

MEDIA RELEASE

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Dyslexia Foundation launches revolutionary guide for schools in face of political inaction

Dyslexia in schools a ticking time bomb

The Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand (DFNZ) today launched a revolutionary guide for New Zealand schools to tackle dyslexia in the classroom – a resource designed to support educators on the frontlines in the absence of dedicated government funding or resources.

The Foundation also today challenged political party leaders to publicly announce their policy on dyslexia, noting that funding for dyslexia would substantially reduce flow-on social issues caused by failure at school.

It is estimated that 50% of people who come before the Youth Court have some sort of learning difficulty, and DFNZ Chair of Trustees Guy Pope-Mayell says the link between dyslexia and social dysfunction is clear.

“Addressed appropriately, dyslexia can be a creative gift. But when the issue is ignored, under-funded and under-resourced, it leads to failure at school and low self-esteem. From there it’s a slippery slope to issues like alienation, depression and even criminal behaviour. Dyslexia really is a ticking time bomb in this country.”

With 70,000 dyslexic students currently in the education system, dyslexia was both widespread and a powerful root cause for these types of social issues. New Zealanders needed to know what politicians were planning to do to alleviate this.

The recent annual report into the compulsory schools sector in New Zealand showed that troubled students cost the education system 10 times as much as others, and noted that supporting students at risk of educational and societal failure is one of the most pressing issues facing the education sector. At the same time, an NZ Council for Education Research survey of Wellington teachers showed just over half said the severe behaviour of students limited the activities they would try with their classes.

The Foundation’s 4D | For Dyslexia (www.4Dschoools.org.nz) programme – detailed in the comprehensive guide for schools launched today, is designed to give schools concrete guidance on how best to deal with dyslexia and changes that can be made in the classroom, some as simple as replacing white paper with coloured paper that is easier to read from. All 2550 New Zealand schools will this week receive a booklet introducing the programme and inviting them to take part.

DFNZ worked with international dyslexia consultant Neil MacKay, architect of Britain’s Dyslexia Friendly Schools initiative, to help create the programme. Pope-Mayell says New Zealand is lagging behind the rest of the world when it comes to taking dyslexia seriously.

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“Last week in England, a council was fined \$NZ66,000 for failing to acknowledge that a student at one of its schools had dyslexia. Compare that to New Zealand, where the Labour government only recognised dyslexia for the first time in 2007, and since then has failed to honour its promise to provide dyslexia-specific funding for schools,” he says.

Pope-Mayell also said the National Party’s recently announced “Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy”, while making passing mention of dyslexia and learning difficulties, did not go far enough.

“Many of the social issues that John Key is so concerned about – like students falling behind and going off the rails – would be improved by a real commitment to deal with learning differences. In making national standards in literacy a focus without addressing these challenges, there is also great risk that students with learning differences feel even more of a failure,” Pope-Mayell says.

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