

## Meet Sonia Pope, an Educational Psychologist

Based in Auckland, Sonia joined the Ministry of Education in 2020.



### Sonia's story

Sonia became interested in the Educational Psychologist role because of her own early educational experience. She wanted to give back to the community and work with minorities and disadvantaged children, recognising the current inequities in the educational system. Through her own experience Sonia saw the importance of a holistic approach where schools collaborate alongside the student, the family and even the community.

### Sonia's day-to-day

Sonia supports schools and families to solve complex persistent problems that interfere with a young person's learning. She uses her psychological lens to help people look at the situation differently, so that they understand the root causes of the problem and feel confident to problem solve. Sonia uses a collaborative approach to build the capacity of the child to reach their true learning potential. It is a busy role that requires someone who is both calm, resilient, and passionate about the area.

### Reflecting cultural values in her work

*"I try my best to create connection for learners between who they are, their culture, their values and their community, so that students feel engaged and feel valued at school. I also help teachers*

*strengthen their cultural competence so they can become more culturally sensitive to teach our multi-cultural classrooms and maintain an inclusive and diverse education system”*

## **Rewards and challenges of the role**

Sonia enjoys how each day in her practice is never the same. *“Not all of my clients are the same or have the same needs, which further highlights how all students are wonderfully and beautifully made in their own unique character.”*

Sonia particularly enjoys the positive changes and progress her students make. *“Resilience is my favourite word in life and being in this kind of work, I get to help my clients and witness my clients find their true personal resilience.”*

## **Educational Psychologist – Role information**

### **Role responsibility:**

- work closely with parents and whānau, teachers and other specialists across a range of educational settings (early childhood, primary and high school) to help children and young people with special education needs
- develop individualised support programmes for learners to overcome the challenges they face
- apply psychological knowledge and implement evidence-based strategies to address barriers to learning
- Work in collaboration with the team supporting a child using a holistic and strength-based approach.

### **Qualifications and experience needed:**

- a master’s degree in psychology or in education
- a postgraduate diploma in educational psychology (or an equivalent)
- to be registered as a psychologist with the New Zealand Psychologists Board.

### **An Educational Psychologist must have knowledge of or skills in:**

- Te Whāriki, the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum and/or the NZ Curriculum/ Te Marautanga o Aotearoa
- human or cognitive development
- supporting special education needs, particularly learning and behaviour, in a variety of settings
- psychology, education theory and child development
- community and family support services
- effective communication, teaching, research and planning
- confidently and competently facilitating groups and meetings.
- Culturally competent to work with diverse people

## **Career development**

Becoming a Psychologist with the Ministry of Education will give you the rewards and challenges of the job itself, as well as opportunities to develop your career.

### **You will:**

- be supported and supervised by experienced professional colleagues
- be kept up to date with the latest evidence
- take part in professional learning and development
- have opportunities to share and extend your knowledge and skills.
- Continue to strengthen your professional identity with professional relationships at a school and community level.

In time you might be considered for leadership roles or have opportunities to take part in projects and working groups.

## **Further Information**

### **Learning support careers and professional development**

For more information about the role of a special education adviser and working in learning support, visit our [learning support careers page](#)

### **Learning support scholarships and study awards**

If you're interested in a career in learning support, you may be eligible for a scholarship or study award. Find out [more here](#)