

Media release

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GOVERNMENT URGED TO IMPLEMENT MINORITY REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DYSLEXIA, AUTISM AND DYSPRAXIA

A Parliamentary Select Committee report into the learning needs of students with dyslexia, autism and dyspraxia is well meaning but ineffectual unless tougher recommendations are implemented to give it teeth, says Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand (DFNZ).

The Education and Science Select Committee report, tabled in Parliament on Friday, outlined 46 recommendations to improve education experiences for students with dyslexia, autism and dyspraxia and highlighted three key issues revealed by submissions to the select committee. These were that parents need more information about what support is available and assistance to access that support; that schools support is inconsistent and variable; and that the capability and capacity of teachers, teacher aides and other specialist support providers varies widely between schools.

Several members of the select committee declined to support the report, including Green Party education spokesperson Catherine Delahunty, who helped initiate the select committee inquiry. The views of these members of the Labour Party, Green Party and New Zealand First were instead captured in an additional Minority View section of the report, outlining 26 recommendations designed to give the main report more teeth.

The Minority Report says the Government's hands off approach to recent issues around 'Seclusion Rooms' did not inspire confidence that urgent action would transpire. And extreme situations, such as year-long waiting lists for specialist support, parents paying for extra support in state schools, or a child only receiving one hour of education per day, could not be addressed without increases in specialist resource.

Guy Pope-Mayell, DFNZ Chair of Trustees, says the Minority Report is bang on in identifying actions needed to make the inquiry count.

"The main report recommendations are all sound, commonsense items for Ministry of Education to action which, as much as anything, reveal the Ministry has been paying lip service to supporting these students but not taking action," he says.

"Yet the main report recommendations also fail to allow for much needed legislative changes and fail to set out clear directives for definitive action. Without this, the system will continue going in circles with limited funds available to support these students.

"For this reason, we urge the Government to implement the Minority Report recommendations which do take a stand on the issues of children's rights, funding and accountability to ensure that inclusive education is developed in all schools. We support calls for the rights of students with learning differences to be enshrined in the Education Act, for the urgent collection of data so the issues and progress are measurable, and for increased special education funding to be made available to address the needs of said number of children," Pope-Mayell says.

DFNZ acknowledges that turning theory into practice is an ongoing issue for Ministry of Education.

“The self-managing schools environment we have in New Zealand is a double edge sword. For schools with great leadership and a commitment to inclusion we see great results, for the remainder the Ministry needs a means of motivation that they don’t have’

“It would be a crime if the thousands of hours invested by the many individuals, students and organisations that made submissions to the select committee, and by the select committee in analysing and organising this information is all for nothing. We need the Minister to show some leadership here.” Pope-Mayell says.

One positive from the report was the adoption of DFNZ’s proposal that a ‘pathway to learning’ be identified for students with learning differences from year one whereby their learning needs are understood and catered for throughout the school years, with appropriate transition and sharing of information between primary, intermediate and secondary schools to help make the journey seamless. The report recommends that the Ministry of Education work with DFNZ, Dyspraxia New Zealand and other key stakeholders to develop specific pathways for special learning differences.

Pope-Mayell says another big opportunity going forward is to encourage ‘communities of change’ whereby clusters of schools get together to identify learning challenges and pitch for funds to solve these. Further opportunities also lie in ensuring that specialist RTLit and RTLB staff are better resourced and utilised.

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

The Select Committee Report is available at this link:

https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/reports/document/51DBSCH_SCR71769_1/inquiry-into-the-identification-and-support-for-students

ABOUT DYSLEXIA FOUNDATION NEW ZEALAND

DFNZ’s mission is to increase the awareness, recognition, understanding and acceptance of dyslexia as an alternative way of thinking. DFNZ is focused on action-oriented activities to champion change for dyslexic individuals, and on providing information, tools and resources to inspire others to do the same. Since inception in November 2006, DFNZ has built its reputation on successful advocacy and action. From lobbying the Government for dyslexia to be officially recognised, achieved in 2007, through to working closely with the Government on the inclusive education agenda, the landscape of dyslexia has been fundamentally changed. DFNZ remains remain fully engaged with the education agenda. In parallel, it has activated a second agenda of youth justice and is backing proposals to raise the Youth Court age from its current level of 16 years.