# **Executive summary**

Tranche 1 of the LSC roll out represents the culmination of many years’ work to shift to a more local, collaborative, and responsive approach to learning support defined in the Learning Support Delivery Model (LSDM). The purpose of the LSCs role is to make sure that children and young people with mild-to-moderate, neurodiverse, or high and complex learning support needs receive appropriate help when they need it. Implementation started in January 2020 as a result of $312 million of new operating and capital funding. The first tranche of 623 full-time permanent LSC roles were allocated to 1052 schools in 124 clusters of schools, kura and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo (clusters).

Synergia is providing three phases of evaluation alongside tranche 1, which has reached approximately four in ten schools. Phase 1 of the LSC evaluation, completed in January 2021, provided feedback on initial implementation of the LSC role to inform future delivery. Phase 2 (January 2021 to July 2021) of the evaluation focused on the functioning of the LSC role and gaining deeper insight into LSCs working across multiple schools, engagement with whānau, and transitions. Understanding the contribution of LSCs to learning support for Māori learners, and Pacific leaners, was also a key focus. The evaluation used a mixed methods design. This involved national surveys of LSCs and allocated schools, and six cluster visits, resulting in 102 interviews. Both surveys received good response rates: 72% (n=449) of LSCs and 55% (n=574) of schools/kura with an LSC allocation.

Phase 2 findings have captured the progress of implementation, which has greater momentum at school than at cluster level. This is to be expected in the relatively early stages of establishing a new and unique role as it is logical to establish the role in schools before finding its place in more complex cluster collaborations.

## **How well is the LSC role functioning?**

* **Overall, there is good to excellent progress with implementing the LSC role in schools**
* 96% of LSC roles have been filled and there is relatively low turnover (9.5%).
* The LSC role is well established and largely functioning as intended.
* LSCs are valued by schools for their high level of experience and expertise.
* Some context-specific challenges highlighted in phase 1 are still in place. For example, eight schools are yet to recruit LSC, and one in three LSCs working alongside a Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) are still not clear about their respective roles and responsibilities.
* **LSCs are making good progress with performing their key functions in schools**
* Cluster visits and interviews saw LSCs providing much needed expertise and capacity for learning support.
* Improvements in the identification and visibility of learning support needs are occurring. Nine in ten schools have some form of a register of learning support needs (92%, n=460).
* Most LSC are now able to access resources and services for some or most learners (96%, n=351 and 92%, n=338, respectively).
* LSCs are building teachers’ capability using a range of strategies. Three quarters of schools (76%, n=395) indicated that the LSC role had improved their ability to support kaiako/teachers.
* Three quarters of schools (75%, n=386) say LSCs have improved their ability to engage with whānau. This can look different depending on the school context, with more involvement occurring in primary schools than in secondary schools.
* LSCs ability to influence school leadership depends on the operational setup of the role and reporting lines.
* LSCs are connectors for their schools, traversing known networks and creating new ones in the community.
* **The influence of LSCs on cluster-level learning support is dependent on the functioning of the cluster and its leadership (progress is good to adequate)**
* Seven in ten schools who completed the school survey indicated that their cluster is either planning, making, or has made, changes to cluster level learning support.
* The LSC survey showed that:
  + Two in three LSCs indicated that there is visible cluster leadership.
  + Seven in ten LSCs are clear about cluster priorities; these include pre-existing Kāhui Ako priorities in addition to those identified by LSC.
* The interviews indicated that LSCs’ ability to influence cluster leadership depends on their role within their cluster and their line managers involvement in cluster leadership.
* The learning support facilitation function intended of Service Managers is being carried out in different ways. The vision of sharing aggregated data is more challenging without Te Rito/a standardised Learning Support Register (sLSR).

## **Key insights from the focus areas**

* **Around half of LSCs work in more than one school, typically on a timetabled basis and in line with LSC FTE allocation**
* While there are advantages to working across multiple schools, LSCs and schools are less satisfied when the LSC role is shared between schools.

Role clarity and connections with other learning support roles, are more challenging for LSCs working across multiple schools. When sharing LSCs, some clusters have set them up as a team, working across the cluster. While not suitable for all contexts, This positions LSCs to work strategically across the cluster as they have an explicit link to cluster leadership through a single line manager.

* **Whānau are supported in different ways to feel understood, involved, and informed**
* LSCs are enhancing schools’ engagement with whānau and supporting whānau to navigate and access learning support.
* Whānau engagement and support is tailored to the needs of learners and their whānau.
* The most common way of connecting to an LSC is through a warm handover from another staff member.
* In just over a third of schools, whānau can approach LSCs directly.
* The small number of whānau spoken with described LSCs as their advocates and navigators, making them feel understood, involved, and informed.
* **LSCs are filling a recognised gap for those with mild to moderate needs in transition support**
* The contribution of LSCs to transitions was highlighted as a key contribution of the role which addressed a clear gap, particularly for learners with mild to moderate needs.
* The LSC survey indicated that eight in ten LSCs are involved in transitions into school, seven in ten support within-school transitions, and five in ten support transitions out of school.
* Secondary schools are more likely to have other staff roles to support transitions, particularly out of school.
* LSCs working across multiple schools were particularly well placed to support transitions and provide a familiar face and connection.
* **LSCs are providing support for Māori learners. This is supported by their school and cluster**
* The ability of LSCs to effectively support Māori learners is a reflection of the cultural context of the school and the experience/expertise of individual LSCs rather than a direct output of LSC implementation.
* Creating connections with whānau and building trust were noted as important by LSCs supporting Māori learners.
* There are many examples of the ways that LSCs work with learners and whānau which align with the strategic vision of Ka Hikitia.
* The contribution of the LSC role to Māori learners warrants deeper exploration in phase 3, and processes to support this have been established during this phase of the evaluation.
* **LSCs support Pacific learners in a way that reflects the school and community**
* As with Māori learners, the ability of LSCs to effectively support Pacific learners is a reflection of the cultural context of the school and the experience/expertise of individual LSCs rather than a direct output of LSC implementation.
* Some LSCs and schools described offering the same or similar processes of support for Māori learners, and Pacific learners. This highlights the need and value of professional development to support the specific needs of Pacific learners.

## **Key aspects of implementation to consider**

Phase 2 has consolidated our understanding of the implementation of the role and identified the following additional aspects to consider:

1. Operational arrangements (such as employment and the number of schools worked across) impact on the functioning and influence of LSCs. These decisions are made by clusters to best fit their local context and preferences. The different operating arrangements play to different strengths of the LSC role and include trade-offs.
2. More explicit consideration of ELSs when clusters allocate LSC resource may promote more consistent reach into ELS as LSCs are in demand and valued in this space.
3. The challenge and opportunity of the LSC role collaborating with others.

In relation to these aspects of implementation, the evaluation highlighted:

* LSCs with a common employer that work across all schools in the cluster are explicitly connected to cluster leadership. This positions them well to work strategically and flexibly across the cluster.
* ELS provide a golden opportunity for LSCs to navigate and connect pre-schoolers with learning support.
* ELS were also described as a valuable opportunity to support learners, as there is a high level of whānau involvement and staff supervision.
* In terms of collaboration, LSCs are working out the who, where and how to connect with others, and are building their networks steadily.
* Some connections fall easily into place, whereas discovery and navigating existing processes and networks is required for others.
* Building and maintaining maps of local networks, agencies and contacts would be a useful cluster activity and resource for those working in the LSDM.

## **What else is needed to support current implementation?**

* A shared understanding of the expectations of the facilitation function, now the Service Manager role review is complete.
* Facilitation to address and progress unresolved implementation issues is required in a small number of schools with an LSC allocation.
* For LSCs to have an overall leadership function and PLD.
* Ministry support for clusters and LSC to share experiences of LSC role delivery locally and nationally. This is to support practice development and success and also to share resources to prevent others ‘reinventing the wheel’.
* There may be benefit in identifying the availability of learning support resources to help guide schools’ funding application efforts, given the time LSCs and schools spend on these.

## **Further into the future**

* The rationale for LSC allocation is important to communicate well. There is a strong perception that the LSC allocation is an entitlement based only on each schools’ roll.
* More explicit consideration of ELS when clusters allocate LSC resource
* Roll out to clusters without high engagement in the LSDM and a functioning Kāhui Ako may require a greater level of implementation support or guidance from the Ministry.

There is no ‘right way’ of employing and sharing LSC allocation across a cluster of schools. Rather there are several ‘ways’ emerging that are context dependent and result in LSC delivering the role functions differently. There may be other ways of working still to identify and explore. Understanding more about these ways of implementing the LSC role and the influence on initial outcomes will be a focus of the phase 3 evaluation.