



Information Update: RTLit Service evaluation and data

To:	Hon Erica Stanford, Minister of Education		
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Seen by the Communications Team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Request

Your office has requested a summary of data and/or evaluations relating to Resource Teachers: Literacy (RTLit) that informed proposals in the draft Cabinet paper “Early Budget 2025 approval: Reprioritisation of Resource Teachers: Literacy and Resource: Teachers Māori.” The Cabinet paper is scheduled to be considered by Cabinet Social Outcomes committee on Wednesday 12 February 2025 and Cabinet on Monday 17 February.

Alignment with Government priorities

The proposal to consult on reprioritising funding currently allocated for RTLit supports the Government’s Budget priorities to:

- Deliver more efficient, effective and responsive public services to all who need and use them – in particular, to improve educational achievement.
- Get the Government’s books back in order and restore discipline to public spending.

Information

Background

RTLit provide specialised literacy assistance to learners in years 0 to 8 who are experiencing difficulties with literacy learning. They also provide English reading literacy, written literacy, and oral language support to the teachers of identified students. Each RTLit is employed by a host school and works across several schools within a cluster. The Education (2025 School Staffing) Order 2024 provides for 121 full-time teacher equivalents (FTTE) for RTLit, and 110 FTTE are currently allocated.

Analysis shows that there are issues with the quality of the RTLit Service, which have informed your related Budget savings decisions. Issues include inconsistent practices (both professional and management) across the devolved service, inefficiencies evident in the significant time spent travelling to schools, and insufficient evidence of impact based on current data measures [METIS 1341125 and 1342122 refers]. This paper provides further detail on the evidence base underpinning this.

Operational and policy review of RTLit

The most recent evaluation of the RTLit Service was conducted in 2013 and the report, prepared by Martin Jenkins, was published on the Ministry's website in September 2014.¹ This operational and policy review identified **three overarching factors that significantly affect many aspects of the RTLit service's implementation**:

1. A lack of clarity in the Service's purpose and goals, including its target group.

There is wide variation and inconsistency in RTLits' and Cluster Management Committees' understanding of which students the Service is intended for; what the specific criteria for enrolment should be; what adequate progress looks like; and when a student should be successfully discontinued or referred elsewhere.

2. Cluster-specific characteristics, especially geography and scale of need, shape every aspect of the operation of the Service at the local level – i.e., what support is offered, to whom and how.

Geography acts as a constraint on the ability of an RTLit to serve a given area; rural areas face particular difficulties to efficient provision given the large distance and travel times involved and because of low population density. There are also variations in the scale of need, e.g., urban clusters with high needs report significant excess demand.

3. Resource allocation has not responded to changes in enrolments or patterns of demand across clusters.

Since RTLits were established in 2001, the level of resource has been held constant (at 121 FTE), and the allocation of it across the 86 clusters has been static, despite significant changes in school rolls and the number of students enrolled in the service.

The 2014 evaluation report also identified **other important issues** arising from the above.

a. Access to the Service is inconsistent and levels of unmet need are unknown.

- Demand for the Service currently outstrips the available resource. Rationing processes (including referral and acceptance processes and school practices) lead to inconsistent approaches and poor matching of available resources to those with the highest need.
- Lack of systematic referral processes mean it is not possible to accurately quantify the level of unmet need, or the characteristics of those missing out on support. Unmet need is likely to be highest in dense urban clusters with high equity/low decile schools.

b. RTLit practice and processes are variable.

RTLits typically practice in isolation, and there are no formal mechanisms for sharing best practice amongst RTLits. Key practice issues identified by the evaluation were:

- the way RTLits assess students is not consistent, and there are indications that some may do this key task better than others;
- there is no agreement amongst stakeholders (including RTLits) as to whether support should be aimed directly at students or indirectly through their teachers, and there are significant concerns about the quality and appropriateness of existing referral options;
- the reasons students are discontinued from the Service are inconsistent and there is variability in interpretations of when a 'successful outcome' has been achieved.

c. It is not clear that the current RTLit workforce has the right level of capability, and specific training gaps were identified.

¹ Available at: <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling2/learning-support/resource-teachers-literacy-operational-and-policy-review/>.

- RTLits (and some literacy stakeholders) identified a need for better initial practical training and ongoing support to work with 'well below' students.
 - The capability and willingness of RTLits to work successfully with teachers (using an indirect model) is a concern for RTLits and schools.
- d. *It is challenging to assess the overall effectiveness of the RTLit Service because intended outcomes for students are not clearly defined.*
- Whether the amount of literacy progress is optimal, or whether the support is being provided to the right students is unclear. The lack of clear Service goals means there is no clear basis to judge the value and effectiveness of the Service.
- e. *The cluster management model is not operating effectively or efficiently.*
- There are only a small number of RTLits in each cluster (most clusters have one RTLit, a small number have two or three) and there is inconsistency and wide variation in the way the clusters operate.
 - There are concerns about the lack of guidance for Cluster Management Committees. Individual cluster operation is primarily driven by RTLits as Cluster Management Committees do not provide strong governance, direction or guidance to RTLits. Cluster Management Committees and Principals responsible for clusters do not feel adequately supported to manage RTLits.
- f. *The Ministry's current influence on the operation and effectiveness of the Service is limited.*
- The Ministry has not provided strong support or leadership to the Service. In combination with low RTLit buy-in and understanding of the Ministry's Professional Practice Manual, and the Service's devolved and itinerant implementation model, this means that the Service lacks strong direction.
- g. *The fit of the RTLit Service within the wider system of literacy infrastructure is unclear and problematic.*
- The devolved nature of the Service and other key services (e.g., [what was then] Reading Recovery and the RTLB Service) means that the way the Service fits within the wider infrastructure varies from cluster to cluster.

Strategic intent to review RTLit

The first Resource Teacher: Literacy manual was introduced in 2016 and updated in 2021. While the manual provides operational and practice guidance, it does not fully address the issues identified with the RTLit Service, which require broader changes to system settings.

Further work to strengthen the RTLit Service in response to evaluation findings was signalled in Ministry action plans, including the Learning Support Action Plan (2019–2025) and the Literacy & Communication and Maths Action Plans (2022),² however this work has not been progressed due to phased sequencing of actions and budget constraints.

Note that RTLits have been communicated as an additional support for accelerating literacy learning. Based on a Ministry survey in April 2024, approximately 90% of RTLits self-identified as having undertaken structured literacy approach training. We anticipate this figure to now be closer to 100% given the recent focus on upskilling the workforce, inclusive of resource teacher roles, through SLA PLD.

² The Learning Support Action Plan contained an action to "Design improvements with the Resource Teachers: Literacy Service to better support teachers of children and young people with literacy difficulties, including dyslexia." The Literacy & Communication and Maths Action Plans contained an action to "Review and strengthen the role and functions of Resource Teachers of Literacy."

RTLit data for the 2023 calendar year

- Data on students supported by RTLit are collected annually. (RTLit data for 2024 will be available by the end of February 2025.)
- For the 2023 calendar year, data was collected for 4,842 students.³ The number of students on the RTLit roll has been relatively consistent over the past decade or so (in 2012 the number was 4,826 students).
- There was an average of 45 students per RTLit, with a recorded range of between 6 students and 201 students.
- Based on 2023 data, outcomes of RTLit support included:
 - 33% of students were successfully discontinued. (For comparison, in 2012, 45% of students were successfully discontinued.)
 - Of those 33%, at the end of the RTLit Service's involvement:
 - 43% of students matched current year expectations in all literacy domains they were assessed in;
 - 31% of students were 6 months to 1 year below current year expectations in at least one of the literacy domains they were assessed in;
 - 17% of students were more than 1 year below current year expectations in at least one of the literacy domains they were assessed in;
 - 9% of students were more than 2 years below current year expectations in at least one of the literacy domains they were assessed in;
 - 22% of students were rolled over for 2024;
 - 20% of students were withdrawn, for a wide range of reasons, including student left or moved, and that RTLit is a time-bound service (the RTLit Manual does not stipulate a set number of interactions);
 - 10% of students were referred on including to RTLBs, Learning Support Coordinators, and SENCO, in-class support, and other in-school resources.
- At the end of RTLit support, 23% of the total number of assessments (5,863) showed that students were matching current year level expectations for the measured literacy domain. 54% of the **reading** data points were more than one year below current year level expectations, 62% of the **writing** data points were more than one year below current year level expectations, and 26% of the **oral language** data points were more than one year below current year level expectations. These students are likely to continue to need additional targeted or tailored support to accelerate their literacy progress.

Data constraints

RTLits have the freedom to choose the writing and oral language assessments they use. As a result, placement in an assessment category (such as '6 months to 1 year below') is based on RTLit judgement. Also, RTLits are not asked to indicate whether accelerated progress for students has been achieved, even if students don't change assessment bands between the beginning and the end of the Service's involvement. This is particularly true for those students who are more than 2 years below curriculum expectation in their baseline assessment.⁴

³ For 2023, there are 5,853 complete pieces of assessment data with both beginning and end time points for 4,842 students across three literacy domains recorded: oral language, reading and writing. Some students were assessed against more than one literacy domain.

⁴ For example, a Year 5 student who is five years below curriculum expectations may have progressed to be only 3 years below expectations after RTLit support but the baseline and end data points would be the same – 2 years or more below.