

## **Media release**

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### **SACS REVIEW PLACES EXTRA BURDENS ON LOW DECILE SCHOOLS AND RTLBS – WITH NO FUNDING TO MATCH**

Changes to Special Assessment Conditions (SACs) highlight the gulf of inequity between high decile and low decile schools in supporting children with learning differences, and place additional burdens on low decile schools to remedy this, says Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand.

The NZQA and Ministry of Education today released a long awaited review of NCEA Special Assessment Conditions – whereby students are granted accommodations such as reader or writer assistance, computer use, or extra time. The review found students at decile 10 schools were seven times more likely to have a SAC application made than those at decile one schools. Some 35% of schools made no SAC applications at all.

Guy Pope-Mayell, DFNZ Chair of Trustees, says the review clearly acknowledges the inequities but places an additional burden on schools to apply for SACs and provide the evidence that will ensure applications are successful.

“A move to greater acceptance of alternative evidence supplied by schools, rather than an independent education psychologist report paid for by parents (around \$800), will remove a financial barrier for the family,” he says.

“Alternative evidence, however, requires skills and resources that most schools simply don’t have. For low decile schools who are already struggling to prioritise this, the changes could make matters worse,” Pope-Mayell says.

“And for the 250 mainly low decile schools that the review identified as targets to improve SAC application numbers this year, funding is clearly a critical missing ingredient.”

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 and support, including SACs.

Guy Pope-Mayell says while the NZQA/MoE report says the alternative evidence application process will be streamlined to be quicker and easier to use, the fact remains that schools need staff who are trained to identify children who need SACS and they need to be prepared to spend time working through the process, he says.

The review envisages that schools will be supported to make the new system work by involving RTLBs (Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour) in the SAC system.

“We believe RTLBs are the right people to help, but they are not currently funded to provide support to NZQA level students (11-13 years) nor are they trained to provide the level of detail NZQA requires in an alternative evidence application,” Pope-Mayell says.

“In addition, RTLBs are already under huge stress – shared between schools and stretched thin. If the MoE sees RTLB as the instrument of change in increasing SAC application levels, they need to be trained to take this on. And more RTLBs need to be deployed in the field. Again, funding is the critical missing variable.”

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Another key finding from the report was that while access to SACs needs to be improved in the short term, in the long term advances in technology – such as greater use of computers, and special headphones so students with reading difficulties can listen to recorded exams – were likely to solve many assessment issues.

DFNZ says this is not the case. “Technology will not be the ultimate saviour. While it will improve things for many students there are some things technology cannot address, for example the need for extra time for students who process information more slowly,” Pope-Mayell says.

“Our overall outtake from this review is that there is clear acknowledgement that the needs and rights of dyslexic students have not been met over the seven years since dyslexia was officially recognised by the Government. We need adequate resources, training, funding and a timeline to achieve this.”

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.

There is a dedicated DAW webspaces 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.

## **ends**

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## **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](http://www.4d.org.nz) for schools and providing professional development opportunities for teachers*