

# Children with dyslexia 'casualties of school'

By KIRSTY JOHNSTON - Taranaki Daily News    Last updated 23:35 21/06/2009

Children with dyslexia are failing to learn because there is not enough support from the Government, a learning disability expert says.

Dr Tom Nicholson, of Massey University, was in New Plymouth at the weekend for the Speld dyslexia conference. He said it was about time the Government provided more money for dyslexia sufferers.

Dyslexia is a learning disability that affects reading, spelling and writing.

Often those with dyslexia are very visual people, but struggle with words and numbers.

The disability was recognised by the Ministry of Education in 2007 but Dr Nicholson said that was yet to equate to better funding.

"A skilled tutor can turn these children from zero to hero.

"We feel that basically they are casualties of school. Schools aren't set up for them and they don't respond," Dr Nicholson said.

"Schools need extra resources."

The biggest problem was teaching children with dyslexia to read the words on the page, he said.

"The ministry's motto is 'no child left behind'. If they really believed in that they would provide them with the opportunity to learn to read."

At the moment, many dyslexic children were missing out on vital one-on-one time because their parents could not afford to send them to a private tutor.

"It's got to be a priority. So many leave school without qualifications - one third - and that one third will go into unemployment.

"But once they learn to read they will be great," he said.

Associate Minister of Education Heather Roy said in her speech at the conference that Speld had not, to date, received any government funding.

She said she recognised the frustration tutors felt at not being able to help more of those needing educational assistance, but funding was hard to come by in the current economic climate.

Around 200 parents and tutors attended the Speld conference held at the Quality Hotel Plymouth International.

It was aimed at creating a safe learning environment to prevent under-achievement and celebrating gifted students with a learning disability.

There were three key speakers including Dr Nicholson and a series of workshops held over three days.