Resource Teachers Literacy: Operational and Policy Review

August 2013

Final Report

Synthesis of evaluation findings

MARTIN'JENKINS

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

Preface

This report has been prepared for the Ministry of Education by Donella Bellett, Robyn Ward and Nick Davis from MartinJenkins (Martin, Jenkins & Associates Limited). The report has been peer reviewed by Sue Douglas.

Our goal is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisations we work with. We do this by providing strategic advice and operational support in the following areas:

·   Strategy, Transformation & Performance

·   Policy & Economics

·   Evaluation & Research.

MartinJenkins was established in 1993 and is 100% New Zealand owned. It is governed by executive directors Doug Martin, Kevin Jenkins, Michael Mills, Nick Davis and Nick Hill, plus independent directors Peter Taylor (Chair) and Sir John Wells.

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Introduction

The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) contracted MartinJenkins to conduct an evaluation of the Resource Teachers Literacy (RTLit) Service (the Service). The RTLit Service is designed to provide short, intensive support to students with high literacy needs, and to identify students with persistent learning needs who will require ongoing specialist support. RTLits are specialist teachers whose role is to support and assist staff in schools to meet the needs of Years 1 to 8 students experiencing difficulties with literacy learning.

This report synthesises the work across all stages of the evaluation to make evidence based conclusions about the operation of the service and its effectiveness. These conclusions are used to identify possible areas for improvement to the Service.

The overall objective of the evaluation was to investigate the operation of the RTLit model, structures and outcomes through assessment of:

· the operation of the Cluster Management Committees

· the effectiveness of RTLits' processes and practices

· students on the RTLit roll (including who they are and their outcomes)

· the relationship between the Service and the wider literacy support system

· how the Ministry supports the Service.

The three key evaluation inputs were:

1   initial scoping: interviews with key stakeholders and review of key documents

2   online surveys of RTLits (95% response rate) and Host Principals (94% response rate)

3   case studies of six clusters, chosen to represent diverse characteristics (interviews with the Host Principal, the RTLit(s), Cluster Management Committee members, Service users, and other local stakeholders; data review; brief telephone interviews with non-using schools; interviews with regional Ministry staff).

Evaluation conclusions

Overarching factors

The evaluation identified three overarching factors that significantly affect many aspects of the Service's implementation.

- **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 (or inadequate) progress looks like

    § when a student should be successfully discontinued or referred elsewhere.

- **Cluster-specific characteristics, especially geography and scale of need, shape every aspect of the operation of the Service at the local level** – ie 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.

  – Variations in the scale of need represent a different type of challenge; clusters fall into two broad categories – low need clusters made up of rural and/or high decile schools, and high need clusters made up of urban and/or low decile schools; dense urban clusters with high needs report significant excess demand resulting in the rationing of service provision.

    (See the section on 'Service provision and outcomes are driven by key factors' on page 25 of the report).

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

  – Since the establishment of the Service in 2001, the level of RTLit resource has been held constant (at 109 FTEs), and the allocation of RTLit resource across the 86 clusters has been static, despite significant changes in school rolls and a doubling of the number of students enrolled in the Service.

  – Reviewing the current allocation against the Ministry's original formula shows a number of clusters that appear to be significantly under-resourced relative to others. These under-resourced clusters tend to be located in dense urban areas with concentrations of low decile schools.

    (See the section on 'Distribution and allocation of RTLits' on page 81 of the report).

Other important issues

The evaluation identified a series of significant, cascading effects arising from these three overarching factors.

- **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) are devised and implemented locally, leading to inconsistent approaches and poor matching of available resources to those with the very highest level of need across the country as a whole. Some rationing practices are driven by practical considerations (eg rotating access to different schools in different years), rather than student need.

- Lack of systematic referral processes mean it is not possible to accurately quantify the level of unmet need, or the characteristics of those who are missing out on support. However, unmet need is likely to be highest in dense urban clusters with low decile schools.

  (See the section on 'Accessing the Service' on page 31 of the report).

- **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

  - the reasons students are discontinued from the Service are inconsistent – students may be discontinued because they achieve a 'successful' outcome (though rarely does success mean reaching national standards), because of resource restrictions (ie to give somebody else a turn), or because they aren't progressing

  - RTLits (and other stakeholders including schools) have significant concerns about the quality and appropriateness of existing referral options

    (See sections on 'The intervention: assessing need and RTLit practice' on page 42 and 'Practice outcomes: discontinuation and referrals to other services' on page 58).

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

  - 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.

    (See the section on 'RTLit Workforce' on page 88 of the report).

- **It is challenging to assess the overall effectiveness of the Service because intended outcomes for students are not clearly defined.**

  - Students enrolled in the Service are thought to make better literacy progress than they would have without RTLit support.

– 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.

(See the section on 'Effectiveness and efficiency of the Service' on page 62 of the report).

· **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.

(See the section on 'Operational management of the Service' on page 71 of the report).

· **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. This lack of leadership in combination with low RTLit buy-in and understanding of the Ministry's Professional Practice Manual (the PPM), and the Service's devolved and itinerant implementation model means that the Service lacks strong direction. An absence of ongoing professional learning and development for RTLits from the Ministry is seen as a problematic gap.

(See the section on 'Need for Ministry support and overall leadership' on page 76 of the report).

· **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 (eg Reading Recovery and the RTLB Service) means that the way the Service fits within the wider infrastructure varies from cluster to cluster. It is variously perceived as: following classroom teaching and intensive support if progress is not being made; intensive support only for those with high learning needs; or specialist support, only available as a last resort for those with the very highest learning needs.

(See the section on 'Relationships to other services and literacy interventions' on page 93 of the report).

Implications for future operation of the Service

The evaluation findings have a number of potential implications – specifically for the operation and implementation of the Service, and more broadly for the wider literacy system.

The findings suggest that any changes to the Service are unlikely to be effective unless key policy issues are addressed first. These include:

- clarification of the purpose and goals of the Service, and its target group – including the need to review expectations for student outcomes to ensure they are realistic and aligned with the target group for the Service

- investigation of whether service provision could be improved by taking a segmented approach to delivery: the appropriate operational model for delivery in a dense urban cluster is likely to be different to the appropriate model for delivery in a rural cluster

- review of the level and the allocation of resource for the Service across the country and relative to the target group

- clarification of the fit of the Service with other literacy services.

Following from this, the evaluation suggests:

- a need to strengthen the referral process to ensure that the available resource is used to support an agreed target group

- a Ministry-led workforce strategy is needed with a clear focus on ensuring ongoing workforce capability, providing ongoing support and ensuring future workforce needs are met

- the appropriateness of the current cluster model needs to be reviewed

    - if the model is retained, there needs to be better support for committees and Host Principals to perform their roles (including performance management) and better operational guidance and tools (eg referral forms)

    - if the model is retained, a mechanism for sharing best practice between clusters should also be considered

- improved monitoring of student outcomes is needed

- a need for clear and visible leadership for the Service from the Ministry, or some other leadership function

- linkages and referral processes between the Service, schools and other literacy services may need to be strengthened.

Introduction

The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) needs to ensure that its investment in the Resource Teachers Literacy (RTLit) Service is delivering effective outcomes for priority learners, and that the delivery arrangements are efficient and represent value-for-money. It wants to understand variations in outcomes for different learners with a particular focus on Māori, Pasifika, learners with special education needs, and learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. The Ministry also needs to better understand the relationship between operational policies and learner outcomes. To do this, the Ministry engaged MartinJenkins to investigate the operation of the RTLit model, structures and outcomes, and to make recommendations that will improve delivery and impact.

Although operational guidelines for Cluster Management Committees and practice guidelines for RTLits exist, only anecdotal evidence has been available about how these are applied. This evaluation aimed to provide a clearer understanding of the application of guidelines, in order to better understand the relationship between practices and learner outcomes.

The evaluation is the first part of a two phase process. This first phase is intended to inform a second and separate phase: the development of policy options to improve the implementation and operation of the Service.

Purpose of the report

This report is the third and final evaluation report and marks the conclusion of the first phase of the overall process. It synthesises the work across all stages of the evaluation to make evidence based conclusions about the operation of the service and its effectiveness. These conclusions are used to identify possible areas for improvement of the RTLit Service.

Objectives of the evaluation

The overall objective of the evaluation was to investigate the operation of the RTLit model, structures and outcomes through assessment of:

·	the operation of the Cluster Management Committees

·	the effectiveness of RTLits' processes and practices

·	students on the RTLit roll (including who they are and their outcomes)

·	the relationship between the RTLit Service and the wider literacy support system

·	how the Ministry supports the RTLit Service.

Evaluation methodology

A brief summary of the evaluation methodology is provided as context for the report. More detail can be found in Appendix 1.

The three key evaluation inputs were:

1   initial scoping:

- · interviews with 16 key stakeholders including: academics, representatives from the RTLit Executive, literacy stakeholders and practitioners, principals and RTLits

- · review of key documents including: Ministry policy and operational papers, the RTLit Professional Practice Manual (PPM), operational guidelines and other papers relating to the operation of the Service; Annual Reports on the Service (monitoring data); and papers relating to the Literacy Taskforce and Strategy.

2   online surveys of RTLits (95% response rate) and Host Principals (94% response rate)

3   case studies of six clusters, chosen to represent diverse characteristics; for each cluster we:

- · conducted interviews over two days,covering: the Host Principal, the RTLit(s), Cluster Management Committee members, Service users, and other local stakeholders

- · reviewed relevant data

- · conducted brief telephone interviews with up to two non-using schools

- · interviewed a small number of Regional Ministry staff (identified by the Ministry) by telephone (Ministry staff were not necessarily connected with a cluster).

Analysis and reporting

The analysis of the key evaluation inputs was conducted by the evaluation team to ensure interpretations were checked and the context of each case study cluster was fully understood. Qualitative information was analysed using NVivo.

The reporting has been guided by the intervention logics developed for the evaluation (see Figure 1 and Figure 2), in order to ensure that the key components of the Service are examined in detail. A final section draws together our conclusions and identifies implications for the second phase of the process.

Key audiences for the report

The report is the key input to the second phase of the process. The evidence about the Service's operation and areas identified for improvement will be used to inform the development of policy options for this second phase.

Phase two is also being conducted by MartinJenkins, in order to fully leverage the knowledge and insights about the Service gained during the evaluation.

The Ministry is a key audience for the report. Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Design within the Student Achievement Group will use the report to oversee Phase 2 of the Review and inform ongoing implementation of the Service. Other groups within the Ministry likely to have an interest in the report include Special Education, and Research and Evaluation.

It is also anticipated that the report will be of interest to RTLits, Host Principals, Cluster Management Committees and the RTLit Executive Body.

Background and context

This section discusses:

·   key factors shaping the current Service (the Literacy Taskforce and subsequent strategy)

·   the literacy 'system' (of which the Service is one of a number of interventions)

·   the RTLit Service and its intended outcomes (including intervention logics)

·   characteristics of the Service's users – schools and students

·   characteristics of the Service clusters.

Literacy Taskforce and Strategy (1999)

The current model, structure and operations of the Service had its genesis in the 1999 Report of the Literacy Taskforce (the Taskforce). Among other things, the Taskforce was asked to make specific recommendations to improve teaching and learning for children in their first four years at school.

The Taskforce was particularly concerned with the wide gap between the highest and lowest levels of reading achievement and significant differences in performance between particular groups of children.

While New Zealand children are successful readers and writers compared with children from countries with similar or better socio-economic conditions, the same studies highlight a wide variation in literacy outcomes of particular groups.[1] Specifically, the evidence suggests Māori and Pasifika children, and children in low decile-schools, are more likely to have initially low literacy levels and that these initial disparities continue to grow over the first four years of schooling.

In any given class there is likely to be a group of children who make relatively limited progress compared with other children in their class. However, the literacy levels of this group vary from school to school and relative to the national average. For example, the average student achievement (and range of achievement) in a low decile school is likely to be lower (and wider) than in higher decile schools.

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[1]   Cited in the *Report of the Literacy Taskforce*, 1999; the studies were the IEA Reading Literacy Study, 1990; the International Adult Literacy Study, 1997; the NEMP Report 6 Reading and Speaking Assessment, 1996. Initial disparities were reported in School Entry Assessment/Aro matawai Urunga-a-Kura, The First National Picture - July 1997 - May 1998.

There is an additional group of children, variously estimated between one and four percent, who have been identified as having particular literacy learning needs that don't appear to respond to effective classroom literacy practice. For this group, a *second tier of* intensive, more specialised support is required, additional to the classroom teacher. The key literacy interventions in this area are Reading Recovery and the RTLit Service. However, for this group of children learning needs may not be limited to literacy acquisition and children may also be referred to other services (eg Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour [RTLBs] and Speech Language Therapists [SLTs]).

To raise overall literacy and numeracy levels, and to narrow the gap between high and under-achievers, the 1999 report of the Taskforce called for:

· best practice in literacy and numeracy instruction to be developed and promulgated to schools, with the intention of influencing teaching practice and guiding the development of curriculum materials and schools' purchase of such materials

· schools and teachers to place an emphasis on literacy and numeracy in the early years of teaching, including focusing monitoring of student learning outcomes on achievement in literacy and numeracy

· an improvement in the quantity and quality of curriculum materials for teachers and children, and better guidance for schools to assist their selection of materials for literacy programmes

· the development of a comprehensive professional development package to assist teachers to implement best practice in their teaching of reading and writing, including explicit instruction on the approaches needed to work effectively with children who are underachieving

· greater literacy leadership in schools, supported by a nationally co-ordinated service to provide support and advise school literacy leaders, to enable these leaders to evaluate and oversee schools' literacy programmes at the classroom level and for those children requiring additional support.

The Literacy Strategy

The Literacy Strategy was implemented in 1999 to respond to the Taskforce's concerns that the system did not adequately meet the needs of a significant proportion of learners. Under the auspices of the Literacy Strategy, a range of system changes and specific initiatives related to literacy teaching and learning were initiated to lift overall system performance and address under-achievement. Over the next decade these included:

· changes to the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) to emphasise the importance of literacy, especially in the early years

· introduction of the Literacy Learning Progressions and the National Standards for Reading and Writing

- the establishment of the RTLit Service, which was born out of the former Resource Teachers for Reading Service

- new requirements and improved support for professional development focused on literacy

- the development of literacy teaching and learning resources

- a focus on developing literacy leadership in schools

- the establishment of Literacy Development Officers (subsequently disestablished)

- greater research into literacy good practice and its promulgation to the sector

- home school partnerships focused on literacy.

While the Literacy Strategy has not been in place since 2008/09, the RTLit Service and other initiatives continue. The Literacy Strategy initiatives corresponded to a period of significant change in education policy, including devolution of significant decision-making to schools.

The literacy 'system' of learning and interventions

There are three tiers of support for literacy learning in New Zealand schools, a description of which can be seen in the Curriculum Update, Issue 2, October 2010. Effective classroom teaching is the first tier, while RTLits operate at the second tier providing targeted and intensive support (the third tier is ongoing specialist support). The model of support was endorsed by the Taskforce, who recommended measures to strengthen teaching practice as well as reinforcing the need for effective intervention programmes for children who will benefit from more intensive, specialised teaching.

The Taskforce report placed primary responsibility for literacy learning with teachers in the classroom, and effective classroom teaching is widely regarded as *Tier 1* support for literacy learning in New Zealand schools. Teachers and schools are expected to monitor student achievement in literacy from a very early stage, with a view to identifying issues early and ideally during the first year of schooling.

Tier 1, effective classroom teaching, expects teachers to use *The Literacy Learning Progressions* and/or *The English Language Learning Progressions*, and the guidelines in the Effective Literacy Practice handbooks (Years 1 to 4 and Years 5 to 8), and to continuously evaluate each student's progress. School leadership teams are expected to help teachers access additional guidance and support to expand their teaching, knowledge and skills.

If diagnostic assessment confirms that students who are not making suitable progress require intensive support, schools are expected to make immediate decisions about the kind of support they need. For many students, at different points in their schooling, it will be most appropriate to provide this through classroom programmes.

For students who are still not making suitable progress, a *second tier* of more intensive support is designed to be additional to targeted classroom teaching. A key intervention in this area is Reading Recovery and it aims to achieve two outcomes:

· to accelerate the student's progress in reading and writing to the average level of their peers, so that they can learn effectively in the classroom without further additional support after about 12-20 weeks ('discontinued')

· to identify those students who will require further intensive support beyond the short-term Reading Recovery intervention ('referred').

Reading Recovery is an in-school intervention that is provided in addition to classroom learning and is not intended as a replacement for it.[2] Reading Recovery guidance indicates that students should begin the programme as near as possible to the end of their first year of school, as delaying entry may increase the achievement gap and result in the student requiring longer in the intervention to catch up with peers.

Reading Recovery is delivered by a dedicated teacher who is expected to work with the classroom teacher to ensure a seamless learning programme. School leaders monitor student progress and are responsible for ensuring that the progress of all students who are no longer in Reading Recovery is closely monitored and that action is taken if progress is not maintained. Classroom and Reading Recovery teachers are also expected to inform and involve parents and whānau so that they have appropriate expectations for achievement and know how to support the student at home.

Where a student requires ongoing, more specialist and intensive support, they can be referred to:

· the RTLit Service

· the RTLB Service

· Speech Language Therapists (SLTs).

RTLBs work with students and teachers by providing itinerant specialist support, and have a pivotal role to play in helping cluster schools improve education outcomes for students with moderate learning and/or behaviour difficulties. They may support a specific intervention through Learner Support Funding. RTLBs can also work at either Tier 2 or 3 depending on the particular needs of the student (although they are not literacy trained).

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2   Note that not all schools use Reading Recovery. In 2011, 64% of schools with six year-olds had access to Reading Recovery. There was large variation around the country, from 50% of schools in Northland offering Reading Recovery, to 92% of schools in the Nelson region. (Lee, M (2011). *Annual Monitoring of Reading Recovery: The data for 2011.* Accessed 16 July 2012, http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/111104/Annual-Monitoring-of-Reading-Recovery-2011-Data.pdf).

SLTs help teachers in Years 1 to 8 (with priority given to Years 1 to 3) support oral language development as a foundation for effective literacy learning.

The RTLit Service and its intended outcomes

The RTLit Service is designed to provide short, intensive support to students with high literacy needs, and to identify students with persistent learning needs who will require ongoing specialist support. The goal is that students make accelerated learning progress and are able to work at or near the appropriate New Zealand Reading and/or Writing Standard/Curriculum Level[3] and benefit from effective classroom teaching, and maintain expected progress to close the gap with their cohort (noting that their cohort may not be working at the National Standard).

The service was established in 2001, when the role of the Resource Teacher of Reading (RTR) was replaced by that of RTLit, and the service was modified to provide support to teachers and staff rather than solely to students. The majority of RTRs became RTLits, although they were required to have completed a training course approved by the Ministry of Education. The total number of RTLits has remained constant since the beginning of the Service (109 in 86 clusters).

RTLits are specialist teachers whose role is to support and assist staff in schools to meet the needs of Years 1 to 8 students experiencing difficulties with literacy learning. Key aspects of their role are intended to encompass:

· advice, modelling and guidance for classroom teachers (of students on the RTLit roll) – this is meant to be their major focus

· direct instruction to individuals or small-groups of students who require intensive instruction

· general advice and support, in collaboration with other literacy professionals, to help principals and literacy leaders monitor and maintain literacy practice (to support effective classroom teaching).

Each RTLit is employed by a host school and works across a number of schools within a cluster. RTLit management and governance are the responsibility of a Cluster Management Committee, which typically consists of the Host Principal, representatives of other principals in the cluster of schools they work with, and other literacy professionals. The Cluster Management Committees are intended to:

· assist RTLits to meet the priorities for the cluster

· oversee the process of determining which students are enrolled in the local service

· advise on how case loads are allocated and managed

· report to the Ministry on student achievement at the cluster level.

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3   Note that the National Standards were not in place with the Service was first implemented.

In effect, the operational design of the RTLit Service devolves the majority of decisions about operational policy and practice to Cluster Management Committees. In practice the committees undertake a range of tasks including managing: referrals and operational procedures, co-operation with other agencies, the distribution of cluster funding, RTLit training and study leave, and reporting. In support of these functions, each committee develops local policies and administrative procedures, informed by national guidelines.

The Ministry currently invests $9 million per annum in the RTLit service.

Intended outcomes of the RTLit Service

The model and design of the RTLit service can be conceived and analysed at multiple levels.

- **Service provision level**: at this level, the focus is on the literacy intervention itself, which can be conceived as a service delivered by RTLits to students, working alongside classroom teachers and other literacy professionals, supported by school leadership. Key foci at this level relate to how literacy support is provided by RTLits to students, and how this relates to improvements in individual student achievement.

- **Cluster level**: at this level, the focus is on the how the Cluster Management Committees operate to ensure equitable access to the Service and efficient and effective delivery. Possible areas for focus at this level include: how students who most need the programme are identified and referred to the programme; how Cluster Management Committees make decisions about which students are enrolled; how RTLit case loads are managed; how Cluster Management Committees support learning and development of RTLit practice; and how clusters report to the Ministry on student achievement.

- **National system level**: to achieve the goal of a nationally coherent and integrated system of literacy support in New Zealand schools, both the service provision level and the cluster management level need to be underpinned by system-level levers and supports including guidance material and other resources, soft and hard infrastructure (eg support for communities of practice), funding and accountability arrangements, regulations and expectations, and workforce strategies.

It is also possible to conceive of the intervention in a simpler way: the service provision level and the system governance level (ie Cluster Management Committees lead system governance at the cluster level; while the Ministry leads system governance level at the national level).

Taking this approach, two intervention logics were developed to guide the evaluation. They are based around the service provision and system governance concepts.

Figure 1: RTLit Service Provision Logic

| Improving education outcomes | Maximising the contribution of education to the New Zealand economy |

SERVICE OUTCOMES

Ex-Service monitoring: RTLits support schools to put monitoring processes in place

GOAL OF THE RTLit SERVICE

Effective classroom teaching maintains progress & closes gaps

Student **SUCCESSFULLY DISCONTINUED**

Student on roll works at or above expected reading or writing standards

Student on roll makes accelerated learning progress

Student **REFERRED ON** Further intensive support from other services (eg RTLB, SLT, Educational Psychologist)

Student has ongoing, persistent literacy needs / not making sufficient progress

TIER 2 INTERVENTION
Time-bound (to ensure equity of access)

RTLits provide guidance to school leaders

In-Service monitoring: RTLits conduct professional checkpoints when student is not making accelerated progress

RTLits provide intensive support to supplement effective classroom teaching

RTLits' MAJOR FOCUS

Indirect support for students on the roll

Advice, modelling & guidance for teachers with students on the roll

Collaborative working to transfer skills & ensure consistency

Key tasks: analyse student strength/need; determine teacher needs; plan learning opportunities for delivery by classroom teacher; monitor/evaluate

RTLits can also provide direct instruction for students on the roll

- with individuals or small groups

- may include diagnosis or breaking patterns of ineffective learning

STUDENTS WITH HIGHEST NEEDS ACCESS THE SERVICE

Students with low needs are not eligible

Students with 'lower' needs are waitlisted

Students with the highest literacy needs across the Cluster are selected for the service

Students experiencing difficulty with literacy learning receive an early, timely referral

Referrals are made for those with the highest literacy needs within a school
Priority for: those who are well below reading or writing standards; those who have been referred from Reading Recovery

RTLits work to ensure equitable access to the RTLit Service for students with the highest needs

Work with management committees to influence referrals

Work with school leaders to review referral procedures

Assist classroom teachers with assessment, instruction & reporting procedures

Qualified workforce: specialist and experienced literacy teachers (ongoing professional development), able to work with diverse students

Figure 2: RTLit System governance intervention logic

RTLit SYSTEM OUTCOMES	IMPROVING EDUCATION OUTCOMES
	MAXIMISING THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION TO THE NZ ECONOMY

SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT IN LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT AT A SYSTEM LEVEL
including Māori, Pasifika and ESOL students

RTLit INTERVENTION

RTLits PROVIDE INTENSIVE SUPPORT (Tier 2)

INDIRECT SUPPORT (major focus)

Advice, modelling & guidance for teachers with students on the RTLit roll
Analysing students' needs & strengths, determining teachers' needs, planning & delivering instruction; monitoring & evaluating outcomes

DIRECT SUPPORT

Direct support for individuals or small groups

CLUSTER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES ENSURE FAIR & EQUITABLE ACCESS TO THE RTLit SERVICE

Students with the highest needs across a cluster are enrolled in the local RTLit Service

Cluster schools are aware of policies and practices for determining access, and the broad approach & process

SYSTEM OUTCOME

EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM TEACHING AND SYSTEMATIC IDENTIFICATION OF LITERACY PROGRESS

SYSTEM LEVERS

MINISTRY REGULATIONS / EXPECTATIONS	**ACCOUNTABILITY**	**RT:Lit RESOURCING**	**LITERACY & WIDER SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE**	**TEACHER CAPABILITY**	**SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**
- School planning & reporting - Curriculum - RTLit Professional Practice Manual	- Student achievement data - Literacy Learning Progressions - English Language Progressions - National Standards	- Qualitified & skilled RTLit workforce - Funding to host schools for employment and performance management	- Access to cohesive and integrated literacy interventions, expertise & support - Reading Recovery - RTLBs, SLTs, - Literacy professional networks/ communities of practice	- Appropriate levels of literacy expertise - Ongoing professional development	- Clear approach & expectations for effective classroom teaching, student progression & intervention

Characteristics of the Service's users – schools and students

The Ministry's monitoring data for the Service shows that in 2011, 818 schools accessed the Service (this increased to 951 in 2012).[4] Across these schools 3,777 students were accepted to the RTLit roll (1% of all students in Years 1 to 8 in these schools). When compared to information provided by schools for the 1 July 2011 roll return, the Service's 2011 monitoring data shows that:

· boys were over-represented on the Service's roll: there were almost twice as many boys as girls on the roll (65% and 35% respectively)

  – in the annual roll return (across all schools Years 1 to 8) there were roughly equal proportions of boys and girls (51% and 49% respectively)

· Māori students were over-represented on the Service's roll: 35% identified as Māori,

  – in the annual roll return (across all schools Years 1 to 8), 24% of students identified as Māori.

Distribution by age on entry to the RTLit service shows that the most common ages for students who are enrolled in the Service is between seven and nine years of age.

Table 1:   Age on entry for students discharged from the RTLit roll, 2010

Age on entry	Number of Students	%
5	70	3.5
6	189	9.6
7	437	22.1
8	439	22.3
9	378	19.2
10	251	12.7
11	133	6.7
12	73	3.7
13	3	0.2
Total	1,973	100.0

Ministry of Education RTLit monitoring data, 2010

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[4] This section uses the Ministry's 2011 monitoring data (excluding Table 1, which uses 2010 data) as the 2012 data has not yet been released.

This table is from the 2010 Annual Report, as a breakdown by each age year was not available from the 2011 report.

Table 2 compares the number of schools in each Ministry Local Office area who are accessing the service, compared with the number of schools in clusters in the same area. It shows a large degree of variation between areas, from a low of 27% of schools covered by the Whangarei office accessing the service, to a high of 57% of schools covered by the Invercargill office. Overall, 40% of schools accessed the service in 2011 (see page 31 on, for a discussion of issues impacting on access).

Table 2:   Schools accessing the RTLit service by Ministry Local Office (2011)

Ministry Local Office	# schools accessing	Total # schools in area	% schools accessing
Whangarei	30	111	27%
Auckland North	56	145	39%
Auckland South	107	264	41%
Hamilton	72	228	32%
Rotorua	60	140	43%
Napier	64	136	47%
Whanganui	95	216	44%
Wellington	100	221	45%
Nelson	56	112	50%
Christchurch	76	239	32%
Dunedin	51	130	39%
Invercargill	43	76	57%
Total*	810	2018	40%

Source: MartinJenkins summary of Ministry of Education RTLit monitoring data

* Figures are based upon schools currently operating

Presenting the same information by school decile shows little relationship between the decile level of schools and use of the service. The percentage of schools accessing the Service at each decile level ranged from 31% (decile 10) to 47% (decile 2), with most sitting around 40%.

Table 3:   Schools accessing the RTLit service by Decile (2011)

Decile	# schools accessing	Total # schools in decile level	% schools accessing
1	77	183	42%
2	92	196	47%
3	79	195	41%
4	90	194	46%
5	81	207	39%
6	84	203	41%
7	78	204	38%
8	83	218	38%
9	81	206	39%
10	65	212	31%
Total	810	2018	40%

Source: MartinJenkins summary of Ministry of Education RTLit monitoring data

* Figures are based upon schools currently still operating

Changes in the Service roll

Trends in the Ministry's monitoring data shows that:[5]

·   **the number of students enrolled in the service has increased:** from 2001 to 2011, the RTLit roll has increased from 1,898 to 3,777, with a peak of 4,258 in 2008 (see Figure 3). As the number of RTLits has remained constant, this means that the average number of students per RTLit has risen as well: from 17 in 2001 to 35 in 2011.

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[5]   We looked at key indicators consistently collected by the Ministry between 2001 and 2011. A number of other variables were added and omitted at certain points in time and so cannot be included.

Figure 3:   Number of enrolled students by gender
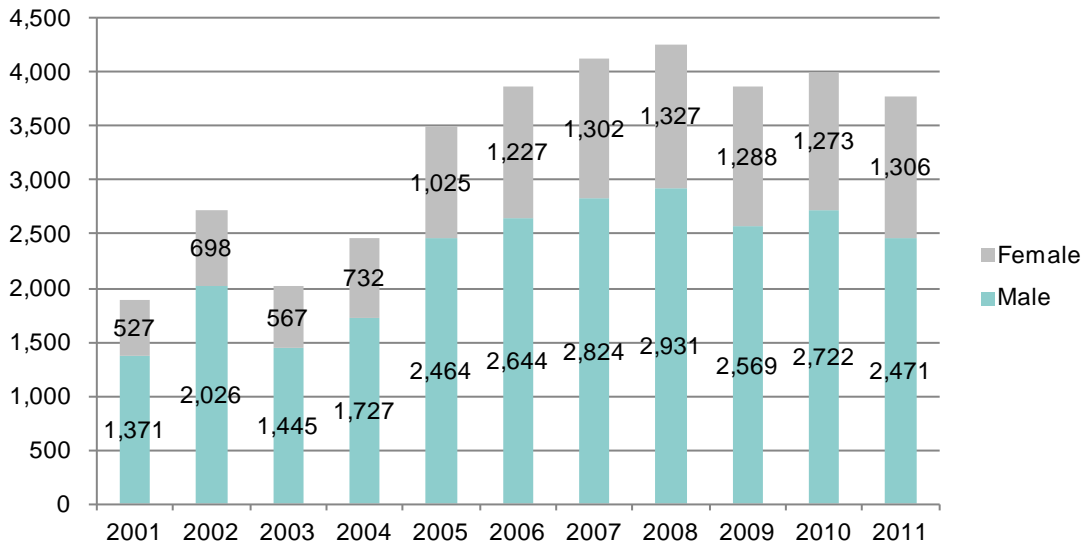
Source: MartinJenkins summary of Ministry of Education RTLit monitoring data

· **boys are consistently over-represented on the RTLit roll:** Figure 3 also shows that the proportion of boys to girls on the roll has always been much larger, though the gap has closed marginally; in 2001, there were 72% boys and 28% girls; in 2011, they were 65% and 35% respectively.

· **the proportion of children on the roll who are known to have previously been in Reading Recovery has decreased:** in 2001, 41% of children receiving support from RTLits were known to have previously been in Reading Recovery; by 2011, this cohort represented less than a third of those on the roll (31%; see Figure 4); as this measure is dependent on the RTLit knowing about a previous Reading Recovery enrolment, it is possible that numbers may be under-reported (this is particularly likely for older students, where Reading Recovery may have occurred a number of years previously).

Figure 4: Percentage of children on the RTLit roll who have been in Reading Recovery
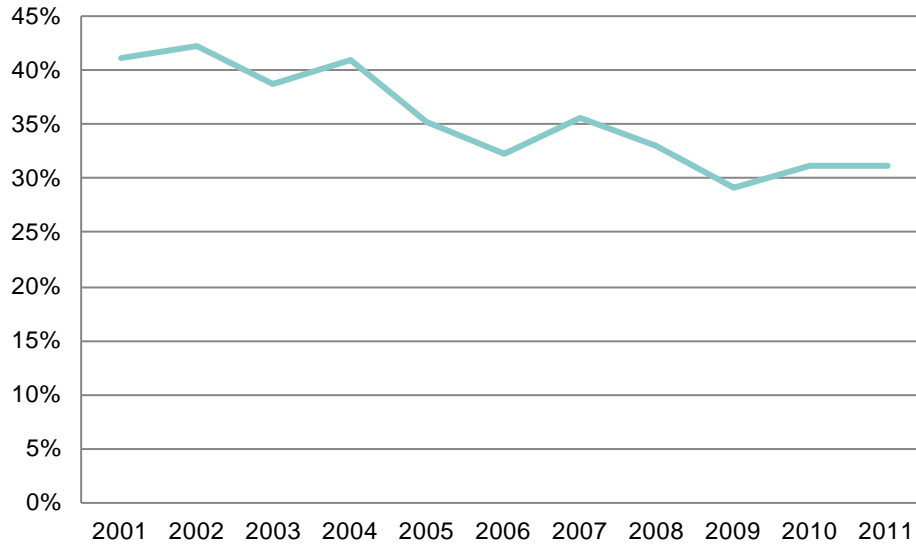
Source: MartinJenkins summary of Ministry of Education RTLit monitoring data

· **ethnic representation on the roll has remained static:** while there will always be slight variations, the mix of ethnicities of students on the roll has been consistent over the years the service has been in operation; Table 4 shows the ethnic composition of the roll at the beginning, mid-point and end of the period being analysed.

Table 4:   Ethnic composition of students on the RTLit roll

Ethnicity	2001	2006	2011
NZ European / Pākehā	53%	56%	53%
NZ Māori	32%	32%	35%
Pasifika	10%	5%	10%
Asian	2%	2%	2%
Other/missing	3%	5%	3%

Source: MartinJenkins summary of Ministry of Education RTLit monitoring data

Characteristics of the Service clusters

Using the Ministry of Education's Directory of Schools (2013), along with cluster mapping provided by the Ministry, we have been able to derive a comprehensive description of RTLit clusters around the country.

Table 5 shows that there is large variation in the composition and characteristics of the 86 clusters that comprise the RTLit service. While most have between 15 and 29 schools they cover, at the extreme end there are three clusters with 60 or more schools. The majority of clusters have up to 6,000 students per RTLit (ie total number of students in the cluster, not students actually on the roll), while eight clusters have over 8,000 students per RTLit. The weighted average deciles[6] of most clusters fall in the middle of the decile range, with few clusters comprising consistently high or low decile schools. As an indicator of the geographic nature of a cluster, an urban/rural indicator was calculated, which averages the urban location classification for each of the schools in the cluster.[7] This shows that the majority of the clusters are predominantly urban in nature.

Table 5:   Summary statistics for clusters

Characteristic		Clusters
Schools in cluster	less than 15	16
	15-29	55
	30-44	9
	45-59	3
	60 or more	3
Number of RTLits in cluster	1	67
	2	16
	3	3
Total number of students across all schools in the cluster, per RTLit	> 8,000	8
	6,001 – 8,000	13
	4,001 – 6,000	21
	2,001 – 4,000	30
	2,000 or less	14

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[6]   These were calculated weighting the decile of each school in the cluster to the roll of that school, and averaging these across the cluster.

[7]   This calculation uses the Statistics New Zealand classification of the location of each of the cluster schools (1 = Rural to 4 = Main Urban), and averages this across the cluster. These average indicators were then grouped into Rural (2 or less), Urban (2.01 to 3) and dense urban (3.01 to 4).

Characteristic		Clusters
Weighted average decile	High (8-10)	7
	Middle (4-7)	69
	Low (1-3)	10
Urban/rural nature	Rural	32
	Urban	21
	Dense urban	33

Source: MartinJenkins summary of Ministry of Education Directory of Schools data (2013)

Evaluation findings

The evaluation findings draw on all available evidence including initial interviews, online surveys, case studies, background documents and the Ministry's monitoring data.

The presentation of the key findings is guided by the intervention logics. Each section is summarised, and the report's final conclusions section reflects on the objectives and identifies implications of the findings for the second part of the review. The key findings are discussed in the following sections:

· an introductory section outlining how Service provision and outcomes are driven by key factors: including student need and geography

· RTLit practice: provision of support to students, teachers and schools

· effectiveness and efficiency of the Service

· operational management of the Service

· system level issues.

Service provision and outcomes are driven by key factors

Factors interact; key factors are student need and cluster geography

The way the Service actually operates, and the outcomes it achieves for students on its roll can only be understood by reference to the specific contexts within which the service is delivered at a local level. The evaluation has shown that there is wide variation in the way the Service operates in different clusters. Two key factors that influence service delivery at the cluster level include: the scale and type of student need; and the geography of the cluster.

In addition, there are a number of factors at the cluster level that affect decisions made about Service operation, as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Interacting factors affecting practice within a cluster
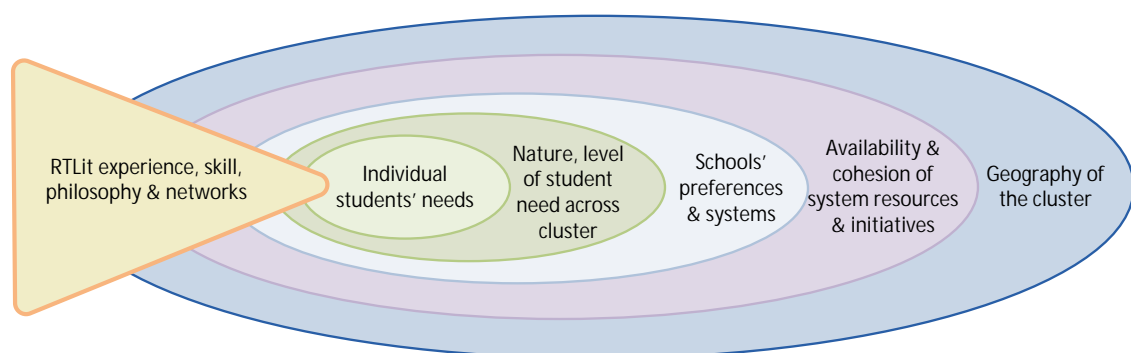
Overlaying all of these interacting factors are the experiences, skills and philosophy of the individual RTLit(s) in a cluster:

· the individual RTLits' philosophy on the best way to support students is a key factor in the way support is offered at the cluster level

  – approach and philosophy is dependent on professional background (eg Resource Teacher Reading, Reading Recovery training and/or tutor role, school leadership and classroom teaching), experience and length of time in the Service, and literacy training

· RTLits' networks, ability and willingness to work with teachers also affect the way the Service is provided at the cluster level.

Further detail on the way the factors illustrated in Figure 5 may play out is given below. Service operation in each cluster is affected by:

- the nature, scale and distribution of student need, in relation to urban density and socio-economic conditions

    – individual students' learning needs differ by **type** (eg oral, written, reading, comprehension), **severity** (eg below cohort or well below) and **cause** or driver (eg social deprivation, 'missed out', or underlying cognitive issues such as dyslexia or 'global delay')

    – the scale and distribution of students who require support varies by geography

        o urban clusters typically have dense populations, high concentrations of low decile schools, high proportions of Māori and Pasifika students, and greater numbers of students from ESOL backgrounds (ie these clusters have high need for literacy support)

        o rural clusters typically have low population density, low school rolls overall, and students with generally more moderate learning needs (ie these clusters have lower need for literacy support)

        o in some clusters or schools there may be multiple students with similar support requirements; in other locations students who require support are alone in a class, age group or school

    – the nature and number of students who require support varies by decile

        o lower decile clusters typically had more student referrals for students who had 'missed out' on literacy skill development (when compared to higher decile clusters), students had 'missed out' for a variety of reasons including deprived backgrounds, poor health, low engagement and attendance, transient home lives

        o higher decile clusters typically had more student referrals where support needs appeared to be driven by an underlying condition (diagnosed or undiagnosed, eg dyslexia or global delay) rather than 'missing out'

- schools' systems and preferences

    – service provision is tailored for individual schools and depends on schools' internal literacy systems and 'ownership' of literacy issues, schools' professional learning and development (PLD), the use of specific literacy interventions including Reading Recovery, and school leadership and expectations relating to literacy

    – in addition, Service provision depends on who schools refer: whether or not a school refers to the Service depends on a variety of factors including previous experiences of the Service, their understanding of the support offered by the Service, and their perceptions of Service value (see page 37)

- availability and cohesion of wider system resources and initiatives at the cluster level

  – this includes other literacy initiatives (including those initiated and supported by the Ministry), access to other literacy specialists (eg SLTs), and the use of other resources such as RTLBs and educational psychologists

  – referrals to the Service are also affected by the way the RTLit Service is understood to fit with other initiatives (see page 93): including who should be referred and at what point

- geography of the cluster

  – rural clusters are characterised by large distances and significant travel times, making it difficult for the RTLit to maintain contact with all schools

  – urban clusters have dense populations and have smaller travel distances between schools but the benefits of this can be offset by traffic congestion leading to significant travel times; some urban clusters also contain a rural hinterland.

Service provision characterised by key contextual factors

Despite the range of interacting factors that influence the operation of the service at the cluster level, our research suggests there are two key factors that have a particularly significant impact: the scale of student need within a cluster and the geography of the cluster.

As illustrated in Figure 6, clusters can be mapped according to where each lies on a continuum from:

- predominantly urban (with dense populations) to predominantly rural (with low population density)

- high absolute need to low absolute need (with size of school rolls and deciles of schools in a cluster acting as a proxy for the level of need).

Figure 6 shows two example clusters:

- the low decile, dense urban cluster in the upper right quadrant is likely to have a high level of need across the total school population

- the high decile, rural cluster in the lower left quadrant is likely to have a lower level of need across the total school population.

It is important to note that the level of need within a population does not necessarily equate to the level of demand for the Service (demand is essentially the numbers of students who are referred to the service by schools). Demand is affected by a number of factors including the way the Service is implemented at the local level (eg how access to the Service is managed), and schools' awareness of the Service and referral practices.

Figure 6:   Continuum of cluster characteristics: examples of two contrasting clusters
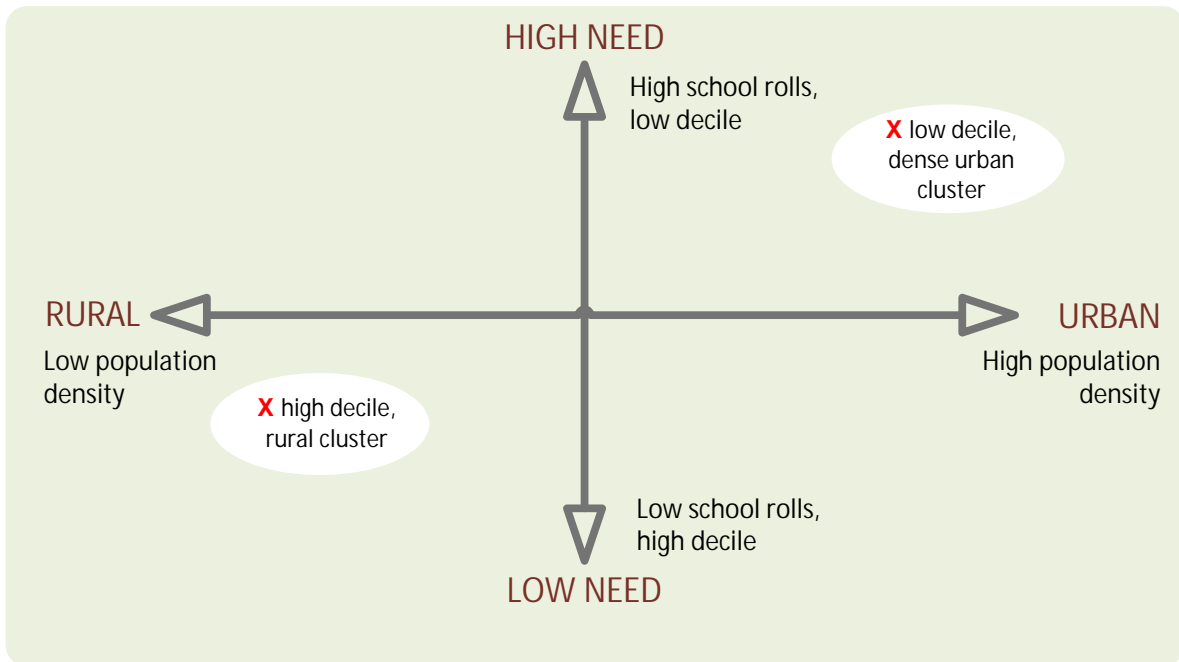

Figure 7 plots the *actual* RTLit clusters on the continuum described above. 'Need' is plotted on the 'y' axis – this was calculated for each cluster by dividing the total roll by average decile for the cluster. Again, note that Figure 7 illustrates need, not demand.

Figure 7 shows:

·   rural clusters have lower need: these are the clusters in the lower left quadrant

·   dense urban clusters are predominantly located in the upper right quadrant, clusters plotted in the top of the upper right quadrant have high rolls and low deciles – therefore they are likely to have greater numbers of students with high needs than schools in the lower left quadrant.

Figure 7: Current RTLit clusters, plotted by 'need' and geography
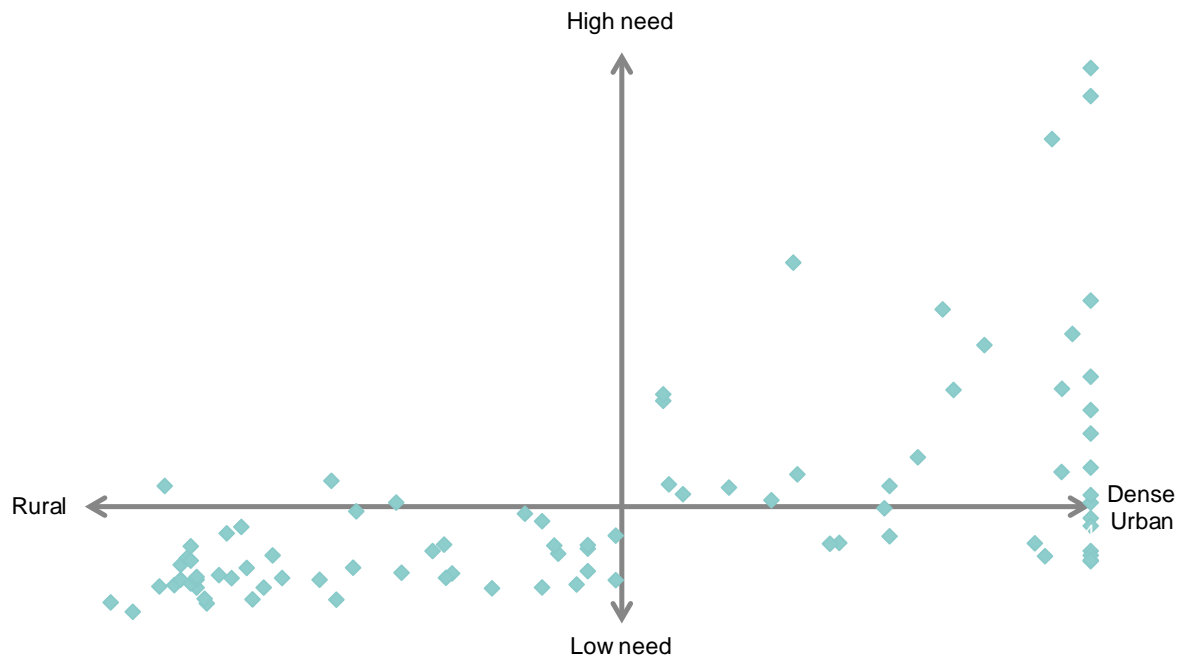
Source: MartinJenkins' analysis of Ministry data on school rolls, deciles and locations.

SUMMARY: service provision and outcomes is driven by key factors

A wide range of idiosyncratic factors interact at the local level, affecting every aspect of the Service – including what support is offered, who to, and how. At the local level, the Service is essentially implemented by individual RTLits. Because of this, the experience, skill, philosophy and networks of the individual RTLits have a big impact on what is done within a cluster.

Over and above this however, two factors stand out as important when looking to understand service provision: the geography of the cluster, and the scale and type of student need.

· Geography acts as a constraint on the ability of an RTLit to serve a given area. Rural areas are typically harder to serve efficiently because of travel times between schools and because it is more difficult to work with groups of students with learning needs in common; dense urban areas can also face travel-related difficulties because of traffic congestion.

· Variations in the scale of need represents a different kind of challenge. Clusters fall into two broad categories: low need clusters of rural and/or high decile schools, and high need clusters of urban and/or low decile schools.

This finding provides important context for the following sections of the report – differences between clusters relating to geography and levels of student need are repeatedly highlighted.

Provision of support to students, teachers and schools

Key findings relating to Service provision are discussed in relation to the intervention logic outlining RTLit Service provision (page 15):

· accessing the Service

· the intervention: assessing need and RTLit practice (including direct and indirect support)

· outcomes: discontinuation and referrals.

Accessing the Service

The Service is intended to provide support to students with the highest needs

The system is intended to support equitable access to the Service (ie to students with the highest literacy learning needs) across the country *and* within a cluster.

The referral process

Students with high literacy needs can be referred to the Service by their school. The intervention logic identifies the referral process as a critical part of the system: RTLits are supposed to work closely with their Cluster Management Committee and school leaders to ensure that students with the highest needs access the Service. The logic shows that students having difficulty with literacy should receive an early and timely referral to the Service, and that those with the highest needs should be accepted onto the roll. The Professional Practice Manual (PPM)[8] states that priority should be given to those who are well below reading or writing standards, and to those who have been referred from Reading Recovery (noting that judgement is required).

Despite the existence of criteria, and distribution of resource across the county, there is a strongly held belief that the total amount of resource is insufficient relative to the total level of need, and that it is not well targeted to the areas with the highest levels of need.[9] This results in a number of inequities:

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[8] The PPM was released by the Ministry in 2012 to clarify Ministry expectations and provide clear guidance on good practice to increase effectiveness and access to the Service. The guidelines were aimed at schools, management committees, Host Principals and RTLits.

[9] This belief was expressed by all types of stakeholders including RTLits and Host Principals responding to the online surveys, and a diverse range of stakeholders interviewed during the case studies.

- there are particular clusters where demand for the service significantly exceeds the capacity of the service to support students

- due to differing levels of local demand, some clusters only work with students who are 'well below' their cohort while others also work with students with less severe literacy needs (ie those who are 'below' their cohort).

> So this is why it needs to be a very flexible service, because it's what you can best offer with the resources that you've got, and it's so varied throughout New Zealand, isn't it? (RTLit)

Feedback from the online surveys of RTLits and Host Principals shows that key stakeholders believe that demand for support exceeds available resources. The proportion of Host Principals who view the demand as exceeding the resource is slightly higher than RTLits, but the same overall pattern is apparent (see Figure 8).

Figure 8:   Referrals to the RTLit service vis-a-vis space on roll
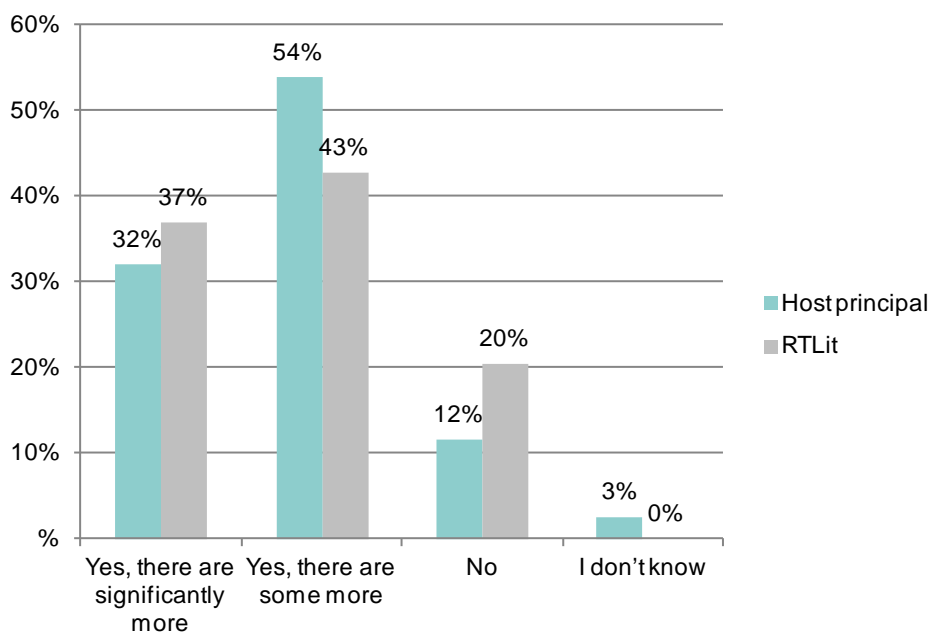
Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits and Host Principals, 2013

When looking for variance between clusters, we found a significant difference by location (in both the RTLit and Host Principal surveys). Those in dense urban clusters were more likely to report that they had significantly more referrals than could be accepted onto the roll, and those in rural areas were more likely to report they didn't (see Figure 9 and Figure 10).

Figure 9:   RTLits: Referrals to the RTLit service vis-a-vis space on roll, by location
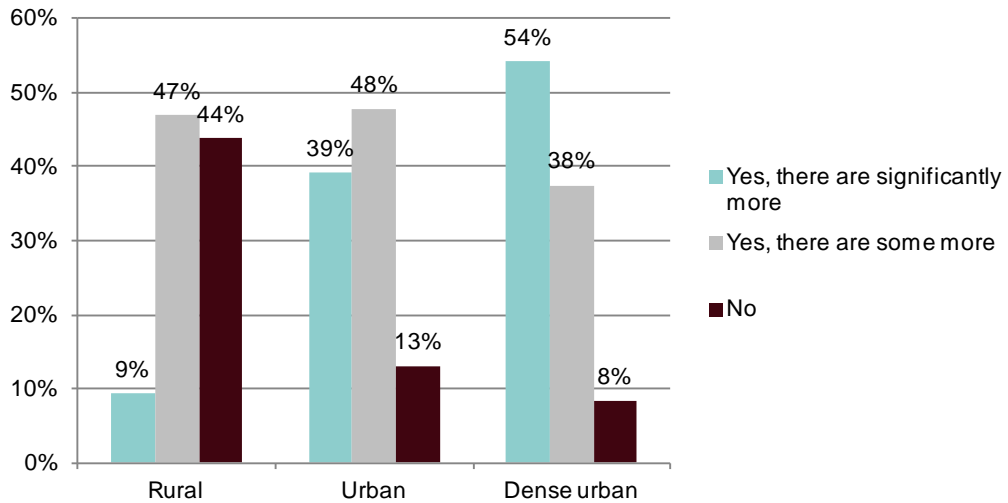
Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits, 2013.

Figure 10: Host Principals: Referrals to the RTLit service vis-a-vis space on roll by location

Source: MartinJenkins survey of Host Principals, 2013.

Dealing with excess demand: the Service is rationed, leading to inequitable access
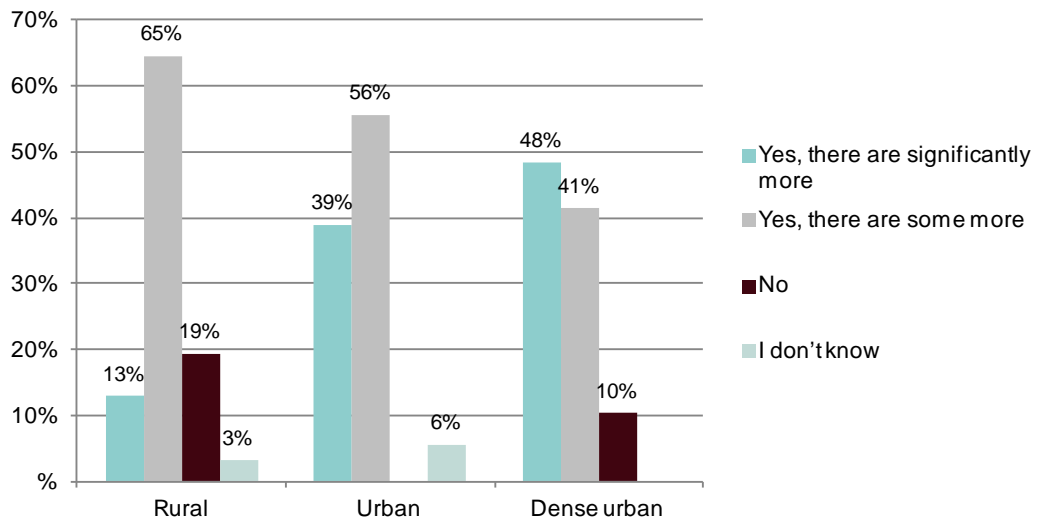
To deal with excess demand, the Service is rationed. Rationing occurs at three levels:

·   Ministry level, through allocation and distribution of RTLit resource across clusters

·   RTLit and Cluster Management Committee level, through setting access criteria and making decisions about the use of local RTLit time and resource

·   school level, through decisions on who they refer to the Service.

Ministry level: allocation and distribution of RTLits across clusters

RTLits are distributed across the country to take into account the greater levels of need in areas with high populations and with higher concentrations of low decile schools. Despite this, there is a common belief that there is insufficient resource to meet the needs of students in many clusters (see Figure 8, Figure 9 and Figure 10). In addition, many clusters believe that they are under resourced relative to others.

> The cluster is too large, with too many children to cater to for it to be effective. An improved service would see more people available and be based in a realistic proximity to the schools in their area. One person for the whole [area] is just not realistic. [Non-user school]

The current number of RTLits is 109 FTEs. The distribution and allocation of RTLits across the country is fully discussed on page 81.

RTLit and Cluster Management Committee level: the referral process in action

In practice, we found that the PPM's access guidelines are interpreted in a range of different ways in different clusters. Overall we found that while clusters tend to have fairly clear, or explicit criteria for who should be referred to the Service, decisions on who is actually accepted are usually overlaid by other more implicit criteria. As a result, referral criteria and processes differ markedly from cluster to cluster. Examples of explicit and implicit criteria that are used in different ways in different clusters include:

·   explicit criteria: clusters interpret who should be prioritised differently, examples of different criteria used are – Year 3 students who have previously been on Reading Recovery, students at any level who are 'well below' their cohort, students within a particular school that is currently being worked with (and identified as likely to benefit from additional literacy support)

    –   explicit criteria are communicated to schools, in some cases this is done formally and consistently (eg through regular newsletters to all schools); in other cases it is done on an ad hoc basis and inconsistently (eg through face to face communications)

- implicit criteria are a combination of:

  – judgement based decisions (usually RTLit led but drawing on input from the school if necessary) about who is likely to benefit; judgements relate to a range of things including student attitude, attendance, potential to improve their literacy through additional support

  – practically driven decisions: eg ability to work with a number of students efficiently (in the same class, school or area), choosing to work with students with receptive classroom teachers, or making a decision based on whether they are currently or have previously been enrolled with another service (eg RTLB or SLT).

The case studies revealed that the referral process is driven by the RTLit but that decisions are taken in consultation with, or approved by, the Cluster Management Committee. The online survey of Host Principals asked which criteria were taken into account when determining whether referrals would be accepted. Figure 11 shows that the key criteria identified relate to the literacy level of the student (relative to others on a waiting list), student's year level, and whether they have received other interventions, including Reading Recovery.

Figure 11: Criteria considered when accepting referrals onto roll
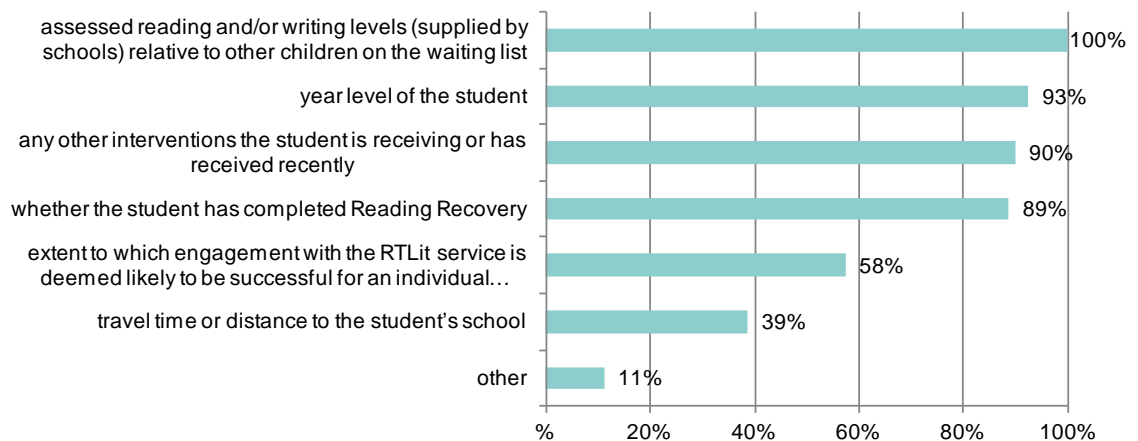
Source: MartinJenkins survey of Host Principals, 2013

On top of applying criteria, clusters also used a number of strategies to manage demand for the Service, including include one or a combination of:

- using waiting lists

- rotating access to different schools at different times (eg once per term, or every second year)

- limiting contact length or duration of support to individual students or schools (eg to a maximum number of time limited sessions, or support throughout a term or school year)

- restricting access criteria to particular students (eg Years 2 to 4, students who have previously been through Reading Recovery, or not taking particular 'types' of students such as ESOL funded students, students with behavioural or attendance issues, or students judged to be 'unlikely to benefit')

- changing support from individual students to a wider focus (eg groups of students, a greater focus on classroom teachers, provision of support to all teaching staff).

> [It should be about seamless] transition for the child within the system. And I don't believe we're there yet, particularly where we have teachers coming in saying, " I've had to refer a child, but we've only got one RTLit and that RTLit can't see that child for six months." All of the good work in reading recovery is now undone. (Literacy stakeholder)

> Logistically we can't go up there and do long-term interventions. Once a year, and twice a year, if we wanted, we go and make visits to all of those schools and we take resources and we follow up on requests. (RTLit)

> We traditionally have a large number of referrals and so trying to work out a way of accommodating all of those students, we needed to move towards a more indirect approach, working with groups rather than individuals. (RTLit)

Survey results showed that the most common strategies for managing demand are making use of indirect instruction, operating waiting lists and using group instruction. While there was some variation, the same general pattern of results was observed for RTLits as for Host Principals (see Figure 12). The only significant differences by location or decile was for 'we limit/rotate schools' access by geography' (less likely to be selected by Host Principals from medium decile clusters) and 'we operate a waiting list' (less likely to be selected by RTLits in rural areas).

A good example of the implicit judgement based criteria used by RTLits (as outlined above) is 'we prioritise students who are likely to respond more quickly to RTLit support', identified as a strategy by 20% of RTLits (and 24% of Host Principals).

Looking at the 'other' ways clusters managed demands, RTLit open ended survey responses included:[10]

- prioritising children according to the PPM

- prioritising ex-Reading Recovery students

- providing wider PLD to teachers within a school or cluster.

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[10] A number of the responses under 'other' from RTLits were actually options included in the list in the survey: limiting by geography, limiting by year group and providing indirect instruction (including to children not officially on the roll).

Host Principals' responses on 'other' ways to manage demand included:

· looking at attendance

· prioritising by need

· prioritising students according to the PPM/government priorities

· providing wider PLD to teachers within a school or cluster.

Figure 12: Strategies used to manage demand for the RTLit service
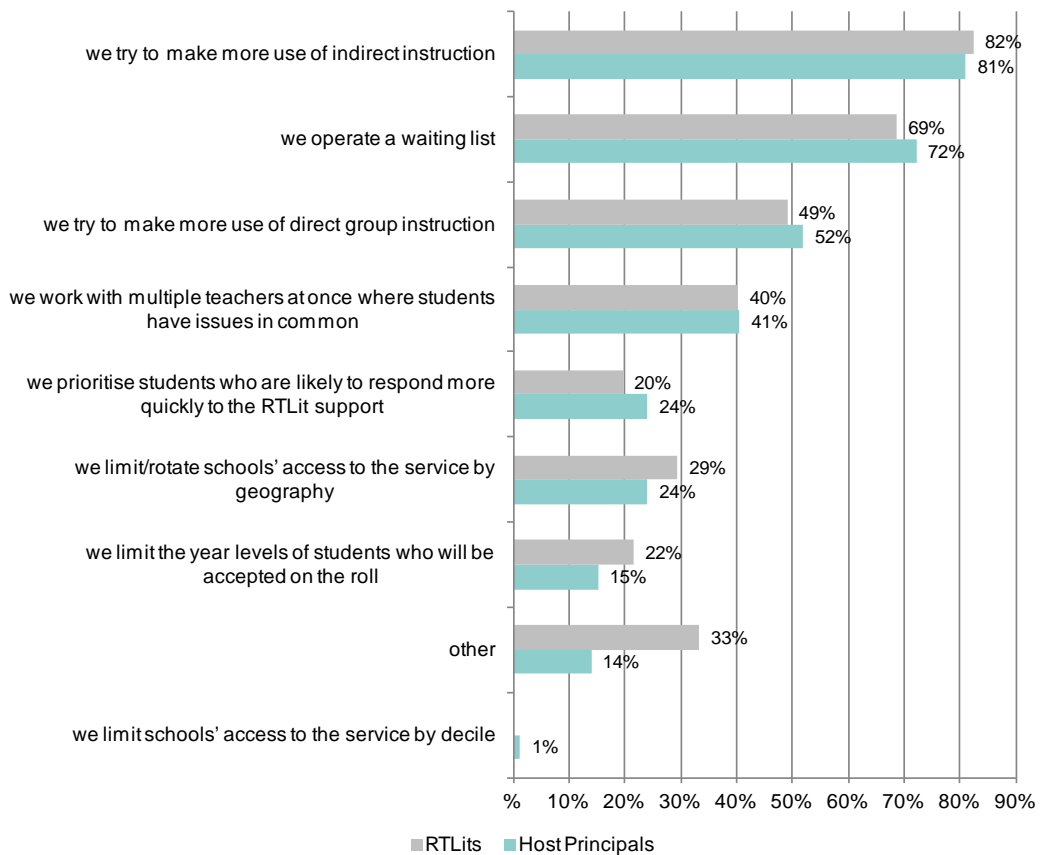
Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits and Host Principals, 2013.

Clusters varied in the ways they documented and captured the referral process and the ways that they managed demand. Some used paper based systems, others had databases or lists relating to different schools or year levels. Some recorded all referrals while others only recorded those who were accepted onto the roll; some had waiting lists while others didn't. Because of this, there is no accurate information about how referral criteria are applied, the characteristics of students who aren't accepted onto the roll, or how long they wait. In addition, not all students who would benefit from the Service are referred. This is discussed below, under 'school level' rationing.

School level

Both the online survey and the case study research confirmed that schools' actions act to further restrict access to the Service, effectively masking the actual level of need.

> There's one or two [schools] that I know need serious support, and despite visits, even this year, and lengthy meetings with the literacy person, as well as meeting with the new principal, they have not come forward, and that's really concerning. (RTLit)

> ...and [the school] said, no [they wouldn't refer], because their Year 7 and 8 children had such a busy timetable that they wouldn't like to take that time away from them and they were doing their own programme, thank you very much. (RTLit)

In the online survey 39% of RTLits and 37% of Host Principals reported barriers to schools referring to the Service. Of these, a lack of awareness and understanding of the service by classroom teachers (67%) and principals (45%), as well as a perception by schools that the waiting list is too long (50%) were the barriers most often cited by RTLits. Amongst Host Principals, a similar pattern can be seen, though the emphasis is slightly different (see Figure 13).

A large proportion of respondents also cited 'other' barriers to schools making referrals. Amongst RTLits:

·   most common: the distance of the school from the RTLits host school, and teacher attitude to RTLits (being resistant or feeling intimidated)

·   also mentioned: cost-benefit in terms of time to refer versus likelihood of getting on the roll, wanting direct instruction, schools' awareness of the limited resource, and use of other literacy programmes.

In addition to the barriers listed by RTLits, Host Principals also mentioned: an awareness of the limited resource, cost benefit of referring, and a perception that students won't make the required progress in the limited time frame.

> One RTLit, it's just not enough. Even in the individual schools that the RTLit is at ... there might be 30 children who could benefit ... under the current practices you cannot meet that level of demand, so there has to be prioritisation even within schools. (Literacy stakeholder)

Figure 13: Perceived barriers to referral by schools

a lack of awareness and understanding of the service by classroom teachers — RTLits: 67%, Host Principals: 41%

other — RTLits: 57%, Host Principals: 52%

a perception that the waiting list is too long — RTLits: 50%, Host Principals: 52%

a lack of awareness and understanding of the service by school principals — RTLits: 45%, Host Principals: 34%

a perception that access will be limited by policies put in place by the Cluster Management Committee — RTLits: 33%, Host Principals: 10%

a perception that the RTLit service is not valuable — RTLits: 14%, Host Principals: 14%

poor working relationships with staff in schools — RTLits: 7%, Host Principals: 7%

■ RTLits ■ Host Principals

Source: MartinJenkins surveys of RTLits and Host Principals, 2013

NB Respondents could select multiple options, so numbers do not add up to 100%.

Non-user schools' reasons for not using the Service

Table 2 on page 18 shows that a large number of schools do not use the Service (on average, 40% of schools use the Service). Brief interviews were conducted with a small sample of non-using schools (two in each case study cluster), to gain insight into why they didn't use the Service.[11]

The key reasons cited by non-using schools were:

· schools not referring because they didn't believe referrals would be accepted

  – this included schools in clusters where there is geographic rotation, in these clusters schools only tend to refer when it is 'their turn', as a result, these schools experience intermittent access to the service

  – some non-user schools reported not making referrals because they didn't think there were sufficient RTLits to meet demand

  – some non-user schools reported not making referrals because of their location: they thought the distance between the Host school and their school made support unrealistic

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[11] The interviewed schools had not used the Service in any of the previous four years.

- schools not referring because they didn't value or understand the Service

  – some non-user schools reported a lack of communication from the Service, resulting in a poor understanding of the Service, including what support is available

  – some non-user schools reported that they didn't think the Service was specialist enough to be able to support their students' needs.

- schools not having a need for the Service as their own internal systems supported their students' literacy needs.

A selection of quotes to show the range of feedback from non-user schools is given below:

We've found it a bit tricky to find out about the service. I know the Host school is [x school], and the cluster facilitator has been to visit us once. We don't receive regular communication about the Service. [Non-user school Principal]

I think our demographic impacts on our ability to utilise the service. We're decile 10, but we have lots of ESOL students so we could really use additional literacy support. I've been put off trying though because it's just too difficult. [Non-user school SENCO[12]]

I thought the Service was discontinued when the previous RTLit moved on to a different area... We haven't received any newsletters from the Host school. [Non-user school SENCO]

We don't use the service now because we're better off implementing our own support systems straight away, rather than waiting for the RTLit. There's not enough provision and it's targeted toward certain demographics. The process is very slow and a waste of time when we could be doing things ourselves. [Non-user school SENCO]

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[12] Special Education Needs Coordinator.

SUMMARY: accessing the Service

This section covered the referral process for the Service and ways that the Service is rationed to deal with excess demand.

The intention of the Service is that it should be made available to those with the highest literacy needs. Rather than targeting those with the very highest needs across the country as a whole, the Service has allocated resources to provide support throughout the country. Demand for the Service currently outstrips the available resource (with the Service receiving more referrals than it can accept): RTLits in dense urban areas report the greatest unmet demand.

This excess demand leads to 'rationing' of the Service. Rationing occurs through Service decisions on who to accept (by the RTLit and their committee – done differently in each cluster), and at the school level, with schools making decisions about who to refer and whether to use the Service at all. Feedback from schools who have not used the Service in the past four years revealed a range of reasons for not referring students, including not believing referrals would be accepted due to excess demand.

Lack of systematic referral processes means that it is not possible to accurately quantify the level of unmet need, or the characteristics of those who are missing out on support. The differing referral practices of schools also act to mask the actual level of need. As a consequence, the current referral process is not robust: it does not ensure that those with the highest need are able to access the Service. Limited resource and excess demand is of particular concern in dense urban areas (where the highest levels of unmet demand were reported).

The intervention: assessing need and RTLit practice

Assessment of student need

RTLits assess the needs of students in different ways and at different times. In general student need is assessed at the following times:

·   the beginning of support: all students are assessed at this point, with some being formally assessed prior to being accepted on the roll (ie to support a decision as to whether or not to accept them)

·   during support: some RTLits use formal 'check points', others conduct ongoing assessments and/or track progress

·   at the end of support: in some cases this is triggered after a certain time period (eg one term or academic year) or amount of support (eg 45 sessions), in others it is when a student is thought to have made sufficient gains OR when they are not thought to be likely to make further gains

    –   most RTLits will provide classroom teachers with test results at this point.

       Usually I'll have a talk with the teachers in the school first ... [depending on] what reading data they have, and writing, and then go from there, and I'll implement my own [assessments]. Often I'll resort to reading assessments, because that is the biggie, and from that we can integrate writing. (RTLit)

       I do ask that [schools] give me as much as they can that's current, might be a running record, STAR data, eAASTLE, BURT, whatever. (RTLit)

The type of assessment and/or diagnosis is primarily dependent on the experience and skills of the RTLit (with CMCs having little input), meaning that the process is not consistent across RTLits. Most RTLits focus on core literacy related assessments (eg reading, writing and oral skills), while a smaller number have expertise in specific tests to diagnose underlying cognitive issues. As RTLits typically practice in isolation, there is no formal mechanism for sharing or recommending particular tools amongst RTLits.

In the online survey, the most popular tools used by RTLits **themselves** to assess students (pre and post) were (noting that RTLits used multiple tests):

·   the Burt Word Reading Test (91% pre and post)

·   the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Assessment (82% pre, 74% post)

·   Peters Diagnostic and Remedial Spelling Manual (66% pre, 60% post)

·   JOST (47% pre, 29% post)

·   PROBE (32% pre, 42% post).

A number of these tools (Burt, Observation Survey and Peters) are non-standardised tools, mainly focused on younger students. During interviews, some RTLits commented that they didn't have suitable tools for older students.

Figure 14: Assessment tools used by RTLits: pre- and post-testing
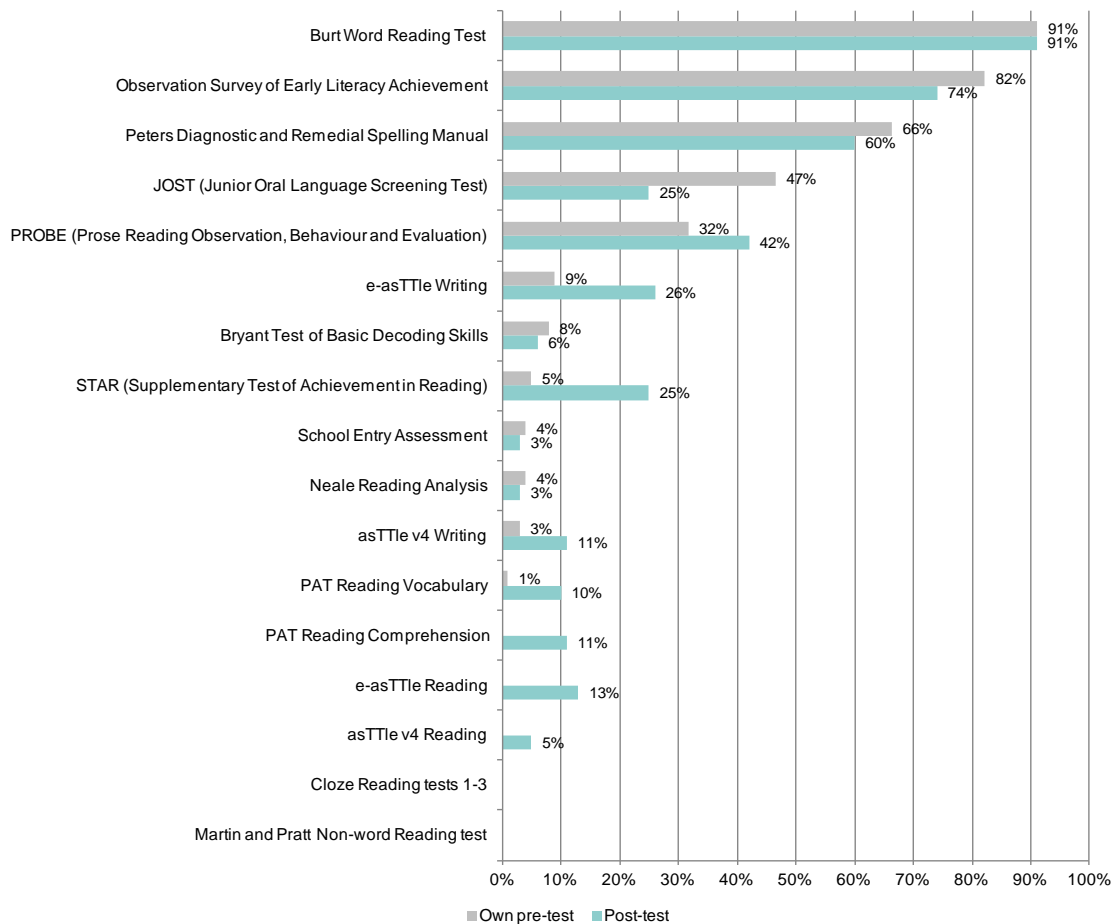
Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits, 2013.

Most RTLits indicated they used three or four main assessment tools for testing students when they came on the RTLit roll, showing that they are not relying on a single tool. While a similar pattern held in terms of post-testing, the number of tools they indicated they used was generally slightly higher at this point (see Figure 15). The survey did not specifically ask about the tools used by the RTLits when students are on the roll (ie throughout the support period) but case study interviews indicate that similar tools are used, with additional tools used to elicit more fine-grained information, as required. The interviews also indicated that different tools are likely to be used for different age groups.

Figure 15: Number of tools used by RTLits to assess students on the roll
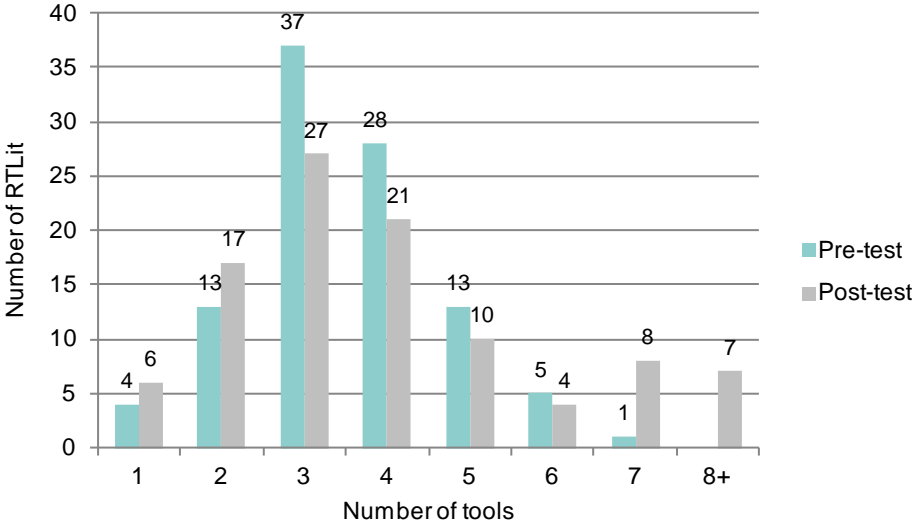
Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits, 2013

In addition to conducting their own tests, the case study RTLits emphasised the importance of drawing on the knowledge of classroom teachers and other school staff (eg literacy leaders or SENCOs) to get a 'rich' picture of the student, including teachers' test results. The extent to which school assessment data is relied upon varies – some RTLits rely heavily on it, some conduct selected tests to supplement school data, while others disregard the school data and repeat tests.

In addition, many RTLits may visit a student in the classroom as part of their initial assessment, to observe how they are coping in the classroom, and the ways the teacher is dealing with them.

> We ask them for running records and testing and assessment, current. Sometimes we go out from a verbal phone call, and we go in and meet that teacher, or the literacy leader, or the SENCO. (RTLit)

The RTLits bring together a wide range of information to give them as detailed a view of the students' needs as possible – as literacy specialists, they are more able to do this than a classroom teacher. As there is little commonality between the tests and tools that different schools in a cluster use, the RTLits have knowledge of a wide range of tools.

> We go in and do our own assessment, and sometimes there's comparability [between our tests and classroom teachers' tests], and sometimes there are big gaps. Classroom teachers don't always have some of the in-depth knowledge of what the little bits are that they're missing. (RTLit)

> I think it's quite important that we are using the same tools that the school is using rather than coming in with something completely different ... and that's another thing from going from school to school; they're doing different things which is quite complex when you come to Ministry reports. (RTLit)

The survey results support the case study findings of RTLits using a mixture of school data (provided as part of the referral process) and their own assessments. Looking solely at the tools RTLits say they use themselves, there is a strong match between the tools used in both pre- and post-testing of children on the roll (see Figure 14). The largest discrepancies are for the tests where schools are providing 'pre' data as part of the referral process. RTLits are less likely to do these types of assessments, and utilise the assessment done by the school: STAR, PAT vocabulary and comprehension, (e)-asTTle reading and writing (see Figure 16). While RTLits will utilise assessments done by schools, they will typically supplement the information that is provided – as outlined above, to give them as detailed a view as possible.

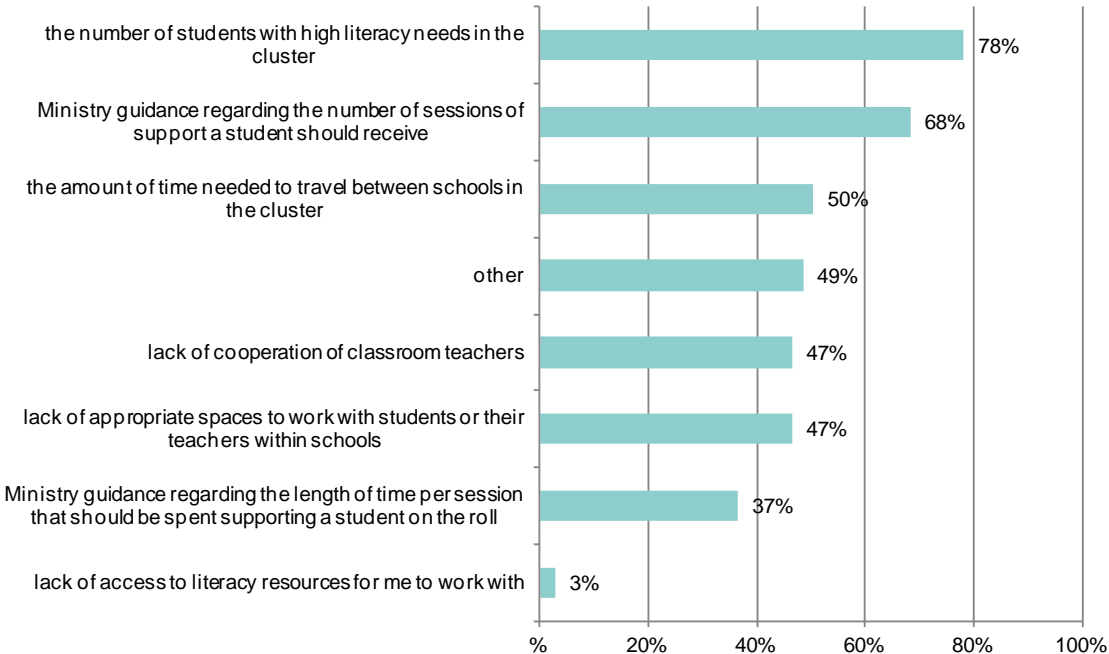**Figure 16: Pre-test data supplied by schools to RTLits**
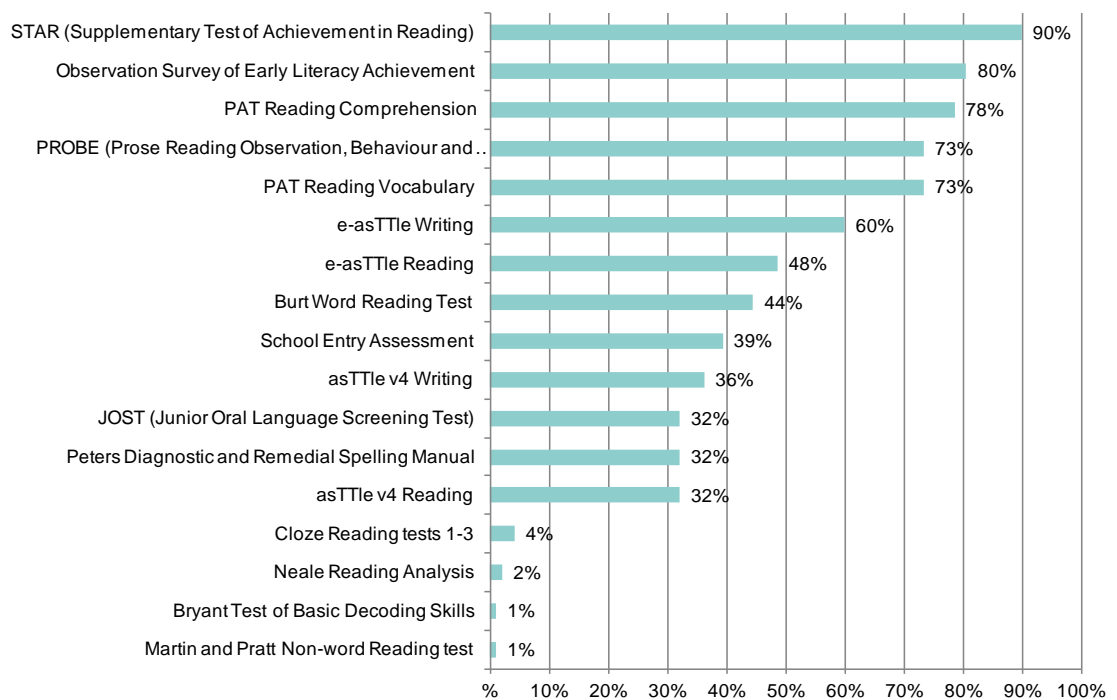
Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits, 2013.

RTLit practice: supporting students on the roll

It is commonly understood that RTLit practice varies widely across clusters, in response to the different contexts in which they operate (as discussed on page 25).

The survey asked RTLits whether there were any barriers to supporting students on the roll. The most commonly identified barrier was the number of students with high literacy needs in the cluster (78%), followed by the suggested number of sessions that should be spent with each student (68%) and travel time within their cluster (50%: see Figure 17).

Figure 17: Perceived barriers to supporting students on the RTLit roll

the number of students with high literacy needs in the cluster — 78%
Ministry guidance regarding the number of sessions of support a student should receive — 68%
the amount of time needed to travel between schools in the cluster — 50%
other — 49%
lack of cooperation of classroom teachers — 47%
lack of appropriate spaces to work with students or their teachers within schools — 47%
Ministry guidance regarding the length of time per session that should be spent supporting a student on the roll — 37%
lack of access to literacy resources for me to work with — 3%

Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits, 2013

When looking for differences in the barriers RTLits perceived, two significant differences emerged by location:

· RTLits in rural (66%) and urban (63%) clusters were more likely than those in dense urban (31%) clusters to identify the time needed to travel between schools as a barrier

· RTLits in urban (79%) and dense urban (85%) clusters were more likely than those in rural (59%) clusters to cite the number of students with high literacy needs in the cluster as a barrier to supporting students on the RTLit roll.

Types of support: direct and indirect

The way that RTLits provide support varies in a number of ways. The PPM describes two main types of practice, direct and indirect.[13]

> **INDIRECT INSTRUCTION**
>
> The major focus of RTLit work will be in the area of indirect instruction. This involves the RTLit supporting the teacher to deliver appropriately designed learning opportunities within the classroom. The teacher, RTLit (and students) work together. Where a group of students has similar learning needs eg a comprehension strategy, they can be grouped for instruction.
>
> **DIRECT INSTRUCTION**
>
> ...used less frequently ... useful for diagnostic purposes where the RTLit wishes to gain greater insight into the teaching and/or learning. It may be chosen when the RTLit believes that a short period of intensive teaching is required to break a pattern of the student's ineffective learning behaviour. This teaching may or may not occur within a classroom but regardless should be balanced carefully with the need to enable the student's learning to take place within the normal classroom setting as soon as possible.
>
> (pages 7-8, Professional Practice Manual, Ministry of Education, 2012)

The PPM also notes that RTLit may also be involved in other literacy initiatives (such as professional development provision or practice groups within a cluster), but that their core focus should be on students on the RTLit roll.

Definitional issues: direct and indirect support

Despite the PPM providing clear direction on the type of support that should be offered, we found a wide range of views on what RTLits *should* be doing: including differences between RTLits and their Host Principals, RTLits and the schools in their cluster, and between schools within a cluster.

> We've got so many kids on the tail who need instruction, one-to-one. These kids need help, and I know a lot of my principals are saying, "What we need is somebody who's actually going to work with our kids and not go into the classroom and tell our teachers, who are already doing a good job, how to do something else." (RTLit)

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[13]   The PPM is quoted as it is the current Ministry guidance, previous guidance also described two types of support.

The case study interviews revealed that there are major definitional issues:

·   the categories 'direct' and 'indirect' are interpreted in different ways by different RTLits

    –   some RTLits define anything in the classroom as 'indirect' and everything out of the classroom as 'direct'; some define anything one-to-one as 'direct' and anything in a group as 'indirect'

·   the categories 'direct' and 'indirect' don't accurately capture all the ways RTLits support students within a cluster, meaning that monitoring data under represents the true range and nature of the RTLit role

    –   intangible benefits are not captured by the monitoring data, such as the benefits of improved teaching to all students in a class (through the support provided to a teacher), continuing over years

    –   RTLits described working with particular students on the roll within a larger group of students who also had literacy needs, the monitoring data only captures the support of the one student on the roll, but a much larger number actually benefits

    –   some RTLits capture wider PLD activities (eg presentations to staff) as 'indirect', others don't capture these activities at all

> In the guidelines it says we should only work with the students who are formally on the role, well that's really difficult if you go into a class ... I've just had this experience, I had two children in the group [on the roll] and three who were a year younger [and not on the roll]... the three who were just there because they were at the same level really [made progress] – I was like, "Oh my gosh, look at these kids." (RTLit)

·   there is some evidence that the categories may be understood or used in different ways by individual RTLits at different times

    –   when interviewed one RTLit described her time use completely differently to the way she had reported it for the Ministry's monitoring purposes.

In addition, RTLits described their practice as being flexible, and varying daily, monthly and yearly in reflection of the different needs of the individual students who are on the roll at any one time.

> [Programmes are] always slightly different. They have to be slightly different because the needs of the children are always different, so it needs tweaking to fit the needs of the children, and also the needs of the teacher. (RTLit)

Describing actual practice: a continuum

Taking into account the definitional issues outlined above, the dichotomous categories in the PPM to describe support (direct and indirect), do not accurately capture or reflect RTLit practice. Rather, analysis of the case study feedback indicates a continuum of practice.

Figure 18: RTLit practice: a continuum
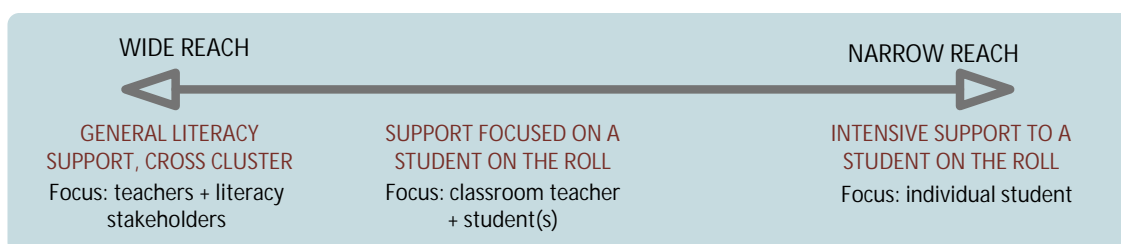
Typical characteristics of the points identified on the continuum are likely to be:

· intensive support to a student on the roll:

– frequent contact with the student, inside or outside the classroom

– one-on-one support (in some cases alongside one or two other students)

– testing literacy levels of the student on the roll (pre and post support)

– feedback to the classroom teacher on the student's progress

· support focused on a student on the roll:

– one-on-one support OR support to the student plus a small group with similar needs – generally within the classroom

– testing literacy levels of the student on the roll (pre and post support), plus feedback may be given on others in a group

– support for the classroom teacher to improve the student's literacy: discussion (in or out of the classroom), observation, modelling, provision of resources, feedback

– sharing of information with others involved with the literacy of the child on the roll (eg SENCO, literacy leader), including feedback on students' progress

· general literacy support to teaching staff and cluster:

– ad hoc discussions relating to students in the school (including students previously on the roll and students not on the roll)

– provision of resources or ideas to teaching staff

– professional development, training sessions, presentations (within a school or cluster group, eg principals' cluster, literacy initiative), advice on schools' literacy systems.

Individual RTLits' practice tend to focus on a particular point on the spectrum

While day to day practice varies according to the needs of the individual students on the roll, most RTLits agree on a general approach, in collaboration with their Cluster Management Committee.

This decision on general approach is influenced by a number of factors:

· the skills, experience and philosophy of the RTLit

· the perspectives of the Cluster Management Committee

· preferences of the schools in the cluster

· student need across the cluster

· resource constraints.

In addition, the PPM influences decisions about practice and support within a cluster: 84% of RTLits said that the PPM had changed their practice.

Case study interviews on practice changes revealed that RTLits and Cluster Management Committees have primarily interpreted the PPM as requiring a greater focus on indirect support, meaning more time should be spent with classroom teachers. A number of other interviewed stakeholders also described seeing a change in focus from one-to-one support for students, to a greater focus on supporting teachers and classroom work, stemming back to the release of the PPM.

Whether or not the PPM had consistently changed practice was less clear however, with some RTLits and Cluster Management Committees agreeing that direct support would be routinely provided despite what the PPM said.

The survey showed that RTLit opinion on whether indirect instruction *should* be the primary focus of the Service was divided (45% agreed, 42% disagreed). The case study interviews investigated this and found that opinion on what was the best approach was driven by two different factors:

· student need:

  – many believe that direct support is the most appropriate support for students with high literacy learning needs (ie those who aren't responding to everyday classroom teaching and need specific, focused intervention), that the needs of this group are very individual-specific and often require teaching strategies and techniques tailored to that individual; because these are the types of students referred to the Service, many stakeholders expressed a preference for this type of support

    > If we can subvert the pure model so she can work directly with the kids then I'm happy, I can't be bothered with a model that just works with teachers. (Principal)

· resource allocation and equitable access:

  – indirect instruction is seen as the fairest way to share a scare resource across the cluster (ie working in this way usually means more students can be on the roll): in some cases decisions to operate in this way appear to be primarily driven by this factor (rather than a focus on student need and quality outcomes)

– stakeholders talked about needing to balance spreading the resource widely with making sure that resources aren't spread too thinly so as to be ineffective (ie through spending shorter periods in individual schools); this often leads to geographic-based rationing (ie to minimise 'wasted' travel time) and under-serving of remote/rural areas.

Data on types of support for students on the roll

The Ministry's monitoring data is designed to capture the type of support the RTLits provide, direct or indirect. The 2011 monitoring data shows that almost half (44%) of the students on the RTLit roll received indirect support only, 36% direct support only, and 20% received a mix of both. As outlined above, the definitional issues indicate that this data is unlikely to be an accurate depiction of support. For this reason, and differences in way the data was collected,[14] we have not made direct comparisons of the monitoring and online survey data.

Online survey data on practice type

Given the variation in the way that RTLits report their practice, survey results are presented at their most granular level, rather than collapsing them into the two categories: direct and indirect.

Figure 19 shows RTLits reported spending the most time (on average) on direct one-to-one instruction outside of the classroom. In line with feedback from the case studies, the survey results also show a large degree of variation in responses (standard deviations are noted next to means in Figure 19).

When looking for relationships between type of instruction and location and decile, the only significant relationships were between location and '*providing advice and guidance to teachers*' both*' inside'* and *'outside'* the classroom:

·   those in more rural areas were more likely to report higher levels of this kind of practice.

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14   Monitoring data summarises individual student information for the entire year, whether the students was supported directly, indirectly, or a mixture of both. It is not possible to achieve this in a one-off survey, and in this case RTLits were asked to estimate the percentage of time they spent on each type of support.

Figure 19: Average percent of time spent on different types of instruction
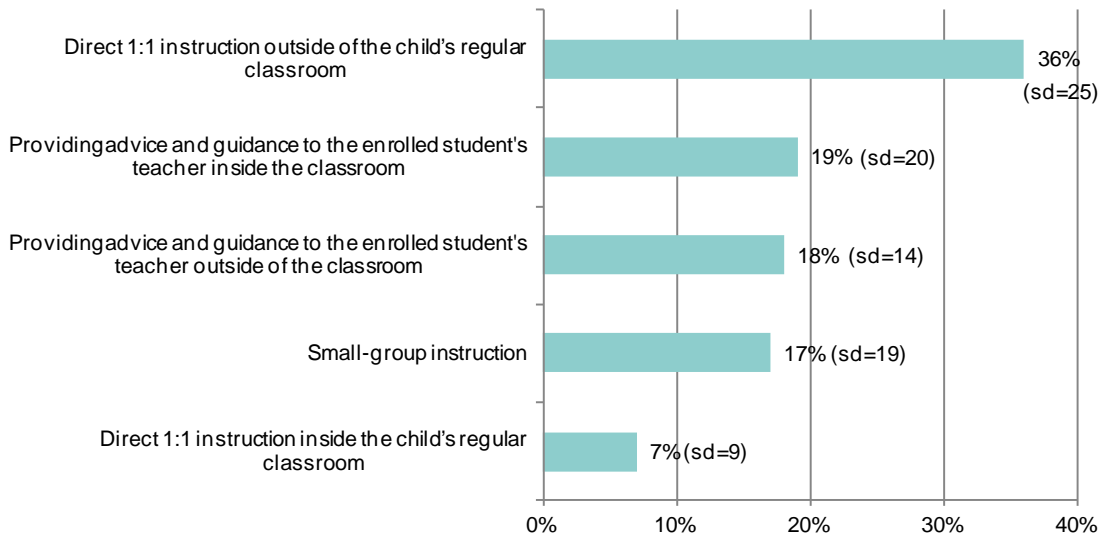
Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits, 2013.

Working with Māori and Pasifika students

On the whole the interviewed RTLits felt confident and prepared to support Māori and Pasifika students (noting that some RTLits operate in areas with low proportions of Māori and Pasifika students). In most cases they described providing an individual response to the student, based on all their literacy learning needs – not on their ethnicity.

> [Do Māori and Pasifika students have any particular needs or issues?] Not by their ethnicity, but by their socio-economic conditions, definitely. (RTLit)

> When you're working with them, you take that cultural base and the knowledge of who they are as a child. It's not the ethnicity, it's who the child is. The ethnicity and culture is part of them... It's no good getting a journal that's about climbing a coconut tree in Samoa if the child has been born and bred here, you know what I mean? (RTLit)

The only issue related to ethnicity that was identified by the RTLits (and some teachers and principals) was working with Pasifika students who come from a non-English speaking background. Some of these students' literacy issues related to limited knowledge of English, while others with more challenging needs also had low literacy levels in their own language. Many Pasifika students on the roll also received ESOL funding.

Only one RTLit mentioned specific additional training she had undertaken to improve her ability to work with Māori and Pasifika students.

> With the Pasifika students I'm aware of the cultural differences ... and I've done a Samoan language course, and when I was doing my RTLit training I did a fairly in-depth paper on the needs of Pacific students, so I feel that I'm okay about that, and with the Māori students I've also done a Māori language course, and so I don't feel that there is a cultural challenge in working with those students. (RTLit)

Working with the families of students on the roll

The survey showed that the majority of RTLits (74%) believe engaging with family and whānau is part of their role. Interviews revealed that RTLits are clear that this is not described as a formal part of their role in the PPM. Despite this, they believed that families play an important role in building and sustaining literacy. Some RTLits described ways of maintaining informal contact: including sending notes to families (through a note book system), seeing people in the community and in some instances, attending parent-teacher interviews.

None of the RTLits we talked to described having formal or lengthy contact with families, this was seen to be the primary responsibility of the school.

RTLit practice: working with teachers

The way that RTLits support students defines the ways that they work with classroom teachers. Figure 18 (page 49) described a continuum of practice:

·   at one end: intensive support to a student on the roll; of all types of practice, this is likely to involve the least amount of formal, direct contact with a classroom teacher

·   in the middle: support focused on a student on the roll; when this type of support aligns with the expectations of the PPM, it involves the RTLit working in close partnership with the classroom teacher to improve literacy, and sustain gains over time within the classroom

   –   in practice, this is done in many ways from collaborative lesson planning and teaching between the RTLit and teacher, through to brief conversations between lessons

·   at the far end: general literacy support to teaching staff and cluster; rather than focusing on the needs of individual students, this type of support is intended to raise the capability of teaching staff, it may involve workshops, presentations or involvement in formal PLD programmes.

There was strong feeling that the PPM requires a greater emphasis on working with teachers than had previously been required. Support is still intended to focus on an individual student, but the rationale of working closely with the teacher is that literacy gains for that student are more likely to be maintained if the teacher's ability to support the student is also increased.

Because the RTLit intervention is focused at the micro level, on an individual student and classroom, it is vital that RTLits are willing to work with teachers, have the capability to do this, and that their role is widely understood and supported by schools.

· Not all RTLits (or schools or Cluster Management Committees) believe that working with teachers is the best use of the limited RTLit resource, RTLits who have a preference for working one-to-one are less willing to accept teacher support as a key part of their role.

> I don't think it should be our role. I know that a teacher observing us will pick up some really good ideas, but in terms of going into a classroom and saying, "This is what you should be doing," I don't feel that that's my job. In fact my principals don't want me to go into the classroom. (RTLit)

· Capability: RTLits have not been specifically trained to work with teachers; their postgraduate diploma includes no specific content on how to effectively support classroom teachers; many stakeholders (including RTLits) identified this as a significant shortcoming of the training.

· Schools:

– school stakeholders had wide ranging expectations of the ways that RTLits should be supporting teachers; many schools saw the role as providing general literacy support to teachers and/or wider literacy PLD

  o RTLits reported relatively low levels of confidence for performing these types of roles: (online survey: lower confidence relative to working collaboratively with teachers, for '*facilitating staff development workshops and meetings*' and *'being involved in processes that lead to informed changes in school literacy practices'*)

– RTLits reported practical challenges in working with teachers: lack of space within classrooms, small 'windows of opportunity' (with literacy scheduled during the morning in most schools; differing class and break times in different schools; and severely limited time to talk with teachers often limited to between classes, formal classroom release time was not commonly used).

> The [training] that we did was mainly related to working to one-on-one and small groups ... but I don't recall a lot of it being to mentor a teacher ... previously we've been working more with the individual child and the teacher has been mentored by a literacy development officer. (RTLit)

> With direct teaching you go in and take the child out ... but with indirect you've got [to compete with the teacher being involved in] swimming, you've got athletics, you've got CRT Release so the teacher's not going to be in the room, the child's sick... There's so many more variables. (RTLit)

> It's hard scheduling meetings with teachers... my Management Team will say, "Well, you know, they've got to make time," but it's tricky. You end up talking at lunch time or if they say they're available after school, then I'm doing paperwork in the car until after school... Or you catch their duty day, and

often we can talk through a lunch hour which means the teacher doesn't get a lunch break... (RTLit)

In addition, in the interviews a number of RTLits and schools described challenging personal relationships (between individual RTLits and teachers, or with particular teachers being unwilling to change their teaching).

SUMMARY: assessing need and RTLit practice

Despite the guidelines in the PPM, RTLits' practices vary greatly. This has led to a lack of clarity about what and how the Service is meant to deliver, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of RTLits' processes and practices.

Assessment

The way RTLits assess students is not consistent, and there are indications that some may do this key task better than others. RTLits described a wide range of practices, with their choice of tools driven by their training or previous experience. RTLits typically practice in isolation, and there is no formal mechanism for sharing or recommending particular tools amongst RTLits. The skill sets of RTLits varied, for example some are able to diagnose underlying cognitive issues while others aren't, and some lacked appropriate tools to assess older students while others were confident to do this.

Assessment also tends to incorporate feedback from the classroom teacher (eg standardised test data or observations), to ensure a well-rounded picture of a student's learning needs. The extent to which school assessment data is relied upon varies – some RTLits rely heavily on it, some conduct selected tests to supplement school data, while others disregard school data and repeat tests.

Types of support – direct and indirect

There is no agreement amongst stakeholders (including RTLits) as to whether support should be offered directly or indirectly to students (ie through their teachers). Although the PPM states that the 'major focus' should be indirect support, there is widespread resistance to this and many RTLits continue to work directly with students in a one-to-one model. Most RTLits vary their practice in response to key factors including student need and geography, and actual practice tends to occur along a continuum rather than being either direct or indirect.

The requirement to focus on indirect support leads to widespread confusion – including how to understand and capture its impact, and how to offer this type of support. The capability and willingness of RTLits to work successfully with teachers is also a concern (for RTLits and schools). A lack of training in how to work indirectly is identified as a key shortcoming of the compulsory diploma.

Little feedback was given on RTLits' ability to work with priority students (Māori and Pasifika), and on the whole RTLits expressed confidence in their ability to work effectively with these students. Providing support to Pasifika students from a non-English speaking background was identified as the key challenge in working with priority students.

These findings indicate that there is a need to clarify how support should be offered, and suggests that support should be tailored to context: in relation to both the learning needs of individual students, and the level of need across the cluster. In addition, the dichotomous support options presented in the PPM (direct and indirect) needs to be amended to better reflect the continuum of practice that actually exists, in order to support more transparent decision making about the types of support that should be offered and under what circumstances.

Practice outcomes: discontinuation and referrals to other services

Discontinuation from the Service

Students are discontinued from the RTLit roll for a number of reasons, and rarely because they have reached the expected national standard. In practice the reason for discontinuation could be one or any combination of the following:

·   their time is up and resource needs to be made available to another student (driven by agreed criteria at the cluster level: this may be a set 'dosage' as interpreted under the PPM or an agreed time period – this varies from cluster to cluster, eg for an academic year or for a single term)

·   because the student has made sufficient progress (not necessarily to national standard) and/or adequate supports have been put in place so they can learn in the classroom: the understanding of what is a successful outcome is discussed below (page 62)

·   no more progress anticipated: in some cases students will be discontinued when it is judged that the RTLit is not able to support the student to make progress

·   the student is referred to another type of support: this may be because progress is not being made or sustained, and/or because an underlying condition or other issue needs to be addressed (ie more intensive or different support is needed).

The decision to discontinue a student is usually discussed with the Cluster Management Committee. In practice the decision is made by the RTLit with the committee providing formal sign-off. In some cases the committee supports the RTLit to make a hard decision: for example when the RTLit would like to continue to support an individual who is making little progress, and where there are no suitable referral options.

> I've had one child ... and I did have her on for a long time, and I tried my best to get her up and I just couldn't and I knew that I had to take her off the programme and the management committee said, "Yes, we agree because you've got to get bang for bucks." (RTLit)

RTLits expressed frustration at having to discontinue students and effectively limit the amount of support they could offer. The need to discontinue students was commonly understood as being driven by the need to ration the scarce RTLit resource across a large group of students, meaning that individual students effectively receive less support than they would ideally like to provide.

Referrals to other services

The online survey indicated that there are options for referring students from the RTLit Service when more intensive support is needed – only 3% said that there was no one to refer to. Further investigation through the interviews revealed that though referrals are being made, they are not necessarily seen as a good outcome: all stakeholders expressed frustration at the options available for referral (seeing options as inappropriate and/or difficult to access).

Referral options differed in different clusters, reflecting the fragmentation of the wider literacy system,[15] in some clusters there appeared to be options available, in others, options were very limited. The key options were:

· RTLBs: in the survey 89% of RTLits said they suggested schools refer students to RTLBs

  – interview feedback was clear that this was seen as an inappropriate referral for most students, as RTLBs are not seen as able to support high literacy needs; despite this RTLits continue to refer to the RTLB Service as they believe this is the intention of the guidance in the PPM, and that there are few other options

· SLTs: reported as a referral option by 41% in the online survey

  – some clusters reported serious problems with accessing SLTS, while SLTs appeared to be more available in other clusters; the relationship with the SLT Service was not clear – in some areas it was described as an intervention for very young children developing early speech and language capability, in others it was seen as a literacy intervention

· educational psychologists: this was reported as a referral option by 45% of RTLits but they were infrequently mentioned by interviewees.

> Oh we do sometimes refer on, particularly if it becomes apparent that a child has global learning needs, so their needs are more than literacy, then we will refer them on to the RTLB service. (RTLit)

> We shouldn't take them off the programme just because they've had 45 weeks because if they're still making accelerated progress it's wrong to take them off and send them to the RTLB, because what are they going to do with them? (RTLit)

Looking at survey results by location reveals that RTLits in rural areas are just as likely as RTLits in other areas to refer students to RTLBs, but referrals to other services is lower (see Figure 20).

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15   See Relationships to other services and literacy interventions, on page 56.

Figure 20: Services RTLits refer to by location
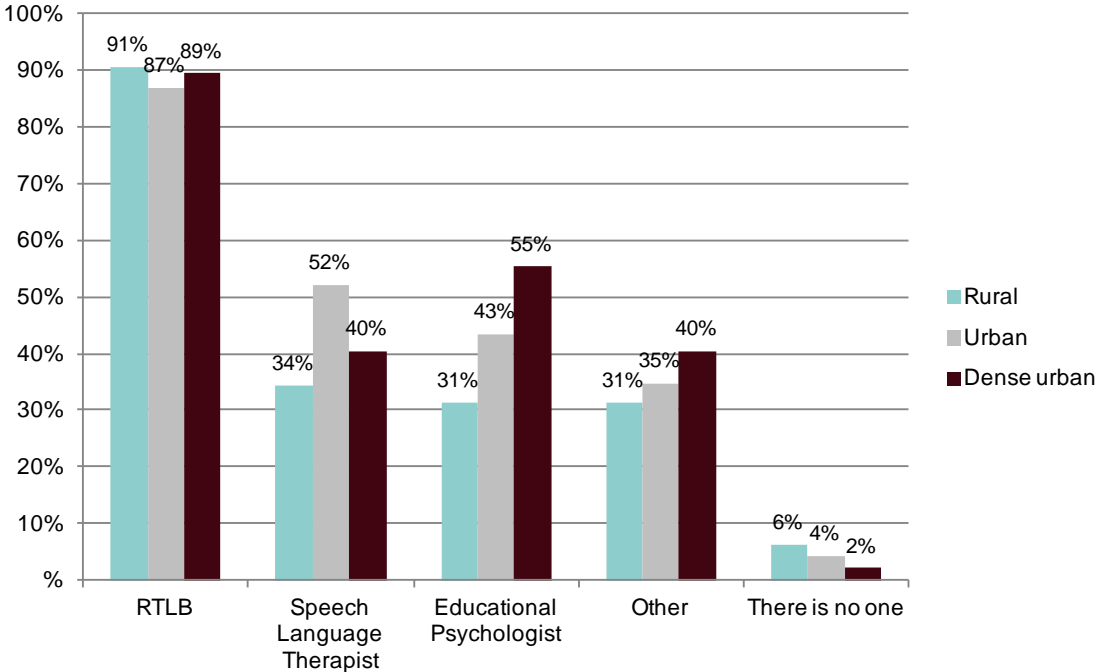
Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits, 2013

Some schools talked about being able to access higher levels of intervention or support for students through having a 'paper trail' of trying other interventions. Failure to achieve accelerated progress through the RTLit Service was seen as good evidence to use when trying to access further assistance (eg ORS funding).

SUMMARY: discontinuation and referrals to other services

The evaluation found that students are discontinued from the Service for a range of reasons. In some cases discontinuation indicates a 'successful' outcome (though rarely does success mean reaching national standards), while in other cases discontinuation is driven by resource restrictions (ie to give somebody else a turn), or because of a lack of student progress. RTLits expressed frustration at having to discontinue students and effectively limit support in order to accept greater numbers onto the roll.

When sufficient student progress is not being made or 'time is up', a recommendation is often made that the school refer the student to another service. RTLits (and other stakeholders including schools) have significant concerns about the quality and appropriateness of existing referral options. In particular, referrals to the RTLB Service are seen as inappropriate for most students with ongoing literacy support needs. The absence of alternative and more intensive literacy support options is seen as a significant gap in the wider literacy system.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the Service

The PPM describes the intention of the Service as being to support a student to quickly progress to where they will benefit from effective classroom teaching. Students should be 'successfully discontinued' when they are working at or close to the expected National Standard. In addition, the Service aims to improve general literacy levels in each cluster.

> To be honest with you, I have never managed to get a child to National Standard within 45 lessons. I have barely managed to get them into the bottom group at 45 lessons, and if we worked directly to the guidelines that we had been given, every single child I've ever had in my role would be a failure, it says that "An indicator of the success will be how many children are at, or just below, National Standards." (RTLit)

Assessing the effectiveness of the Service to support a student and improve their literacy is challenging because of the different ways in which the Service operates in different clusters. As discussed previously: different clusters deal with students with different levels and types of needs, and different clusters provide different interventions (including levels of direct contact with students and different intervention lengths).

Feedback from the case studies on Service outcomes identified additional challenges:

- teaching these students is hard as they have significant challenges, therefore expecting them to catch up to their cohort is not reasonable in the majority of cases

    - most of the students on the roll have already received specialist support, additional teaching and the best available resources; the limited amount of resource available under the RTLit Service is insufficient to catch them up to cohort – this is particularly the case if support is to be primarily indirect

    - there will always be a 'tail', some students have complex conditions/challenges and will never reach their cohort

- those students who are most likely to 'catch up' are those who have 'missed out' – they are the ones who 'can fly'; good gains can be made with these students over a short-period, and some clusters have targeted provision towards these students rather than targeting those who are furthest behind

- when an RTLit is working with a classroom teacher and/or wider teaching staff (such as SENCOs and literacy leaders) their ability to do a good job is dependent on staff and school's skills, attitudes and engagement; RTLits also noted that schools and teachers need to 'own' the need to improve the literacy of students and teaching quality.

We also found clear evidence that there are a wide range of expectations as to what the Service aims to achieve, and what a successful outcome looks like. Examples of successful outcomes included:

· 'accelerated progress': students may not meet their cohort but they will make better progress than they would without support (this was cited as an example of success by a number of stakeholders)

· re-engagement in the classroom, and with reading and literacy (this can include improved self-esteem, attitude and behaviour)

· progress that is appropriate for the individual: for some this may be maintaining reading at a level rather than progressing, for some this may be slow improvement, for others it may be accelerated

· improved classroom teaching: teachers have better understanding of literacy needs (beyond a focus on reading level, ie to include writing and comprehension issues) and strategies to support the student (practical techniques to help include students within groups etc, not necessarily raising their literacy)

· better, richer information about a students' needs to support ongoing teaching and/or to make referrals to other services.

> Do you accelerate their learning so that suddenly they're at National Standards? Probably not, but if the child's coming to school happier in the classroom because the teacher's able to meet the needs and adjust things, then I think that's a really valid thing too. (RTLit)

> He's actually learnt to focus, to concentrate... and now he's got a real confidence about him, he says 'I'm a writer now!'. (Principal)

Outcomes data: assessing the effectiveness of the Service

While the difficulties of measuring the effectiveness of such a devolved service is widely acknowledged, the policy question remains: what impact does the Service have on student literacy?

The Ministry collects data on the outcomes of students who have been enrolled in the Service. This data is of limited usefulness in the determination of overall effectiveness for a number of reasons:

· RTLits report outcomes in a variety of ways (eg some use different measurement tools at entry and exit, others use the same tools)

· different information has been collected by the Ministry over the years, making it difficult to assess impact over time (a significant measurement shift occurred when data moved from assessment in relation to age, to assessment in relation to year level).

The monitoring data shows significant numbers of students are discharged from the Service still 'below' or 'well below' national standards. As an example, the 2011 annual report stated that of those 'discharged':

· less than half (47.5%) had a reading level that matched their chronological age

· the remainder were discharged with a reading level below their chronological age:

　– 21.4% were reading at a level 6-12 months below

　– 18.7% were reading at a level 12+ months below

　– 13.5% were reading at a level 24+ months below.

This is consistent with the feedback that we received: expecting the students who are referred to the Service (those with significant literacy support needs, and the 'well below') to reach their year level cohort is not a realistic expectation.

> A strong point I would make about the service in terms of the Ministry's goals for us, is that to have kids reading at National Standards [on exit] that are working [when referred to us] two, three, four years below; you know that's an unrealistic goal. (RTLit)

As outlined above, accelerated progress is seen as a valid measure of success: these students are unlikely to have reached their cohort, but they are widely viewed to have made better progress than expected had they not received RTLit support. Unfortunately it is not possible to robustly test this belief. Although the Ministry collects data on enrolled students' reading levels on entry and exit to the Service, it is not possible to accurately interpret the overall gains made as students enrolled in the Service vary by age (the Service covers Years 1 to 8) and ability, progress across reading levels is not linear, and it is not possible to determine what would have happened had they not received RTLit support.

# Perceptions of the effectiveness of the Service

Given the acknowledged difficulties in definitively measuring impact, the online survey included a range of questions to explore RTLits' and Host Principals' *perceptions* of the effectiveness of the Service.

Both RTLits and Host Principals responded positively to the statement: '*the RTLit Service is valuable and can demonstrate success in improving student achievement'.*

More detailed questions were asked about literacy achievement for specific types of students.

·   Literacy improvement across *all* students was viewed most positively: 96% of RTLits (90% of Host Principals) reported that the service improved achievement to a *moderate* or *large* extent (see Figure 21).

·   Results were less dramatic when different priority groups were asked about individually, and for Pasifika, special education needs students and English language learners, relatively high proportions of RTLits indicated that they didn't know how the service was performing for these groups (19%, 15% and 21% of RTLits respectively).

·   RTLits saw the service as least effective in improving the level of literacy achievement for students with special education needs (45% felt the service improved levels of literacy achievement for this group to a small extent or less).

**Figure 21: RTLit: Perceptions of extent to which RTLit service improves literacy achievement**
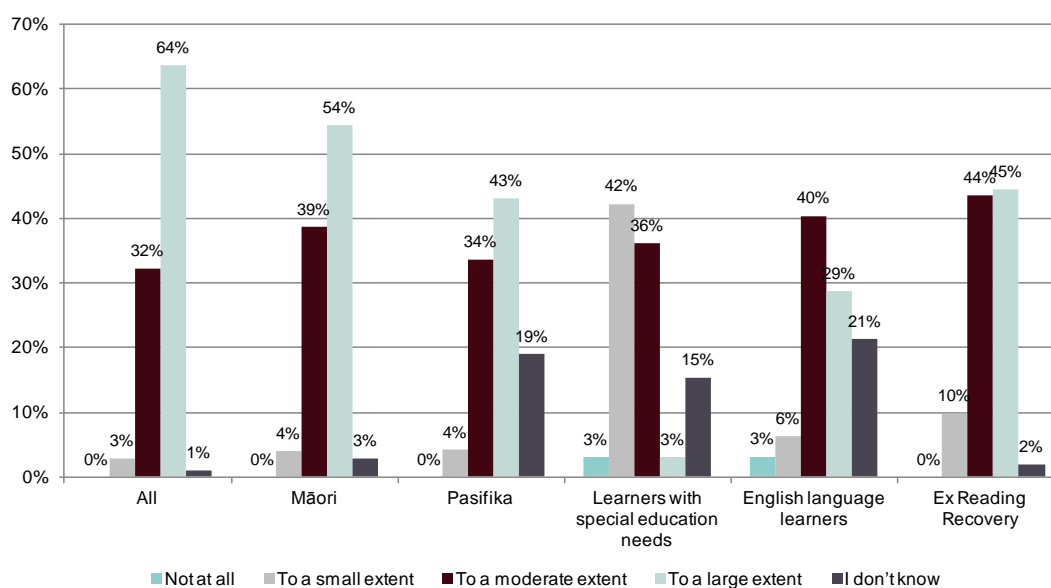
Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits, 2013

Perspectives on the extent to which these literacy gains are maintained were consistent between RTLits and Host Principals, with 69% of both responding that they thought the gains were maintained to at least a moderate extent. Around a quarter of both RTLits and Host Principals didn't know whether gains were maintained after students were discontinued (see Figure 22).

Case study interviews indicated that schools are more likely to know how well literacy gains are maintained than RTLits, through processes and checks overseen by literacy leaders and/or SENCOs. Many schools keep comprehensive records on students with literacy support needs, and regularly meet to discuss their progress and support options. RTLits' information tends to come from schools where they are in regular contact with literacy leaders/SENCOs, and where they are able to informally 'check-in' on student progress after discontinuation.

Figure 22: Perceptions of the degree gains made by students are maintained
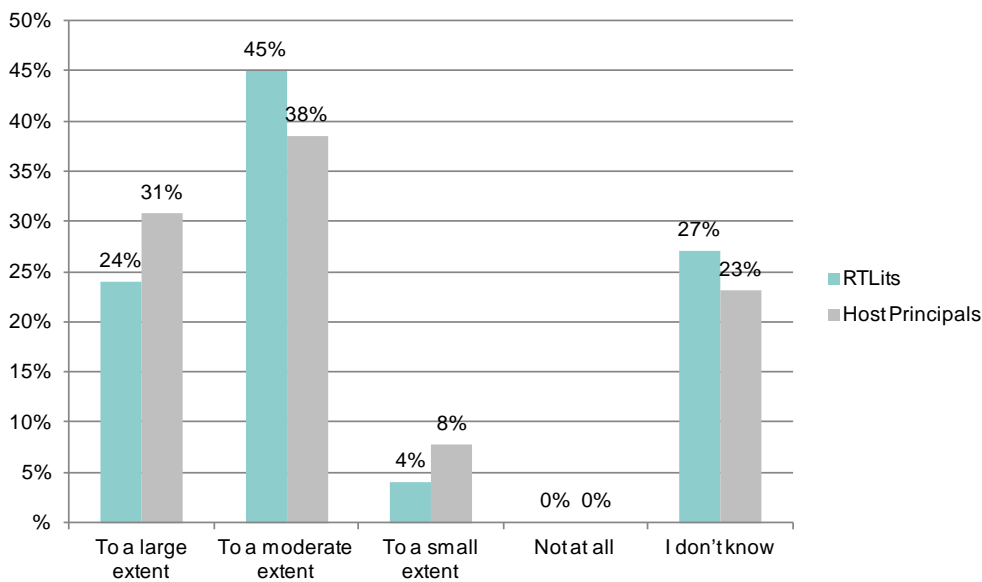
Source: MartinJenkins surveys of RTLits and Host Principals, 2013

On the whole, we received consistent feedback that RTLits are valued and respected (in the interviews), and that they are seen as a practical, expert literacy resource. This was particularly the case for stakeholders who had worked directly with RTLits. Stakeholders who had not worked directly with the RTLit Service, on the whole, did not comment on their value.

> We must keep them. That would be my plea, can we keep them please and can we have more of them and can we maybe define their role better? (Literacy stakeholder)

The Service was seen as particularly valuable in an environment where specialist literacy resources in general were seen to be rapidly disappearing (this was expressed with reference to the disestablishment of Literacy Development Officers and the amalgamation of Supplementary Learning Support into the RTLB Service).

Efficiency of the Service

The ability of the Service to efficiently support students across the cluster is primarily driven by cluster geography and individual schools' internal timetabling and processes.

Cluster geography

As discussed throughout the report, the geography of a cluster has a significant impact on the way support is provided. RTLits in rural clusters have to travel significant distances between schools, and traffic can cause delays in dense urban clusters. On average, RTLits reported they spent 11% of their time travelling to and from schools (online survey). However interviews indicate that RTLits in rural clusters spend significantly more time travelling than was reported in the survey – in some areas schools can be located one to one and a half hours (or further) apart.

Responses to the online survey indicate that decisions are made at the cluster level to maximise the efficiency of Service provision:

·   29% of RTLits (and one-quarter of Host Principals) reported that they limited/rotated schools' access to the Service by geography (online survey, see Figure 12 on page 37)

·   RTLits in rural clusters were more likely to report higher levels of indirect types of instruction (providing advice and guidance to teachers in and out of the classroom) than RTLits in urban and dense urban clusters; this means that RTLits in rural clusters spend less time on direct instruction and small group instruction (online survey, see Figure 19 on page 52).

School timetabling and internal processes

The interviews also identified schools' internal organisation as having a large impact on RTLits' ability to provide support efficiently.

School timetabling is a significant challenge to RTLits. RTLits attempt to align their support with the times that schools focus on literacy (to allow them to provide support in the classroom and to avoid students having to be removed from other activities such as sport).

·   Most schools focus on literacy in the mornings, this means there is a very small window of opportunity (around two hours a day), during which time both schools and RTLits prefer support to be provided.

·   Schools have different break times, making it difficult to work across more than one school in a morning.

Processes and protocols for teacher release time also vary widely from school to school making it impossible to use one method to support and communicate with teachers. RTLits commonly talk to teachers during break times or within an operating classroom.

RTLits also reported difficulties with providing consistent support to students around school activities such as sports days, assemblies, productions and end of term activities.

SUMMARY: effectiveness and efficiency of the Service

This section looked at student outcomes (effectiveness of the Service) and the efficiency of the Service.

Effectiveness – student outcomes

Assessing the overall effectiveness of the Service is challenging for a number of reasons:

· it is implemented differently across clusters: different ages and 'types' of students are supported in different ways (meaning that is not easy to draw conclusions from the monitoring data)

· it isn't possible to know what would have happened without support from the Service

· there are different expectations for what the Service is *meant* to achieve: the goal in the PPM (successful discontinuation when a student is working at or close to the expected National Standard), is widely seen as unrealistic for the majority of students especially given the need to limit the amount of support for individual students.

The Ministry's monitoring data shows significant numbers of students are discharged from the Service still 'below' or 'well below' national standards. Despite this, it is thought that students who are enrolled in the Service make better literacy progress than they would have without RTLit support.

Outcomes perceived to be 'successful' include outcomes relating to improved literacy (eg accelerated progress), through to a student having a better chance of learning in the classroom setting (eg re-engagement and increased confidence) and improved teaching by the classroom teacher (eg better knowledge about a student's learning needs and better teacher strategies to improve literacy).

Beyond improving literacy for individual students, the Service is also intended to have an impact on overall literacy levels. Because of the access and unmet demand issues discussed in previous sections, it is unlikely that the Service is having a significant impact on wider literacy levels, beyond the students and teachers it directly reaches.

Efficiency of the Service

The ability of the Service to operate efficiently is hampered by geography (with particular challenges in rural areas), and school timetabling – rather than being able to support students across the school day, support is most usefully provided during set literacy periods (held in the mornings in most schools).

Operational management of the Service

Cluster Management Committees are in place for most if not all clusters, and they operate in collaboration with RTLits to manage and operationalise the Service at the local level. The survey of Host Principals included a number of questions on the operation of these committees, and their operation was further discussed during case study interviews with both RTLits and the committees.

The shape of each Cluster Management Committee differed, but overall membership was generally seen to be appropriate – the 'right' people are thought to be on and they are usually chosen to represent the schools in the cluster.

·   Members are typically the Host Principal, the RTLit and one or more other principals (though we encountered one instance where the Host Principal was not on the committee).

·   Beyond this core group, composition varies but in some cases they include other literacy specialists (eg Reading Recovery Tutors) and/or other child development specialists (eg educational psychologists or RTLBs).

·   In practice, members' skills and interests in literacy varied, meaning that input and advice from the RTLit was critical and relied upon.

Meetings range in frequency, but are typically once per term (76%). The Host Principal usually chairs the Committee (70%) but the RTLit often prepares the agenda and runs the meetings; it is also not uncommon for the RTLit to formally Chair the committee (22%).

There was lack of clarity and consensus around the role of the committees, different clusters viewed the role differently, but overall most saw their role as being to provide operational and moral support to the RTLit. Roles were variously described as providing:

·   governance and oversight to the Service

·   accountability for funding

·   communication to and from the sector (primarily to principals)

·   practical support around RTLit decisions on individual students.

Each cluster develops its own policies and procedures. In the online survey most Host Principals reported that their committee had written policies and procedures spanning: referral of students to the service (95%), criteria for enrolment (93%), monitoring and reporting on student achievement (89%), and discharge (84%). Less common (though still present in the majority of clusters) were policies for:

·   priority learners (70%)

·   monitoring of students post-discharge (71%)

·   referral of students to other services (72%).

On the whole, the committees see the RTLits as the literacy professionals, able to be trusted with key decisions. RTLits supply operational reports to the committees covering referrals, waiting lists (where relevant), enrolments, discontinuations and referrals. RTLits also provide information to ensure accountability (including reporting on spending), and they identify PLD opportunities and organise their own travel (across the cluster). Committees typically receive and discuss information from RTLits but decision making is mostly endorsing or 'rubber-stamping' what the RTLit is doing.

Because of the devolved nature of the Service, with each cluster operating independently, operational reports produced by the RTLits are a critical information source for the Cluster Management Committee. The types of information and the way it is presented and reported varies from cluster to cluster, as does the RTLits' abilities to make sense of the complex nature of the data. Overall, the RTLits struggle to do this in a way that provides meaningful feedback. Many reports are at the micro-level, focusing on the experiences of individual students on the roll, rather than looking across the cluster to enable RTLits or their committees to make wider judgements about access to, or the effectiveness of, support.

We saw little evidence of networking or sharing of practices across cluster boundaries. While many RTLits participate in professional practice groups/ongoing study with other RTLits, this doesn't appear to spill over to sharing information or best practice on the day to day operation and management of the individual clusters. The desire to share information and practice was reflected in suggestions for improvement to the service in the online survey:

> I think there definitely needs to be more support for new host principals if they have not had the experience of hosting RTLits before. I was a first time Principal coming into a school with an RTLit unit and received no guidance from the Ministry on what my role in relation to managing the service was. I would really like to have at least one meeting a year with other host principals so we can share best practice and discuss policies and procedures. (Online survey, Host Principal)

Host Principals typically have performance agreements in place and conduct annual appraisals but performance management is light handed with the Host Principal not necessarily feeling well placed to judge the RTLits performance. This is likely to be related to the fact that many RTLits operate largely independently, spending relatively little time in the host schools.

SUMMARY: operational management of the Service

The Cluster Management Committees are the key management mechanism for the Service: they do not provide strong governance, direction or guidance. This is not surprising given the lack of clarity around the purpose and goals of the Service, and the absence of common policies or practices for the committees. In addition, Host Principals are generally not active in managing RTLits – they feel they lack a strong mandate and that they are unequipped to do so.

As a result, individual cluster operation is primarily driven by RTLits. While it means that decisions are made locally, this comes at the cost of a unified, consistent Service. There is no robust mechanism for sharing best practice, and no commonality between basic operational processes (such as referrals). RTLits also struggle to provide meaningful operational data to support key judgements on access and the effectiveness of support. As the Service as a whole lacks professional leadership and management, issues of consistency and performance are unable to be addressed.

System Level Issues

This section examines the RTLit Service within the context of the wider literacy system. It is guided by the following 'system levers' identified in the intervention logic relating to the wider literacy system (see the bottom line on Figure 2, page 16):

- Ministry regulations and expectations
- accountability
- RTLit resourcing
- literacy infrastructure
- teacher capability
- school leadership.

Ministry regulations and expectations

Professional Practice Manual (PPM)

The PPM was introduced in 2012 with the aim of achieving greater consistency of practice, by clarifying Ministry expectations for how the Service is meant to operate. The PPM was developed to guide professional practice and is not intended to replace the operational guidelines for the Service. The PPM is seen as requiring significant changes in practice and overall, RTLits are critical of the lack of PLD or support to help them make the desired shifts in practice.

Most respondents to the RTLit survey (84%) agreed the introduction of the PPM had changed their practice. Most often, these changes were described as increasing the level of indirect practice (or decreasing direct practice) and working more collaboratively with teachers. However, it is difficult to establish the nature and extent of practice change at the system-wide level, and the impact it might be having on overall literacy levels.

Some aspects of the PPM are controversial and are seen as constraining management flexibility and the ability to deliver the service effectively. This indicates that the PPM has yet to be fully embedded in practice and the lack of buy-in means it doesn't carry significant weight in influencing some RTLits' practice. The sections on working with students (page 46) and working with teachers (page 53) discuss key issues, including:

- extensive issues relating to the requirement to focus on 'indirect support': definitional issues and lack of buy-in from RTLits, schools and teachers (especially relating to support for students with the highest literacy learning needs)

- evidence of practice types and styles being along a continuum, rather than being direct OR indirect (see Figure 6 on page 28)

- difficulties knowing how to best work with teachers: differing expectations and lack of common understanding of the role; there is general agreement that this requires specific skills and that many RTLit are not well placed to do this.

In addition the PPM is perceived to emphasise a short, sharp intervention without recognition that some students require more enduring support. In particular the guidance regarding the number of sessions that may be offered to an enrolled student is seen as limiting: 68% of respondents to the RTLit survey consider this to be a barrier to supporting students on the roll.[16]

> Because if I have a child, at 7 years old, who is referred at level five and I've got 45 lessons, which is approximately a term, say 10 weeks, to lift them from level five to level 17 or 18, that would just be a miracle. I haven't managed to attain it; I've sometimes got my children to move up a level a week, but even with that progress they have not been at, or slightly below, National Standard. And so the guidelines set us up to fail. (RTLit)

Devolved cluster management model

The RTLit Service is an itinerant service funded by the Ministry, but located within individual self-managing schools. The evaluation revealed that this a real tension for the Service. The devolved model requires a balance between:

- the responsibility given to individual clusters to operate the service according to local needs and conditions with:

- a coherent, equitable and integrated system at a national level.

Because of the devolved model, clusters largely operate independently and in isolation from each other. In the absence of more centralised management and controls, each cluster makes its own interpretation of Ministry guidelines. This leads to wide-spread variation in the operating model and RTLit practice at a cluster level, and even sometimes to variation between RTLits within a cluster.

As discussed throughout the report, this leads to significant differences in processes and practices for: referrals, assessment, support (of students and teachers), discontinuation and referral to other services. There is also significant variation in the roles and operation of Cluster Management Committees (see page 71).

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[16] Guidance regarding session length was seen as less of an issue.

Need for Ministry support and overall leadership

A strong theme identified throughout all phases of the evaluation is the perceived lack of leadership of, and support for, the effective and efficient operation of the Service by the Ministry.

While there appears to be strong buy-in and support for the current devolved management model, this is balanced by a desire for greater support and assistance from the Ministry to support the effective operation of the service. In particular, members of Cluster Management Committees and Host Principals are critical of the lack of guidance, training and support from the Ministry for practical and operational issues. They feel they are left to muddle their own way through many issues that they probably share in common with other clusters.

All types of stakeholders (RTLits, Host Principals, Service users, local stakeholders and Ministry staff) were concerned about the overall lack of Ministry leadership and ownership for the Service. Interviewees expressed frustration at how difficult it was to find anybody in the Ministry (at the regional level or national level) who could answer a query about the Service or who appeared to have an interest in the Service.

Other key issues relating to the Ministry raised by interviewees included:

- although the Ministry is developing a framework for a more effective national system of literacy teaching and interventions (ie an integrated system of support, see page 93) resources have been lacking to fully implement this

- communication from the Ministry about the service is infrequent and the RTLit Executive body is seen as the primary source of information, including about Ministry initiatives (eg the introduction of the PPM)

- the Ministry is understood to be under-resourced, restricting its ability to play a stronger leadership role

- there is a desire for the Ministry to play a stronger role in professional leadership of the RTLit workforce, including greater support for the desired shifts in practice identified in the PPM and potentially introducing stronger regionally-based professional support for RTLits similar to the role played by Reading Recovery Tutors

- the Ministry has given little consideration to ongoing professional development of RTLits beyond the introduction of the compulsory qualification requirement

- lack of frequent reviews of the level and allocation of resource to ensure high-need areas are appropriately resourced

- more practical, operational support and leadership is required for the Service:

    – there is a need for national and regional mechanisms that support knowledge sharing

    – specific tools would improve Service consistency and aid operation: eg templates for referrals, guidance for assessments and operational issues such as managing excess demand, tools to monitor and track access and impact at the local level

     –   practical advice and support is needed for Host Principals and Cluster Management Committees on how to operate and oversee the service.

The key link between the sector and the Ministry is through the requirement of RTLits to provide annual monitoring data to the Ministry. This is seen as a frustrating process with information only going in one direction: data is requested in frequently changing formats and there is a lack of clarity about what happens to it or how it is used. The annual reports that are published are not useful at the local level (due to the delay in their release and the aggregation of data). System level monitoring is discussed further, below.

Notwithstanding the desire for greater Ministry leadership of and support for the service, the ability to operate the service flexibly is seen as paramount:

> I would give leeway to management committees and RTLits to work our service in the way that suits the schools in the cluster, even if it might [involve] working differently in one school than another school, then it might be that the school has a different need, or the child in that school has a different need. [RTLit]

> Recognition by the MOE that clusters are very diverse and that it is not possible for all RTLit to work in the same way. Perhaps there could be a list of "acceptable" ways for RTLit to work with guidelines to accompany these. [RTLit]

> Allow flexibility across the service so that the Resource is able to deliver in a variety of ways according to the make up of the schools in each cluster, taking into account travel, the needs of schools and the needs of individuals within the schools. This may vary over time. [RTLit]

SUMMARY: Ministry regulations and expectations

The ability of the Ministry to affect the operation and effectiveness of the Service is dependent on the operational and practice guidelines they have produced (the PPM), the implementation model used (itinerant and devolved), and the overall support and leadership they provide to the Service. In order to provide strong support to the Service, all of these areas need to complement and reinforce each other. In practice, all areas were found to have weaknesses.

The PPM is a key mechanism to set clear expectations for service provision. The evaluation found a marked disconnect between the guidelines in the PPM and actual practice. While the PPM is having an effect on practice, primarily through increasing indirect support and collaborative work with teachers, it is not fully embedded in practice. This indicates that the PPM requires review, and needs to take greater account of the key factors identified earlier as affecting practice at the local level – geography and need.

As the Service is implemented locally, the lack of clear expectations and guidelines from the PPM leads to widespread practice variation, with clusters operating independently and in isolation from each other. This leads to inefficient operation and sub-optimal practices, with each cluster having to develop its own forms, policies (for assessment, support, discontinuation and referral), and reporting mechanisms. As a result there is a need for stronger Ministry leadership and support for the operation of the Service. Currently the Ministry is seen to provide inadequate support. The lack of Ministry contact points at both national and regional levels is viewed particularly negatively.

The findings indicate that the Ministry's expectations need to be clarified and support for the Service increased: the guidelines need to balance flexibility with consistency to ensure a quality service is provided to those who most need it.

Accountability

System level monitoring

A strong and coherent literacy system requires checks and balances to ensure the accountability of its component parts. The publication of Annual Reports on the RTLit Service is the key mechanism to support transparency and accountability of the Service at a national level.

The reports provide a useful snapshot of key metrics for the service, including the numbers of students enrolled, the mode of delivery, learning gains and referrals. There are a number of limitations to the current reports, including:

· the emphasis of data collection is on direct provision and there has been little attempt to measure wider outcomes (eg working with teachers) relating to indirect support

  – given the change in emphasis to indirect support, this is seen as likely to miss much of the impact of the Service

· each annual report presents a snapshot of 12 months of data, there is no reporting of time series

· information on cluster characteristics (school rolls, deciles etc) could be used to support more detailed analyses

· analysis of trends is made difficult by the significant changes that have been made in data collection.

Of particular concern is the inconsistent measurement of student achievement data. To a large extent this reflects the different assessment tools used by RTLits and schools (see page 42 on). Greater standardisation of assessment approaches for the purposes of reporting on learning gains would be desirable.

There are opportunities to make better use of data collected by the Ministry to support the overall management of the service, including:

· improved consistency of measurement to facilitate the identification and analysis of trends

· information on cluster characteristics (school rolls, deciles etc) could be used to support more frequent review of resource levels and allocation

· greater use of individual returns (unit records) could assist with better understanding the learning gains achieved for groups of students, in particular the Ministry's priority learners.

In addition, the evaluation has identified issues with the accuracy and currency of the Ministry's administrative data, including with regard to the mapping of schools to clusters.

SUMMARY: accountability

The current system (publication of annual reports) does not support a transparent or accountable Service. In order to achieve a higher level of accountability, consideration needs to be given as to how to better measure student outcomes and achievement and to achieving greater consistency in measurement (between clusters and across the Service, over time). In addition, current measures could be better utilised to ensure resource allocation is optimal.

RTLit resourcing

To make a strong contribution to the wider literacy system, Figure 2 shows that the Service must have a qualified and skilled workforce.

Distribution and allocation of RTLits

The Service comprises 109 FTEs, which are allocated to 86 clusters using a population-based formula with a weighting towards low decile schools.

There is a widespread view that the total level of resource is insufficient to meet the demands on the service: 78% of respondents to the RTLit survey identified the number of students with high literacy needs in the cluster as a barrier to providing effective support to enrolled students (see page 46). This was the most frequently identified barrier.

The need for more RTLits (distributed according to need) is a very common suggestion from both Host Principals and RTLits, and was echoed by other stakeholders we interviewed.

> This is a hugely under-resourced service. We could better address literacy under-achievement in our cluster with an extra RTLit. [Host Principal]

> The big problem is trying to spread myself too thinly across too many schools. It is very stressful trying to address all the needs in the cluster and maintain all the processes required with students and administration. [RTLit]

The distribution of RTLits was originally set in 2001 and was last reviewed in 2011 with no or only minor changes to the allocation of resources. The allocation of the resource has not been dynamic, despite significant changes in school rolls.

The current allocation of RTLits leads to significant variation across clusters in the ratio of RTLit to students on roll, weighted according to average school decile (see Figure 23). The graph indicates the skewed nature of the distribution of need across clusters, with a small number of clusters having particularly high concentrations of students with high need (as proxied by the average decile-weighted student rolls). The clusters on the top-right hand side face particularly demanding challenges in meeting the need in their area with the current level of resources.

Figure 23: Students per RTLit within a cluster, by Decile-Weighted Student Roll
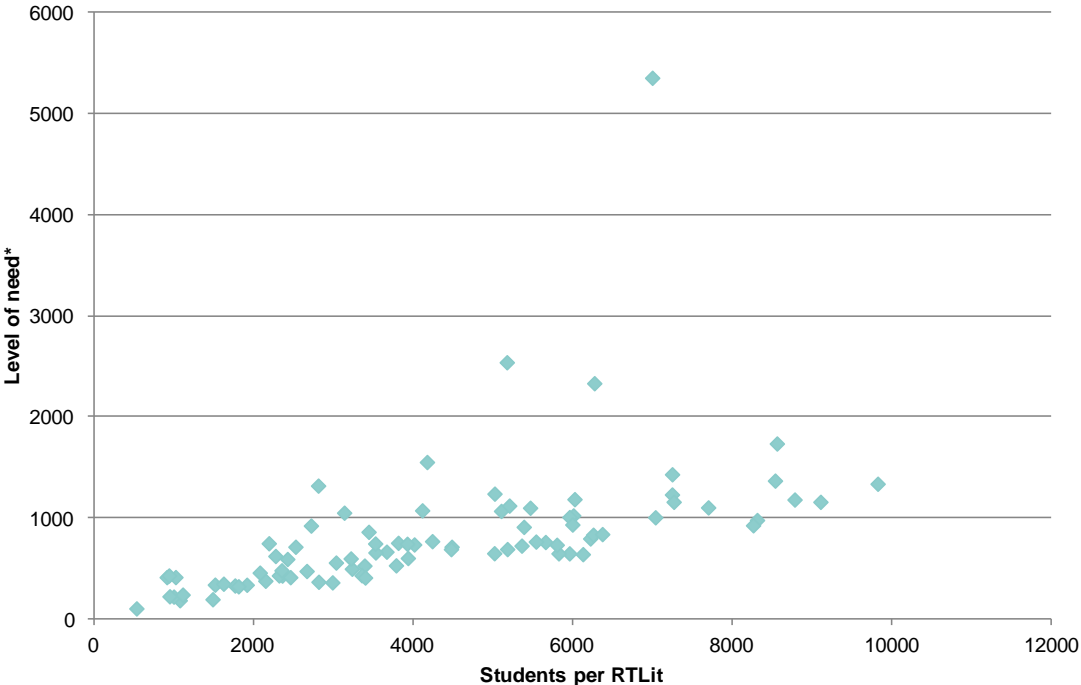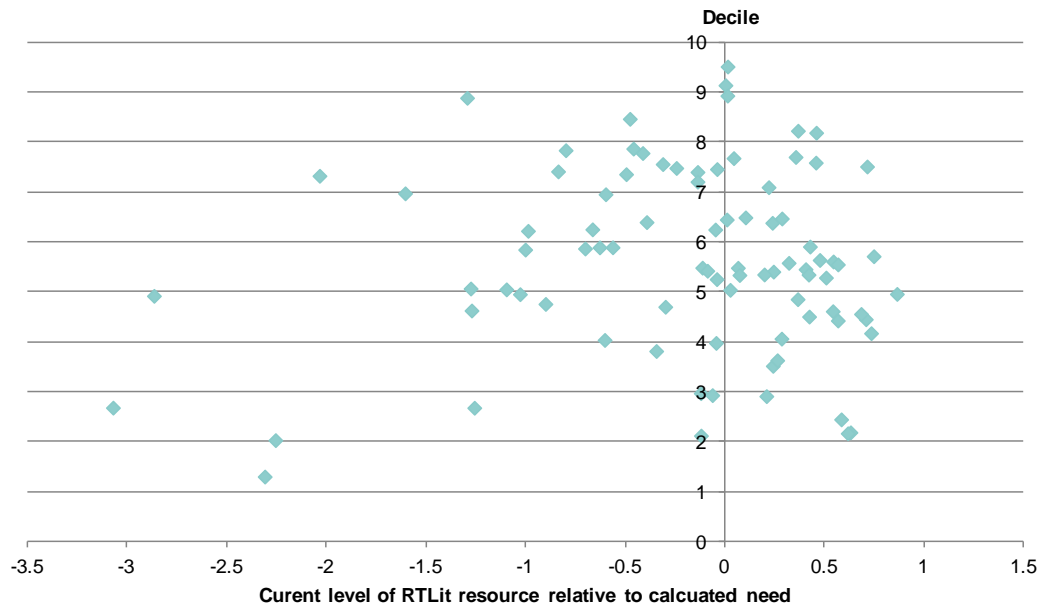

Source: MartinJenkins' analysis of Ministry of Education Directory of Schools data

* This proxy measure of need is calculated by weighting school roll by decile – essentially giving more weight to students in lower decile schools.

As part of the evaluation, we have recalculated the distribution of RTLits using the same formula used by the Ministry in 2011, but with updated data on cluster composition provided by the Ministry. This reveals a number of clusters that appear to be significantly under-resourced (on the basis of the existing allocation mechanism).

Figure 24 and Figure 25 illustrate that the clusters with the greatest 'under-resourcing' (everything to the left of '0' on the x axis) tend to be densely urban areas with concentrations of low decile schools. By contrast, the 'over-resourced' clusters (according to the Ministry formula – shown to the right of '0' on the x axis) tend to be higher decile.

Figure 24: Level of RTLit Resource relative to Ministry Calculation, by Average Decile

Source: MartinJenkins' analysis of Ministry of Education Directory of Schools data

Figure 25: Level of RTLit Resource relative to Ministry Calculation, by Urban/Rural Indicator
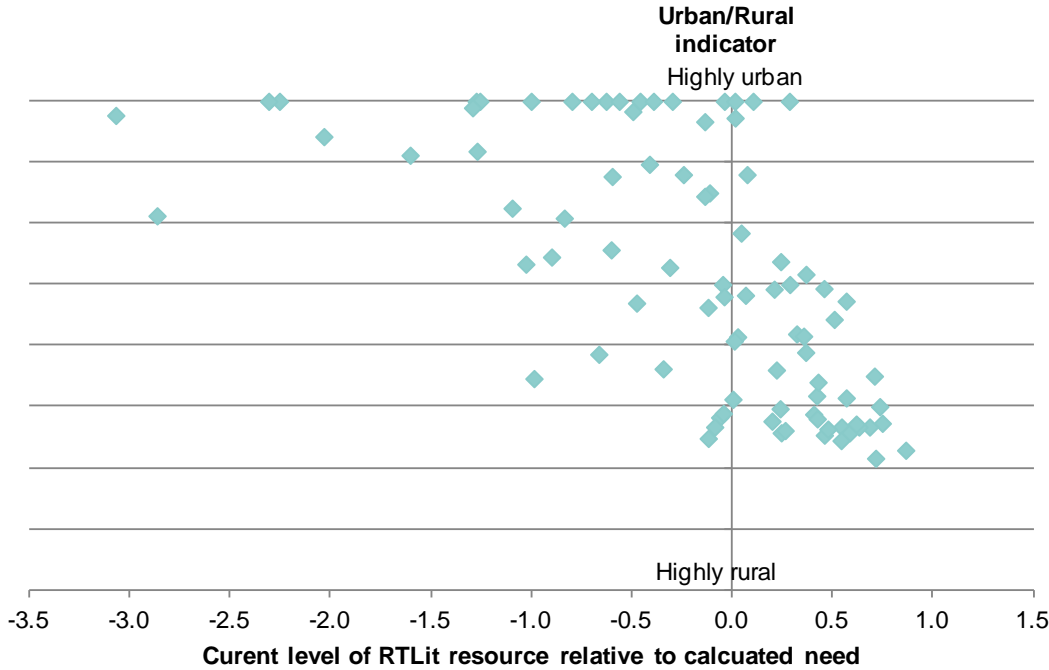
Source: MartinJenkins' analysis of Ministry of Education Directory of Schools data

Table 6 shows 13 clusters that have between 1.5 and 3 fewer FTEs than the formula indicates they should have – in total, the formula shows an overall requirement of 127 RTLits. All clusters are in urban areas (predominantly highly urban) and tend to comprise clusters with low decile schools. There are a further 17 clusters that have between 0.5 and 1.5 fewer FTEs than the formula indicates. Since the service as a whole is over-subscribed, the actual level of under-resourcing is more pronounced than indicated above.

There are, by implication, a number of clusters that have an RTLit allocation exceeding that implied by the formula. Fourteen clusters have current allocations between 0.5 and 1 FTE greater than the formula would allocate. Table 7 shows the five clusters that have 0.70 or more FTEs greater than the formula indicates. These clusters are predominantly rural in character and include some smaller provincial areas.

There are practical limitations in achieving the optimal allocation of resources:

· budgetary constraints and competing priorities limit the total amount of resource

· the concept of full-time equivalent resource is fine for use in an allocative formula, but pragmatic considerations require some 'rounding' in practice (i.e., an allocation of 1.0 FTE is sensible in clusters were the theoretical allocation ranges between 0.8 and 1.2)

- geography is a major constraint on the ability to offer service on a national basis while achieving an efficient allocation of the available resources; some allowance needs to be made for the greater time required for travel between schools in rural clusters.

The limited resource, combined with its geographic distribution, means effective interventions are not always offered or available to those who need them most.

While we have applied the Ministry's allocative formula in the above analysis, the formula itself should also be reviewed. There is currently no allowance for geography in the formula, arguably penalising more remote areas.[17] Further, it is not clear that the current formula achieves the most appropriate balance between population-based targeting and the targeting of areas with the highest absolute need at a national level.

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[17] We understand geography may have been taken into account in the original allocation of RTLit in 2001.

Table 6:   Clusters with apparent under-resourcing (by at least 1 FTE)

cluster	Indicative level of RTLit resource required (using Ministry formula)	Current # of RTLit	Additional RTLit resource required - FTE (as indicated by Ministry formula)	KEY CLUSTER CHARACTERISTICS					
				# Schools	Students per RTLit	Māori %	Pasifika %	Weighted decile	Urban/ Rural indicator*
A	5.07	2	3.07	26	6,269	35%	35%	2.69	3.9
B	4.87	2	2.87	64	8,556	42%	4%	4.92	3.1
C	3.31	1	2.31	13	6,994	17%	77%	2.04	4.0
D	4.26	2	2.26	19	5,173	17%	63%	1.31	4.0
E	4.03	2	2.03	45	9,818	12%	20%	7.32	3.7
F	4.61	3	1.61	77	7,032	17%	5%	6.97	3.6

Source: MartinJenkins' analysis of Ministry of Education Directory of Schools data (2013)

* The urban/rural indicator ranges from 1 to 4, where 4 is highly urban, and 1 high rural. This is based upon the Statistics New Zealand categories for the areas where cluster schools are situated.

Table 7: Clusters with apparent over-resourcing (by at least 0.70 FTE)

cluster	Indicative level of RTLit resource required (using Ministry formula)	Current # of RTLit	Excess RTLit resource - FTE (relative to Ministry formula)	KEY CLUSTER CHARACTERISTICS					
				# Schools	Students per RTLit	Māori %	Pasifika %	Weighted decile	Urban/ Rural indicator*
A	0.14	1	0.86	7	534	34%	0%	4.96	1.1
B	0.25	1	0.75	11	1,077	18%	1%	5.71	1.4
C	0.27	1	0.73	8	949	13%	1%	4.17	1.5
D	0.29	1	0.71	13	1,488	11%	1%	7.51	1.1
E	0.29	1	0.71	8	1,000	39%	9%	4.45	1.8

Source: MartinJenkins' analysis of Ministry of Education Directory of Schools data (2013)

* The urban/rural indicator ranges from 1 to 4, where 4 is highly urban, and 1 high rural. This is based upon the Statistics New Zealand categories for the areas where cluster schools are situated.

RTLit Workforce

RTLits are generally viewed positively and are highly regarded for their knowledge and skill. The vast majority of Host Principals consider RTLits to be high calibre professionals, and we received positive feedback from a wide range of cluster level stakeholders.

Nevertheless, there is a perception that within the RTLit workforce there are groups with widely varying degrees of skill and enthusiasm for the job. The majority are seen as highly motivated and skilled literacy experts, with a minority 'old guard' perceived to be resistant to changing and evolving their practice.

The workforce has been stable over time with the overwhelming majority of RTLits having substantial experience in the role:

· just over 60% have been in the position for more than 10 years

· 80% have 5 or more years experience in the role.

Overall, the level of turnover of the workforce has been low. Further, few RTLits (8%) have worked in clusters other than the one in which they are currently employed.

The vast majority of RTLits previously worked as classroom teachers (97%) and a high proportion (72%) have previously worked as Reading Recovery teachers (see Figure 26).

Figure 26: Previous roles held by RTLits
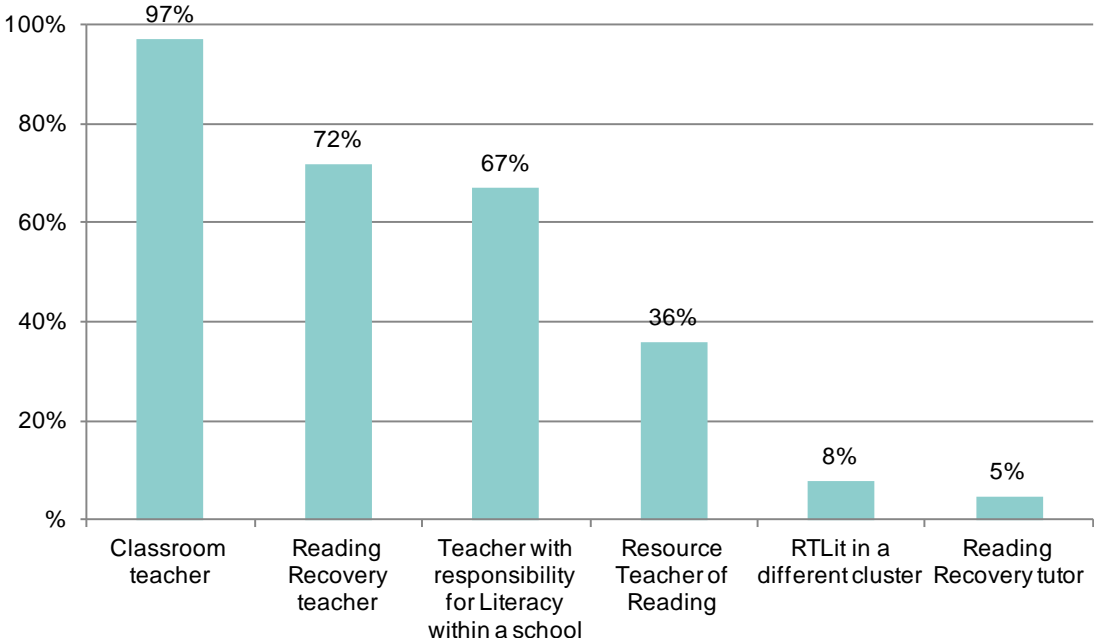
Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits, 2013

There has been a significant investment in skills upgrading since the introduction in 2001 of the requirement that RTLits hold a Postgraduate Diploma in Literacy Education as a requirement of the position. Our survey indicates 68% of RTLits hold this qualification. Many RTLits hold multiple qualifications, with the most common qualifications being undergraduate degrees or diplomas in education.

While the introduction of a minimum qualification is seen as a positive step, overall there are mixed views about whether the qualification prepares RTLits well for the job.[18] Both the Postgraduate Diplomas currently on offer focus on literacy at a theoretical level, and are aimed at a wider audience than just RTLits. A number of key stakeholders told us that the qualifications need a greater focus on needs/practice with 'well below' students, and a practical training component on how to work with teachers. This was supported by findings in the online survey, where one of the key suggestions by RTLits for improvement to the RTLit service was to have better initial training, with a more practical focus.

> The present training, which is an academic course, does not prepare us adequately to teach and accelerate children with specific learning difficulties. [RTLit]

> I would like to see a practical element to training for the job. [RTLit]

In addition to formal qualifications, RTLits routinely undertake a range of on- and off-the-job professional development activities (see Figure 27).

Figure 27: Professional development activities

Source: MartinJenkins survey of RTLits, 2013

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18 The Ministry purchased this training with the expectation that it would provide adequate theory and tools to RTLits. The Ministry has not reviewed the training since the introduction of the qualification.

However, professional development is not seen as well coordinated at the level of the Service as a whole (by RTLits, Host Principals and other stakeholders), and a significant proportion of RTLits would like greater professional leadership of the Service.

While there are mixed views on the adequacy of ongoing training and professional development opportunities overall, there are some specific areas pinpointed for further PLD for the workforce as a whole. In particular, the need for more ongoing professional development aimed at supporting RTLits to shift their practice towards working with teachers was identified as a theme.

> Advising and mentoring are key roles of the RTLit – ongoing-training would be appreciated. [Host Principal]

> More ongoing PD in our role of working alongside the teacher and having the conversations. [RTLit]

The 2004 ERO evaluation also highlighted gaps in awareness and appreciation of current theory and practice relating to Māori education. This evaluation found little evidence of Cluster Management Committees taking a specific focus on priority students (Māori and Pasifika), with access criteria focusing on year levels, test results and equitable school access rather than ethnicity (see page 52).

While most RTLit consider they have a strong professional network and feel comfortable sharing information about their practice and approaching other RTLit for advice, the role can be a lonely and isolated one. Some RTLit feel their practice suffers from the lack of peer support and collegial interaction.

> I find that, because it's such a lonely job, really, although you think you're in a school full of people, but basically at morning teatime you're moving to another school, often, and then at lunchtime you're often moving, and although you do get to say hi and bye to people, you don't really, not a day-to-day basis, get to have a chat with a colleague, really. (RTLit)

While informal professional groups flourish in some areas (eg some RTLits hold meetings to exchange ideas and discuss challenges), there are few formal mechanisms at the system or regional level to provide knowledge and practice sharing. The annual RTLit conference, hosted by the RTLit Executive, is a notable exception.

A final workforce issue relates to the lack of a career pathway for RTLits.

> If the service is wanting to retain those expert classroom practitioners in the RTLit service, there needs to be a career path, otherwise they're not going to stay for very long and they're going to go back to doing something else. [RTLit]

This issue was also linked to the need for greater professional leadership. Parallels were drawn with the roles that Reading Recovery Tutors play in providing professional leadership, advice and support for Reading Recovery Teachers. The absence of this professional support structure was noted for RTLit.

Performance management

A further issue relates to accountability and a performance management framework for RTLits. The relative roles and responsibilities of Host Principals, Cluster Management Committees and RTLits are seen as unclear by some. While roles have been codified in various documents, in practice many clusters operate in ways that are inconsistent with these roles. This includes a lack of clarity around the relationship between RTLits and Host Principals (eg line management only compared to professional guidance, management and development).

SUMMARY: RTLit resourcing

This section discussed the distribution and allocation of RTLit resource, characteristics of the RTLit workforce, and the way their performance is managed.

Distribution and allocation of resource

Since the establishment of the Service in 2001 the level of RTLit resource has been held constant (at 109 FTEs), and the allocation of RTLit resource across the 86 clusters has been static, despite significant changes in school rolls.

Review of this allocation using the Ministry's original formula shows that there are a number of clusters that appear to be significantly under-resourced (relative to other clusters). The under-resourced clusters tend to be dense urban areas with concentrations of low decile schools. This finding provides support for more resource to be made available in these areas. This support could be additional resource or re-allocated resource (from other areas). The finding also indicates that there needs to be a degree of flexibility to allow resource to be used to respond to changes in need over time.

RTLit workforce

On the whole, the RTLit workforce is regarded as one of high calibre literacy specialists. The workforce has low turnover – over 60% have been in their role for over 10 years, and 36% worked for the previous service (Resource Teachers of Reading). RTLits have relevant experience for their role: most previously worked as classroom teachers, and nearly three-quarters of them are trained in Reading Recovery.

Just under 70% of RTLits hold a Postgraduate Diploma in Literacy Education. There are mixed views about this qualification – key shortcomings identified are its lack of focus on working with students with persistent literacy learning difficulties, and lack of practical guidance on how to work effectively with teachers. The expectation that RTLits combine both of these skills within the one role appears to be a growing tension for the Service. With increasing expectations to work collaboratively with teachers, lack of training in this area appears to be contributing to a key capability gap.

Performance management

The performance management of RTLits is currently weak, with Host Principals having an unclear understanding of their performance role and the actual practice of RTLits. With the devolved operating model, and independent operation of individual RTLits, this is a key area in need of strengthening.

Literacy infrastructure

Relationships to other services and literacy interventions

Figure 2 on page 16 notes that a strong literacy system needs to be cohesive and integrated. Previous policy reviews have concluded there is a lack of alignment between government-provided literacy services.

Integrated system of support

There is a wide range of literacy and other supplementary support services with which the RTLit Service potentially interacts. Reading Recovery and the RTLB Service were consistently identified as key programmes that the Service needs to be well connected to.

An integrated system of support is being developed by the Ministry (in consultation with Regional staff). It aims to provide an overarching approach to support students with high needs and improve decision making about the way tools and interventions are used when supplementary support is required. It is being developed iteratively and is ultimately intended to help Ministry staff and schools make sense of the "confusing clutter of mismatched, sometimes counterproductive interventions" that are available to schools.[19]

Stakeholder feedback indicates that this is still a work in progress, with the fit of the RTLit Service within the wider system being understood in contrasting ways by different stakeholders.

Reading Recovery

A key Service interface is with Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery is the dominant early literacy intervention in New Zealand, and the underlying theory and approach has strongly influenced other interventions including the RTLit service. As noted earlier, a significant proportion of RTLits had previously been Reading Recovery teachers (72%, see Figure 26).

In schools where Reading Recovery programmes form a key part of their literacy system, the RTLit Service tends to operate in a complementary and integrated way. In these schools, the role of the RTLit service is generally understood to be to work (primarily) with students who have not progressed sufficiently in Reading Recovery. Examples of reasons for this include: there is often a shared philosophy and understanding of literacy pedagogy between the RTLit, Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers; and that there is more likely to be

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[19] From Borderfields Consulting (2008). *A national system of literacy interventions: A conceptual framework*, report to Ministry of Education, pp. 31–31, quoted in version 5 of the Ministry's Quality Improvement Framework (2013).

consistent assessment practices between schools and the RTLit when Reading Recovery programmes are in place. A number of interviewees thought that classroom teachers in schools with Reading Recovery are likely to have greater understanding and awareness of literacy learning processes and teaching strategies. A number of schools have a rotational policy of training classroom teachers in Reading Recovery, giving them experience as Reading Recovery teachers, before returning them to the classroom.

These observations were supported by the online survey, which found reasonably good agreement that "the RTLit Service and Reading Recovery work well together to address the literacy needs of students requiring support beyond the classroom programme".

The RTLit service also operates in schools that do not have Reading Recovery, some of these schools have alternative programmes that play a similar role to that of Reading Recovery.[20]

RTLB Service

There is some confusion and an ill-defined relationship between the RTLit and RTLB Services, which can lead to overlapping practice except where this is actively managed by school leadership and local communities of literacy professionals. Schools we visited were consistently critical of changes to the RTLB service, which is perceived to have resulted in far less direct provision in working with children. RTLBs are not seen as being equipped to deal with literacy issues, although some children are still referred to RTLBs with literacy-related learning needs. In some cases this is because there are no other referral options, while in others, students may have a number of learning and behavioural needs, and could benefit from the service.

Teacher capability and school leadership

The success of the RTLit Service is dependent on its ability to work collaboratively with teachers and school leadership, to ensure that RTLits are able to fully support classroom teaching. The evaluation revealed that there are a range of differing expectations as to how this should best be achieved. Expectations tend to differ around the type of support that is offered (direct or indirect) and the level of direct contact between RTLits and teachers. These issues are discussed on pages 46 and 53.

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[20]   As noted earlier, in 2011, only 64% of schools with six year-olds had access to Reading Recovery.

SUMMARY: literacy infrastructure

The fit of the RTLit Service within a wider system of literacy infrastructure is unclear and problematic. The devolved nature of the Service and other key services (eg Reading Recovery and the RTLB Service) means that the way the Service fits within the wider infrastructure varies from cluster to cluster. In some clusters there are relatively strong linkages and networks between services, while in other clusters linkages are weak.

At the system level the RTLit Service is not clearly linked or located in relation to other services – the RTLit Service is variously perceived as third wave (ie expected to follow classroom teaching and intensive support if progress is not being made), or being located at Tier 2 (intensive support only for those with high learning needs) or Tier 3 (specialist support, only available as a last resort for those with the very highest literacy learning needs).

Its ability to work seamlessly and efficiently with other services is further hampered by services having different Ministry funding and ownership, multiple operating models and criteria, and differing levels of resource availability in different areas. While an integrated system of support might ultimately be expected to clarify the fit of the RTLit Service with other services and interventions, fundamental questions about the RTLit Service (who the Service is expected to support, how this should be done and expected outcomes) will continue to impact on relationships with other services, until they are resolved.

Overall conclusions and implications

The evaluation drew on a wide range of inputs and material to make judgements about the operation and outcomes of the Service. This final section presents our key conclusions from the evaluation and identifies implications for the future operation of the Service.

Overarching factors

The evaluation identified three overarching factors that significantly affect many aspects of the Service's implementation and operation.

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

The Service is intended to support students with high literacy needs, well below the standard of their cohort. It is estimated that between one and four percent of children have particular literacy learning needs that don't respond to effective classroom teaching. The goal of the Service is to accelerate enrolled students to the point that they can work at or near the appropriate curriculum level (and maintain progress), within the classroom.

Currently 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 (or inadequate) progress looks like

· when a student should be successfully discontinued or referred elsewhere.

Cluster-specific characteristics, especially geography and scale of need, shape every aspect of the operation of the Service at the local level – ie 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 distances and travel times involved and because of low population density.

Variations in the scale of need represent a different type of challenge. Clusters fall into two broad categories – low need clusters made up of rural and/or high decile schools, and high need clusters made up of urban and/or low decile schools. Dense urban clusters with high needs report significant excess demand resulting in the rationing of service provision.

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

Since the establishment of the Service in 2001, the level of RTLit resource has been held constant (at 109 FTEs), and the allocation of RTLit resource across the 86 clusters has been static, despite significant changes in school rolls and a doubling of the number of students enrolled in the Service.

Reviewing the current allocation against the Ministry's original formula shows a number of clusters that appear to be significantly under-resourced relative to others; the under-resourced clusters tend to be located in dense urban areas with concentrations of low decile schools.

Other important issues

The evaluation identified a series of significant, cascading effects arising from these three overarching factors.

Access to the Service is inconsistent and levels of unmet need are not known.

Demand for the Service currently outstrips the available resource. Rationing processes (including referral and acceptance processes and school practices) are devised and implemented locally, leading to inconsistent approaches and poor matching of available resources to those with the very highest level of need across the country as a whole. Some rationing practices are driven by practical considerations (eg rotating access to different schools in different years) not student need.

Lack of systematic referral processes means it is not possible to accurately quantify the level of unmet need, or the characteristics of those who are missing out on support. However, unmet need is likely to be highest in dense urban clusters with low decile schools.

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

· the reasons students are discontinued from the Service are inconsistent – students may be discontinued because they achieve a 'successful' outcome (though rarely does success

mean reaching national standards), because of resource restrictions (ie to give somebody else a turn), or because they aren't progressing

- RTLits (and other stakeholders including schools) have significant concerns about the quality and appropriateness of existing referral options.

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

RTLits (and some other literacy stakeholders) identified a need for better initial practical training and ongoing support to work with 'well below' students. In addition, the capability and willingness of RTLits to work successfully with teachers (using an indirect model) is a concern for RTLits and schools.

It is challenging to assess the overall effectiveness of the Service because intended outcomes for students are not clearly defined.

Students enrolled in the Service are thought to make better literacy progress than they would have without RTLit support. It is unclear whether the amount of literacy progress is optimal, or whether the support is being provided to the right students r. The lack of defined Service goals means there is no clear basis to judge the value and effectiveness of the Service.

Outcomes perceived to be 'successful' include outcomes relating to improved literacy (eg accelerated progress), through to a student having a better chance of learning in the classroom setting (eg re-engagement and increased confidence) and improved teaching by the classroom teacher (eg better knowledge about a student's learning needs and better teacher strategies to improve literacy).

Beyond improving literacy for individual students, the Service is also intended to have an impact on overall literacy levels in a cluster – because of access and unmet demand issues, it is unlikely that the Service is having a significant impact on wider literacy levels, beyond the students and teachers it directly reaches.

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.

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. This lack of leadership in combination with low RTLit buy-in and understanding for the Ministry's Professional Practice Manual (the PPM), and the Service's devolved and itinerant implementation model means that the Service lacks strong direction. An absence of ongoing professional learning and development for RTLits is seen as a problematic gap.

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 means that the way the Service fits within the wider infrastructure varies from cluster to cluster. It is variously perceived as: following classroom teaching and intensive support if progress is not being made; intensive support only for those with high learning needs; or specialist support, only available as a last resort for those with the very highest learning needs.

Implications

The evaluation findings have a number of potential implications – specifically for the operation and implementation of the Service, and more broadly for the wider literacy system.

The findings suggest that any changes to the Service are unlikely to be effective unless key policy issues are addressed first. These include:

- clarification of the purpose and goals of the Service, and its target group – including the need to review expectations for student outcomes to ensure they are realistic and aligned with the target group for the Service

- investigation of whether service provision could be improved by taking a segmented approach to delivery: the appropriate operational model for delivery in a dense urban cluster is likely to be different to the appropriate model for delivery in a rural cluster

- review of the level and the allocation of resource for the Service across the country and relative to the target group

- clarification of the fit of the Service with other literacy services.

Following from this, the evaluation suggests:

- a need to strengthen the referral process to ensure that the available resource is used to support an agreed target group

- a Ministry-led workforce strategy is needed with a clear focus on ensuring ongoing workforce capability, provide ongoing support and to ensure future workforce needs are met

- the appropriateness of the current cluster model needs to be reviewed

    – if the model is retained, there needs to be better support for committees and Host Principals to perform their roles (including performance management) and better operational guidance and tools (eg referral forms)

    – if the model is retained, a mechanism for sharing best practice between clusters should also be considered

- improved monitoring of student outcomes is needed

- a need for clear and visible leadership for the Service from the Ministry, or some other leadership function

- linkages and referral processes between the Service, schools and other literacy services may need to be strengthened.

Appendix 1   Methodology, further detail

The methodology is briefly described on page 7 of the main report. This appendix provides further detail.

The three key evaluation inputs were:

1   initial scoping: interviews with key stakeholders and review of key documents

2   online surveys of RTLits and Host Principals

3   case studies of six clusters, chosen to represent diverse characteristics.

Input 1: initial scoping

This input was designed to ensure we had a thorough understanding of the Service (including design and known issues), the wider literacy system, and the Ministry's requirements for the evaluation.

The evaluation team interviewed 16 people as part of this phase including:

·   academics

·   representatives from the RTLit Executive

·   literacy stakeholders and practitioners

·   principals and RTLits.

In addition, a wide range of background material was reviewed including: Ministry policy and operational papers (relating to literacy, the curriculum and the Service), the RTLit Professional Practice Manual (PPM), operational guidelines, and other papers relating to the operation of the Service; Annual Reports on the Service; and papers relating to the Literacy Taskforce and Strategy.

Input 2: online surveys of RTLits and Host Principals

The purpose of this input was to gain a broad understanding of the operation of the RTLit Service across the country, and to gather information about clusters to inform the selection of the case study clusters.

The survey for RTLits focused on:

·   their own background including years of experience in the RTLit role, their qualifications, and other relevant roles they have held

·   access to the RTLit service in their cluster

- their own practice, including what they spend their time on, the balance of direct and indirect instruction, assessment tools they use and their confidence undertaking different activities comprising the RTLit role

- their relationships with their Host Principal and Cluster Management Committee and other professionals

- discontinuation of students from the service

- their views on the effectiveness and efficiency of the RTLit service

- issues and challenges and suggestions for improvement.

The survey for Host Principals focused on:

- the operation of the Cluster Management Committee

- access to the RTLit service in their cluster

- their relationship with their RTLit(s)

- the effectiveness of current RTLit practice

- their views on the effectiveness and efficiency of the RTLit service

- issues and challenges and suggestions for improvement.

Sample

The questionnaires were sent to all 109 RTLits and all 86 Host Principals. A census was considered the most appropriate approach given the purpose of the survey (to inform case study selection and get as broad an understanding of the service as possible) and the small numbers involved.

Survey administration

The surveys were both delivered online and respondents were invited to participate by email. Reminders were sent after one week and again after two weeks to all of those who had not completed their questionnaires.

Survey results

The overall response rates were 95% for the RTLit survey (104 of 109) and 94% for the Host Principal survey (81 of 86). Given the high degree of coverage, no weightings were applied in the analyses of responses.

Full survey results were reported in the second milestone report for this evaluation (*Top line survey findings and case study methodology*, MartinJenkins, updated 12 July 2013).

Input 3: case studies of six clusters

The purpose of this input was to gather and incorporate the views and experiences of diverse stakeholders in order to develop an in depth understanding of how the RTLit Service is being operationalised in a selection of individual clusters.

The case study clusters were chosen in collaboration with the Ministry. Selection was informed by feedback from the online surveys, cluster demographics and monitoring data. The key variables used to guide selection were:

·   instruction type: predominantly direct **OR** predominantly indirect

·   access: relatively high number of schools within a cluster accessing the service **OR** relatively low number of schools within a cluster accessing the service

·   key demographics across the cluster: range of deciles (weighted), range of locations and inclusion of clusters with high numbers of Māori and Pasifika students.

Table 8:   Characteristics of the case study clusters[21]

	Cluster 1 Rural	Cluster 2 Rural	Cluster 3 Sec. urban	Cluster 4 Urban	Cluster 5 Urban	Cluster 6 Urban
DEMOGRAPHICS						
Schools in cluster	20-24	15-19	30-34	15-19	10-14	25-29
RTLit in cluster	1	1	2	2	1	2
School Roll (approx)	5500	2750	7000	8250	7000	7000
Students per RTLit	5500	2750	3500	4125	7000	3500
Average of % Māori*	Low	High	Medium	Low	Low	Medium
Average of % Pasifika*	Low	Low	Low	Medium	High	Medium
Weighted Average Decile	9.1	2.9	5.3	2.7	1.3	4.7
Urban/rural indicator	Rural	Rural	Urban	Dense urban	Dense urban	Dense urban

Source: MartinJenkins summary of Ministry of Education Directory of Schools data (2013)

* Low = less than 1/3; Medium = between 1/3 and 2/3; High = more than 2/3.

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[21]   Characteristics have been described as categories rather than specific numbers in order to maintain anonymity of the clusters.

Interviews were conducted over two days in each cluster to cover a range of perspectives on the Service's operation and effectiveness. Interviewees were selected by the RTLits and included:

· the Host Principal

· the RTLit(s)

· Cluster Management Committee members (one to two in addition to the host principal)

· Service users

· other local stakeholders (eg RTLBs, literacy leaders, Reading Recovery tutors, SLTs).

Key topics by the type of interviewee are shown in Table 9.

Table 9:   Key interview topic areas by type of interviewee

	Host Principal, Cluster Mngmt Comm	RTLit(s)	Service users	Key stake-holders	Regional Ministry staff
Operation of Cluster Management Committees	X	X			
Access to the Service	X	X	X	X	X
RTLits' operation and practice · barriers and enablers · working with schools and classroom teachers · understanding of role and confidence	X	X	X		X
Effectiveness of RTLit Service · outcomes for students · ongoing monitoring of students · referrals for students	X	X	X	X	
Wider issues relating to literacy and available support in the cluster	X	X	X	X	X
Ministry support for the Service	X	X			X

Relevant data and documents were also reviewed for each cluster and brief telephone interviews were conducted with up to two non-using schools (selected by MartinJenkins using data on cluster composition supplied by the Ministry). A small number of Regional Ministry staff (identified by the Ministry) were also interviewed by telephone.

Analysis

The analysis of the evaluation inputs was conducted by the entire evaluation team to ensure interpretations were checked and the context of each case study cluster was fully understood. Qualitative information was analysed using NVivo.

Draft findings were discussed with the Ministry and the Ministry's feedback informed the final report.

Appendix 2   Case study topic guides

Actual questions asked depended on the interviewee's knowledge and interest. RTLit interviews were around two hours in length with most other interviews lasting for approximately one hour.

Broad interview questions for RTLits and Host Principals

Cluster Management Committees

1   Are the 'right' people on the CMC?

2   What are the strengths of the current CMC processes and practices?

3   Is there anything that prevents the CMC from operating as well as it could?

4   Is the current 'cluster' system/CMC the best way to manage/run the service?

5   Is there anything that needs to change or improve in the relationship between the Host Principal and the RTLit?

Access

6   Why do you think more schools don't use the service?

7   Overall, do you think students with the 'greatest need' across the cluster are able to access the service?

8   Is it clear to you *who* should be accessing the service? How do you define 'greatest need'? Which criteria are being used (eg ex-Reading Recovery)?

Effectiveness of RTLits' processes and practices

9   RTLits: How do you decide what intervention, programme or support (eg direct or indirect) to use for each student?

        Host Principal: How familiar are you with the actual day to day practice of the RTLit?

10   If you were able to decide how to support students on the role in this cluster, how would you do it? (eg Direct/indirect, different strategies/models)

11   What is the RTLit role in working with classroom teachers?

12   Do you think engaging with whānau is/should be part of the RTLit role?

13   Do Māori or Pasifika students present any particular issues or challenges?

14   How effective is your/the RTLits' practice? What evidence or feedback do you use?

15   What impact does the Service/RTLit have on the literacy of individual students on the roll?

16   Given that there are limited resources (numbers of RTLits, the amount of time than can be spent with individual students), how does this impact on literacy across the cluster?

17   What do you think the outcomes of the students in your cluster are like, compared to students in other clusters?

18   Literacy gains of students no longer on the roll: why do you think gains are maintained/not maintained?

19   Is it clear whose responsibility it is to monitor students once they are no longer on the roll?

The wider 'literacy' system

20   How well do you think others in the cluster understand the RTLit role?

21   Thinking widely, to all the different supports and services for student literacy (from classroom teachers through to Reading Recovery, RTLBs and SLTs), how well does everything fit together in your cluster? Are there any gaps or delays? Where do RTLits fit?

The Ministry

22   If you could change anything about the way the Ministry supports or administers the Service, what would you change?

Any thing else? Suggestions for change/improvements?

Broad interview questions for other interviewees

Cluster Management Committee

These questions are for those who are familiar with the operation of the committee.

1   Are the 'right' people on the committee?

2   What are the strengths of the committee? What are your perspectives on the operation and policies of the committee?

3   Who 'drives' or influences committee operation and policies?

4   Is a 'cluster' approach the best approach?

Access to the Service and use of the Service

5   How does 'literacy support' work in your school and/or area? What is your role? Who are the key people?

6   Why don't more schools use the Service?

7   Who do you refer to the Service and who gets accepted? Is it clear who should be referred?

8   Do you think the students with the 'greatest need' get access to the Service?

RTLit processes and practices, effectiveness

9   How much do you know about the Service? The RTLit?

10   Are you aware of the actual support or interventions that the RTLits offer? What do they actually *do*? In your opinion, what type of support or intervention *should* they be offering?

11   Teachers: What happens to students you refer to the Service? How do RTLits work with you? What are the outcomes for students?

12   Overall how effective is the Service for improving literacy in your school/area?

Ideas for the future, changes, improvements

13   Thinking about everything we've discussed – is there anything you'd change to improve the Service and/or to improve outcomes for students?

Broad interview questions for regional Ministry staff

1   Can you explain to me what you role is in relation to the RTLit Service?

       ·   What is the role of the Regional Office in relation to the Service? Role of the National Office? Is it clear?

2   Can you explain how 'literacy support' in general works in your area/cluster?

       ·   Is there anything particular to this area/cluster? (socio-economic, ethnicity, geography)

       ·   Who/what are all the different resources/players? Where do RTLits fit?

3   Do you get any information or reports from RTLits or their management committees?

       ·   How useful is this information? What do you do with it?

4   What impact do you think the Service has on literacy in the area/cluster?

5   Do you know how the management committee structure operates? If so, how well does it operate?

6   Do you have any suggestions for changes or improvements?