



Learning to be less of a trial for dyslexic pupil

JO MOIR

EDUCATION

READING and writing is a daily struggle for 10-year-old William Norrington.

The Worser Bay School pupil slipped behind his peers and failed to connect with teachers until he was diagnosed as dyslexic when he was 6.

His mother, Lesleigh Norrington, said she knew something was wrong from the time he was 3.

"He just wasn't doing the things other kids were, so he started getting speech therapy. But that stopped when he turned 5 and the funding ran out."

Now, however, she is delighted to hear he will continue to have help through his college years, after a decision to drop the charge of up to \$700 for exam support assessment.

"There's been no consistency throughout his early school learning and the path for getting support has always been very unclear," she said.

She believed many children missed out on the right to a good education, and she hoped the support would eventually trickle down to primary schools as well.

The changes stem from a review of the special assessment conditions required for secondary school pupils to qualify for help with their NCEA exams.

The review found that lower-decile schools were much less likely to apply for the help, and that the \$400 to \$700 cost of an independent expert assessment was a major barrier.

Last year, only about 3 per cent of NCEA students received support that included reader-writer aides, more time, a separate space in which to sit exams, and help with technology.

As a result of the review, an alternative free assessment based on a teacher's observation of a pupil will now be used. The Ministry of Education will also be targeting 250 secondary schools, largely with low deciles, which are rarely using the exam support.

Susanne Jungersen, principal at Porirua College, said the school had about 20 pupils who needed

assistance but were unable to apply because of the cost.

"This is an extremely positive move because the money was a complete barrier for us... parents and the school couldn't afford it."

Dyslexia Foundation chairman Guy Pope-Mayell said the review was a step in the right direction, but ultimately teachers would end up with a bigger workload as the onus went on them to assess pupils.

Rawiri Brell, the ministry's deputy secretary of early learning, said about \$140 million in additional funding had been provided to schools in recent years to support special learning.

"Teachers know their students well and additional funding is not required to make better use of information that's already available about a student."

'The path for getting support has always been very unclear.'

Lesleigh Norrington



SUPPORT

Who qualifies for special assessment conditions?

- ADD and autism sufferers – separate accommodation to sit exams
- Deafness – extra time, supervisor and reader capable of signing
- Depression/post-traumatic stress – rest breaks and separate accommodation
- Diabetes – rest breaks and separate accommodation
- Dyslexia/dyspraxia – extra time, computer, reader, writer
- Epilepsy – separate accommodation
- Long-standing physical injuries – rest breaks, computer, writer
- Pregnancy – supervised rest/toilet breaks
- Tourette syndrome – separate accommodation
- Vision impairment – brailled, enlarged, coloured papers, extra time, computer, reader, writer

Helping hand: William Norrington, 10, who is dyslexic, and his mum Lesleigh Norrington are delighted that the process for getting special exam assistance has been improved.

Photo: CAMERON BURNELL/FAIRFAX NZ