’ needs.”

Arts coordinator (secondary school)

“We are not normally here at the beginning of the year when new teachers come in and so we are never introduced to them and so if we have to work in their classes we have to introduce ourselves and explain our role. Some teachers we never meet officially because we are not in their classes.”

Learning support assistant (secondary school)

“There are some things that they forget to talk to me about because they forget I am new and haven’t done them before.”

Librarian (primary school)

“I was a fish out of water with no experience working in a school. I was happy, confident and comfortable in the priorities of my job, but did struggle finding out the processes of the school. I found other support staff very helpful, but I was generally left to my own devices to find my way.”

School nurse, NZRN (secondary school)

“I would have liked more ‘big picture’ information as I felt like I was travelling in a big city without a map.”

Admin assistant (secondary school)

“Ongoing support, especially from those with management positions in the areas I work.”

Admin assistant (secondary school)

“Being told right away ‘Who is my immediate superior, who do I take instructions from’.”

Student Centre Administration (secondary school)

“Would have appreciated more about the school itself, the organisation, and how I was expected to fit into the hierarchy.”

General position – many roles (primary school)

Enhance Communication

“I think that given the role of support staff, and only being paid on an hourly basis, the school does an ‘OK’ job at keeping us informed. I feel that the school should consider having an all-up staff meeting (which support staff should be paid to attend — or it should be part of our contract and included in our working hours) at least once a month so that support staff feel more included and have more of an idea of what’s happening with our students and with our staff.”
Science technician/principal nominee’s assistant (secondary school)

The data in Table 14 (in Chapter Eight) show that close to a quarter (23.1%) of participating support staff considered that their school ‘definitely’ kept them well informed about what was happening in the school. Those who answered in this way often attributed this to strong leadership in the school, effective systems, and overall good staff morale in the school, with a prevailing spirit of openness, inclusiveness and support.

“We are a large high school with a large special needs staff that is very organised.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Doors are always open.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“The principal always keeps the support staff up-to-date in what is going on in the school.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

However, almost the same proportion (22.6%) felt that they were not well served in relation to being kept up-to-date or provided with timely, sufficient information. And, although just over half of respondents answered that they were ‘mostly’ kept quite well informed, at least some of the support staff who gave this response added comments showing that they felt there was considerable room for improvement. For example:

“Staff need reminding about keeping me informed — I sit alone in a separated reception area and can become ‘invisible’. Teaching issues don’t always filter through to support staff even though I field the calls about them.”

Receptionist [school sector unknown]

“Many changes and decisions are made by management ‘on the hoof’. They expect changes that affect my role to be implemented immediately and do not realise the adjustments that need to be made.”

Manager, textbook library (secondary school)

“Am kept informed on some things, totally miss knowing about other things because of lack of communication [in the school]. Teachers have a weekly meeting to keep up with things that are happening. Teacher aides do not.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

Support staff who were mostly dissatisfied with the extent to which they were kept well informed within the school generally attributed this to teachers and leadership staff ‘forgetting about them’ or putting them at the ‘bottom of the list to be told’, even when in the case of office staff in particular they are often the first to field enquiries from parents and others beyond the school. There were also comments about inadequate systems for communicating well across the school as a whole, which particularly impacts on part-time staff who are not in the school for the full week and are most likely to be left out of the communication loop.

“I would like to be informed more regularly about things so you know on a weekly basis what is happening with the class you are working in. Sometimes I come in, in the morning and the class isn’t there and I have to go looking for them. To be informed more when trips or special school things are planned. I would rather have a weekly schedule put in my cubby hole than news put on a computer site — I very seldom have time to go on the computer.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

Some support staff noted that it is important for support (and all) staff to take some responsibility for keeping themselves well informed and not assume that information will automatically come to them in a timely manner.

“I also make a point of trying to find out things for myself.”

Personnel officer (secondary school)

“It pays to be personally proactive about seeking information.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“I know where to find a copy of daily notices (office) but usually don’t go there so can take a lot of the blame myself.”

Lab technician/teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

Practical suggestions for enhancing communication included schools considering how they could enable all support staff ready access to emails (within their working day), in the way that teaching and leadership staff have, as emails are now a major way of conveying information bulletins throughout the school.

“It would be good if teacher aides had [access to] emails as teachers do.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I am lucky as I have a computer. Other support staff who cannot check emails sometimes miss out. They need to be proactive as they know it is a potential problem.”

Librarian (primary school)

Another suggestion was to ensure that there are regular (preferably, paid) meetings to update and include support staff in overall school processes, held at times that will accommodate the part-time hours that many of these staff work.

“I think that given the role of support staff, and only being paid on an hourly basis the school does an OK job of keeping us informed. I feel that the school should consider having an all-up staff meeting (which support staff should be paid to attend — or it should be part of our contract and included in our working hours) at least once a month so that support staff feel more included and have more of an idea of what’s happening with our students and with our staff.”

Science technician (plus other roles) (secondary school)

“It would be helpful if all support staff could attend the staff meetings.”

Principal’s PA (secondary school)

“We do not attend staff meetings. Management and teachers forget to let us know about things. It can be very embarrassing when contacted by parents and we have no idea what they are talking about. It is worse when students have gone on a trip that we know nothing about. Even worse is when students have been stood down and we have not been informed — we ring home to see why the student is not at school. Some parents get very angry and call the school incompetent, or worse.”

Student Services Reception (secondary school)

“I would prefer to have a support staff meeting at least once per month and I am endeavouring to see that commences in 2011.”

Student office manager (secondary school)

“We need allocated time for meetings, checking emails, etc. These things all have to be done in our own time that we are not paid for.”

Teacher aide in a Learning Support Centre (secondary school)

“Am kept informed on some things, totally miss knowing about other things, because of lack of communication. Teachers have a weekly meeting to keep up with things that are happening, teacher aides do not.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (primary school)

“I would like to be part of regular departmental meetings. I am not paid to attend staff meetings but would like to feel welcome at them.”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support (secondary school)

Summary Statements

Main themes in suggestions put forward by support staff for how schools could better use them in the overall work of the school, including achieving good student learning outcomes, included:

- § the importance of establishing clear role definitions within the school and fostering understanding about how different roles should complement one another;
- § the need to involve support staff in relevant planning and also in ongoing work discussions and information-sharing sessions;
- § making the most of the particular skills and experience of different support staff;
- § the need for purposeful planning by teachers and leadership staff to incorporate support staff contributions;
- § having necessary resources (eg, technology, work spaces) available for the work in hand;
- § more professional development opportunities that are targeted and timely;
- § ensuring that support staff have sufficient time to carry out planning and accomplish their key responsibilities adequately.

Chapter Eleven: Planned Changes in Participating Schools in How Support Staff were Used

"We are always looking at change. The main reason is to best meet the needs of students and teachers at our school. We want to get the best outcomes for our identified students requiring support. We are wanting to be open to new strategies, programmes and ways to support students. We want to get the best use of funds from ministry and BOT top ups, and understand best ways to raise student achievement. At times we also look at case loads and try to ensure support staff's workload isn't overly demanding based on cases being dealt with — ie, difficult students may require teacher aide timetables to be freed up more. We often look at ways we are documenting support so parents get a clearer picture of our goals and our outcomes."
Principal (primary school)

Survey data (and also the case studies included in the Support Staff Working Group's Phase Two report: *School Support Staff: Collectively Making Resources Count*) indicated that some schools were already taking steps to tackle a number of the issues and concerns raised by support staff and which were also often experienced by principals in seeking to ensure that support staff were used in ways that best supported leadership and teaching staff to achieve key school goals. Other schools too were aware that ensuring best use of support (and all) staff meant a process of continual planning and reflection.

This chapter gives a brief account of principal feedback on current steps in their schools to change the way they used teacher aides and/or other support staff, followed by support staff observations and perspectives on any such changes.

Changes being Made to How Teacher Aides were Used: Principals' Commentary

To the question *'Is your school currently taking any steps to change the way in which it uses teacher aides?'*, 30 of the 102 principals who provided a response (or 27% of the 110 principals who took part in the study) indicated that such steps were underway. Also, some of the principals who answered 'No' or gave an 'other' response commented that although they were not presently undertaking steps for change, this had either been done in the recent past or was a process underway at all times.

The comments on the next page illustrate the steps being taken in a number of participating schools to change their approach to teacher aides.

The changes described were mostly in areas principals had previously highlighted as being important for gaining the most benefits from teacher aide input and/or were in areas of particular challenge (refer Chapter Seven) — that is, the rationalising of responsibilities within different positions, developing a better understanding of the impact of various staff contributions, providing targeted support for teacher aides within the school and through external

professional development, facilitating teacher–teacher aide partnerships, and streamlining systems and procedures.

“Presently looking at how senior school/junior school use teacher aides; how we support and how we could learn from sharing the information to improve use and outcomes with teacher aides.”

Principal (primary school)

“We are looking at how we are tracking the progress of the children our teacher aide is working with. If this programme is going to be ongoing we are looking for specific training to help with delivery.”

Principal (primary school)

“Now getting teacher aides to be more involved one-on-one with students who need special learning.”

Principal (primary school)

“Becoming more specialised — ie, people who work with autistic kids, phonics, Lexia reading programme, ESOL.”

Principal (primary school)

“Clearly defining the role of a teacher aide and ensuring teachers and teacher aides understand it. Changing teacher and teacher aide mindsets from previous experiences. Providing ongoing professional development for teacher aides with staff and individually. Targeting individual needs of teacher aides through the appraisal system.”

Principal (primary school)

“Making teachers more aware of how they use teacher aides effectively in their classrooms.”

Principal (primary school)

“A focus on teachers planning specific programmes for student(s) — not just saying to the teacher aide ‘can you help that group’.”

Principal (primary school)

*“Having them spend more time specifically **with** students, less on making resources — ie, teacher aide releases teacher to work with high need students while teacher aide works with another group.”*

Principal (primary school)

“To support the teacher in class so that they can spend more time with children who find learning in a school context difficult.”

Principal (primary school)

“We want the outcomes from the investment we have put into our teacher aides to be measurable so they and we can have evidence of our teacher aides making a difference.”

Principal (primary school)

“Targeting professional development to support the acquisition and retention of specific skills.”

Principal (primary school)

“Providing in-school professional development to up-skill teacher aides in particular curriculum areas — ie, numeracy workshops to develop teacher aide content knowledge so that they are able to cope with the progression particularly at the upper end of the school. In-class support for gifted students is an area being explored and requires teacher aides to be able to understand how to work through some of the more complex problems, etc.”

Principal (primary school)

“Justification/rationalisation of why a teacher aide is needed for a particular class or child. Simpler forms for teachers and teacher aides to use.”

Principal (primary school)

Changes being Made to How Support Staff (other than Teacher Aides) were Used: Principals' Commentary

A further question asked principals to advise whether their school was *‘currently taking any steps to change the ways in which it uses support staff (excluding teacher aides)?’*

A fifth of principals (22%, 22) said that their schools were currently taking such steps.

The sorts of changes they were planning or implementing included:

§ better using the specialist skills of some staff;

“Involve librarian in remedial reading programme. Improve literacy — encourage students to read more.”

Principal (secondary school)

“[Having librarian] run a librarianship course with students.”

Principal (primary school)

§ re-thinking ‘who does what’;

“ENROL and other ‘new’ responsibilities for support staff have meant that one role is becoming more complex. I have had to hire another office support person (.4) as one office person could not manage new requirements on top of traditional role. This person takes on a personal assistant role to the principal (me) on occasions but I’m aware I can’t overload her.”

Principal (primary school)

“As principal takes a greater role as curriculum leader and is teaching more, the admin officer will be required to do more for principal.”

Principal (primary school)

“Extending role to support senior leadership team.”

Principal (primary school)

“The computer processing of payroll, student management systems, ENROL, and our finances now have all meant that we need to rework the admin roles to acknowledge this shift in work and the skills required to perform these tasks.”

Principal (primary school)

“Have them [support staff] take on some admin roles currently undertaken by the principal.”

Principal (primary school)

“Trying to balance the load on each staff member and maybe take on a third person who may manage the two staff currently employed.”

Principal (secondary school)

§ attending to ‘human resources’ aspects for those in support staff positions (eg, performance reviews; professional development; including and valuing them);

“Introducing performance reviews for support staff.”

Principal (primary school)

“Up-skilling by encouraging professional development courses. Developing clearer job descriptions to define roles and responsibilities. Encouraging more involvement and ownership within their selected roles.”

Principal (primary school)

“Support staff [are to] become part of the visionary and goal setting workshops for our [school] so that they understand and can share in the vision for our school and see how they can contribute to this vision and the direction our school is moving towards.”

Principal (primary school)

“Trying to improve initiative. We would like greater involvement and decision-making, but some staff are reluctant to pick up a challenge. Mind you, they don't get paid enough to make it worth their while.”

Principal (secondary school)

“By providing targeted professional development to support specific functions.”

Principal (primary school)

§ addressing some of the funding issues by taking steps to implement more efficient systems and trying to ensure best use of available staff through better matching of people with tasks and responsibilities.

“Reduction in cost of office staff, improvement in efficiency of office.”

Principal (secondary school)

“Reviewing the position of a resource manager and its effectiveness to enhance teaching and learning by assisting leadership and staff.”

Principal (primary school)

One principal also had the following to say about compensating for funding issues:

“Pay scale means that we are very aware of what we ask [of support staff] and therefore make sure that their respective voice is heard. The hours worked are often more than paid for and again the school reinforces just how much we value them. But again the extra hours worked minimalise the hourly rate. However by offering and remunerating support staff for personal professional development this empowers them. We also expect support staff to attend regular meetings that will support their needs — but within their respective paid hours. Where we cannot do this and it is after hours then we repay by expectations of non-contact during their 'normal' day.”

Principal (primary school)

Support Staff Feedback on Steps being Taken in their Schools to Change the Way they Worked

Support staff were asked ‘Is your school currently taking any steps to change what you are asked to do in your position or how you do things?’.

Thirteen percent answered that they were ‘unsure’, while close to two-thirds (65%; 381) of support staff answered that their schools were not currently planning to change what they were asked to do in their positions. However, although it appeared that most of these participants were indicating that no particular changes were currently either occurring or being planned for, a number of support staff made the point that while particular ‘steps’ were not necessarily being taken, change was inevitable and ongoing.

“Our roles are constantly changing and evolving as the school grows and we develop as individuals. Change is good — as we learn new skills we can put those to good use.”

Business manager (secondary school)

“They are not ‘taking steps’ as such. The job tends to evolve with what is required to be done — eg, assist on EOTC [Education Outside the Classroom] work.”

Science technician (secondary school)

“As IT grows and changes so does my role within the school. While I originally started out doing computer maintenance, my school role has increasingly grown to accommodate new technologies, including audiovisual equipment, web development, network planning, data protection and security, staff professional development, parent communication, budgeting, and is soon to include wireless management, including support for all the devices brought in by everyone.”

IT engineer (secondary school)

“Continually. Always looking to improve attendance and the impact it has on learning.”

Student attendance administrator (secondary school)

Among the 15 percent (89) of support staff who answered ‘Yes’ were several respondents who were unsure, or unconvinced, about the value of upcoming changes in the school that would affect the work they were doing.

“There is to be a large intake of [students with assessed special needs] for 2011 and no extra teacher aides being employed. What is the school hoping to achieve by making these changes: you would have to ask them.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Have recently been moved from [working in one part of the school to another] — not sure what the school is hoping to achieve by this.”

Administration assistant (secondary school)

And others referred to changes due to cost efficiencies being likely to mean loss of support staff hours and/or increased workloads, and in some cases, loss of some support staff positions altogether.

“School is trying to save money by cutting support staff hours.”

Admin manager (secondary school)

“My position is being disestablished. Some work is going to other support staff and I am being employed in another position. Reduce number of support staff due to drop in roll and amount of operations grant used to pay wages.”

Resource room manager (secondary school)

“Our hours might be cut because of lack of funding. School is hoping to save money.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“My hours are currently full-time. This as I understand it is a temporary measure.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“As the student I currently work with is leaving this year, I will be working with a student with different disabilities next year. I will be job sharing so my hours may be cut. The school is hoping to keep me in the school and fill a gap left by another teacher aide leaving at the end of the year. If there is enough school funding for special needs I will work the extra hours as a classroom support teacher aide.”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“Our hours are going to be cut due to a drop in students [overall]. ... But the amount of special needs children coming through is increasing but there’s no money for teacher aides!”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“Reduction of hours, assistance and budget. School is hoping to alleviate a budget deficit school-wide for 2011.”

Librarian (school sector not known)

However, there were also support staff who identified planned changes by their schools which suggested positive changes both for individual support staff members themselves, and for the effectiveness of the wider school, including learning outcomes for students. The sorts of changes mentioned involved:

§ encouraging teachers to be more focused/systematic/prepared for using teacher aides in their classes;

“I think management are requiring teachers to itemise exactly what they will use the teacher aide for if they ask for teacher aide assistance. The school is hoping to achieve better use of teacher aide time and resources (funding).”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

§ different approaches to or philosophies on how teacher aides should be used;

“Presently I support a whole class with a large number of under-achievers. The school is looking at whether to cluster or separate these kinds of students. Still deciding the best way to address this [the students’ needs] so there may be a change of focus for myself.”

Teacher aide – learning support (secondary school)

“[School is working towards having us] work ‘in-class’ alongside certain students as opposed to withdrawing them — so that they can learn to retain new information in a classroom environment rather than [in a separate] one-to-one [situation].”

Teacher aide – general teacher/classroom support

§ provision of professional development/training/ongoing support/mentoring;

“[The school is to] offer teacher aide certificate and more involvement in meetings. The school is hoping to achieve more rounded knowledge and experience [for teacher aides].”

Teacher aide – special needs (secondary school)

“The RTLB [Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour] is being organised to work with me to help special needs students. I will [then] be able to [better] understand the needs of special needs children.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

“[Introducing] a teacher aide course. The school is hoping to have each teacher aide qualified.”

Teacher aide – special needs (primary school)

§ process/system changes to improve efficiencies;

“Some of the jobs I used to do are now being done by teachers themselves. The school is hoping to achieve more efficient and effective use of my time.”

Office admin/school secretary (primary school)

“[Changes are being made so that] reporting is done in a more transparent way. Also reporting so the outcomes are clear and followed through where needed. The school is hoping that better decisions are made: that we will have financial data on where we are now and how we got there, what still needs doing.”

Executive officer (primary school)

“All audio equipment has been moved to my office. The school is hoping that by making these changes the items do not go missing and are charged regularly.”

Receptionist (secondary school)

“Increasing paid hours, more responsibility. The school is hoping to achieve job satisfaction, feeling of worth [among support staff], efficient turnaround of paperwork, records up-to-date.”

Office administrator (primary school)

“Job description assessment. The school is hoping to achieve efficiency in admin.”

Administrator (secondary school)

“Removal of the position of Teacher with Library Responsibility. School is hoping to use staff where they are most effective (eg, more use of my skills), to save money.”

Librarian (secondary school)

“I was finding one of my tasks in my main job really imposing. I spoke to the librarian and the business manager about this issue and within a very short space of time the problem was resolved. Also I am always evaluating tasks, how I could do them better, more efficiently.”

Library/resource assistant (secondary school)

§ taking on extra help (staff) to assist with workload.

“With growth of the school a new staff member has been employed. Each person’s role in the office is being more defined — to reduce a cross-over of tasks and double-up.”

School secretary (primary school)

“They are looking to employ an administrator to work between me and the accountant. The school is hoping to give me more time to better project manage and make the school a better and safer learning environment.”

Property manager (secondary school)

“I’m to be given additional help with an increasing workload, which will help [me] in following up on results and be more proactive in sport organisation.”

Sports coordinator (secondary school)

Summary Comments

Some schools in the study were reported to be currently undertaking steps to change the way they used their support staff. The sorts of changes being undertaken in most cases mirrored areas that principals and support staff frequently identified as important areas to address. For example, the schools were variously: thinking carefully about ‘who does what’ within the school (and classroom); addressing the need for targeted professional development opportunities; addressing workload issues; improving systems and processes to alleviate financial barriers; and providing more systematic approaches to support staff appraisals, guidance and support.

Chapter Twelve: Some Concluding Comments

"I have been privileged to work in a school that values my contributions and recognises the strengths of all staff."

School secretary (secondary school)

"At other schools I have worked in I have not felt as valued as I do here. I love working in a learning community where everyone is seen as a learner and everyone's contribution is valued evenly."

Principal's PA (secondary school)

"There is usually no consideration taken into account when organising and planning activities in and around the school about how to incorporate and involve support staff. There is a big them and us culture in our school, starting at the top."

Office manager (secondary school)

Many support staff expressed high levels of satisfaction regarding their work and referred to a strong sense of reward from the contributions they were able to make within their schools. Principals expressed similarly high levels of satisfaction regarding the input of their support staff as a whole, despite a number of challenges connected with the management and deployment of these staff.

Support staff also highlighted a range of concerns and frustrations to do with workload, pay levels, and time limitations, amongst other things. However, as can be seen throughout this report, support staff participants frequently emphasised the importance to them of a being in a positive school environment: that is, a school characterised by an open-door policy for all staff, and a general atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration in working towards best possible outcomes for students. When support staff reported that they worked in such an environment, to a large extent, this seemed to provide a workable balance with the aspects of their work and conditions that they experienced as less favourable.

In contrast, those least happy about their roles overall and least happy about their opportunity to contribute to the school achieving good learning outcomes for students tended to be those who not only expressed concerns about pay and conditions, but also considered that their contributions were insufficiently understood or valued and that they were not well included as part of the overall school team.

Both principals and support staff offered a range of valuable suggestions for how to achieve more efficient and effective use of support staff in schools. These have been taken into account in the Recommendations put forward by the Support Staff Working Group in their report *School Support Staff: Collectively Making Resources Count* (May, 2011).