

Media release

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TIME RUNNING OUT ON SAC APPLICATIONS FOR 2014 EXAMS

Parents of children with learning difficulties have just one month to ensure their schools put in applications for special accommodations for this year's NCEA exams, Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand warns.

Next Monday, DFNZ will launch Dyslexia Advocacy Week (17-23 March), which is focused on making clear the legal rights that dyslexic students' have in the classroom, and equipping parents to advocate for these rights to be met with appropriate teaching. For NCEA level students, that means access to legally mandated special assessment conditions (SACs) such as reader or writer assistance, computer use, or extra time.

Guy Pope-Mayell, DFNZ Chair of Trustees, says parents need to engage now to ensure schools put in applications by the due date of April 10.

The SACs process has been plagued by controversy in recent years, with inequities in the system driven by an application process which costs individual schools, and often families, considerable time and money. Processing delays and high levels of rejection of applications have come under fire. Issues also came to a head last year with media stories around private and high decile schools having a higher percentage of SAC applications – due to greater staff resourcing, the ability to prioritise making these applications, and the provision of diagnostic reports that some families can afford.

"The SACs process has been both flawed and under-funded. The immediate reality is that many parents will have to advocate strongly right now to ensure their child is put forward to receive the accommodations they need at exam time," Guy Pope-Mayell says.

Pope-Mayell says the MoE's long awaited review of the SAC system will be too little, too late to make much difference to this year's process. The review was originally due out in January. It was then due to be released last week but has been delayed again.

"We anticipate the review report will clearly acknowledge the issues and there will be some key recommendations in the report that seek to improve the process. However, we are concerned that under-funding will remain an issue," he says.

"Whatever the changes, the simple fact is that costs will increase significantly with the inevitable increase in applications over time. If not specifically funded, something must give - and the special education budget is already at breaking point. This barrier alone has the potential to steal the opportunity of success for many dyslexic students," Pope-Mayell says.

Dyslexia Advocacy Week is designed to provide parents with explicit knowledge about their child's rights and how these can be accommodated in the classroom. And to highlight simple, practical steps for teachers and schools to make this happen.

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There is a dedicated DAW webspace at <http://www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz/dyslexiaadvocacy/index.html> which sets out further information on legal rights and classroom changes. DNFZ is also doing a mail-out to every NZ school and principal which delivers free resources to support students with learning differences.

And TV3 will be screening the critically acclaimed dyslexia documentary – The Big Picture; Rethinking Dyslexia – on Sunday 16 March just prior to DAW. Directed by Jamie Redford, son of actor and director Robert Redford, the Big Picture provides personal and uplifting accounts of the dyslexic experience from children, experts and iconic leaders, such as Sir Richard Branson and financier Charles Schwab.

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For further information, please contact DFNZ Chair of Trustees Guy Pope-Mayell, 0275 449 496, guy@dfnz.org.nz

www.dfnz.org.nz

ABOUT DYSLEXIA FOUNDATION NEW ZEALAND

Since inception in November 2006, the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand has changed the landscape of dyslexia in New Zealand. From lobbying the Government for dyslexia to be officially recognised, achieved in 2007, through to mainstreaming dyslexia and changing the paradigm from one of disability to one of difference.

The DFNZ philosophy and approach is based on three principles:

- *Recognition: identifying and naming the issue*
- *Understanding: noticing what this means for everyday life - at school, home, and work*
- *Action: adjusting the approach to improve outcomes - at school, home and work*

These principles were brought to life in successful awareness and action weeks in 2007, 2008 and 2009 as well as creation of the 4D programme www.4d.org.nz for schools and providing professional development opportunities for teachers