

Chief Ombudsman's opinion under the Ombudsmen Act

The omission by the Ministry of Education to develop an implementation framework to enable progress on its strategy on New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) in education

Representatives from a Deaf Disabled People's Organisation (Deaf Aotearoa), who advocate for the rights of Deaf people in New Zealand, have raised concerns about the Ministry of Education's (the Ministry) strategy to progress New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) in education.

Deaf Aotearoa believes that the ‘Development Map for NZSL in education’ (the Map) does not adequately address the long-term issues faced by Deaf learners in relation to the provision of NZSL in the education system.¹

Deaf Aotearoa made a complaint to me about the matter. After further enquiries with the Ministry, it became apparent that the key vehicle to progress NZSL in education is the use of the Map.

¹ For the purposes of my report below, the terms ‘NZSL in education’, ‘education in NZSL’, and ‘NZSL education’ are used interchangeably. The ‘Development Map’ is the Ministry’s key strategy to progress access to education in NZSL.

After considering the Ministry's domestic and international obligations to progress NZSL in education, and investigating the progress of implementing the goals of the Map, I have formed the opinion that the Ministry has unreasonably omitted to:

- implement appropriate timeframes, lines of accountability and targets to operationalise the progress of the Map's goals;
- take adequate steps to ensure that it identifies and advises on the need to secure budget to implement the goals of the Map; and
- institute reasonable provisions for stakeholders to check in and feel confident that the Ministry is on track with progressing the goals of the Map.

Having considered the additional evidence the Ministry provided demonstrating how it evaluates and monitors uptake and success of various work programmes in the Map, I do not consider the evaluative framework the Ministry has implemented so far to be unreasonable.

However, the Ministry should further consider how it can best monitor and evaluate its own operational responsibilities and performance, and track its own progress against the Map's overall goals. To the extent that the Ministry has not yet undertaken such an overall consideration, I consider this unreasonable.

I recommend that the Ministry:

- revises its strategy (ie, the Map) for progressing access to NZSL in education in accordance with my findings;
- clearly and frequently communicates progress on redeveloping the Map to key stakeholders that it has shared the Map with; and
- provides me with quarterly reports on the progress of the above recommendations.