

Media Release 10 October 2007

Ministry of Education starts dyslexia work programme

The Ministry of Education is working collaboratively to better address dyslexia in schools, and has met with the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand and with SPELD (Specific Learning Difficulties).

The ministry's Group Manager, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Design, Mary Chamberlain, said the ministry, researchers, and specialists were responding to the latest international reviews of evidence about persistent difficulties with reading and writing.

"Internationally, education agencies now feel confident using the term 'dyslexia' to describe this specific range of difficulties", Mary Chamberlain said. "We're now at the beginning of the journey toward understanding how to act on this knowledge".

The ministry is working with the Dyslexia Foundation and literacy experts in its work to better address dyslexia in schools.

Mary Chamberlain said that, whilst overall, New Zealand students are achieving well in literacy by international standards, some students didn't make expected progress in reading and writing in spite of good teaching and extra support.

"We are determined to ensure that the different needs of these learners are identified and met as effectively and as early as possible so that specialised instruction can ensure maximum progress", she said.

"We've completed a review of international research and are using this to refocus our current policies and programmes to better address dyslexia.

"We're developing new web pages for teachers and parents in order to provide information and links to further expertise about dyslexia. The first things to go on that website will be the literature review and a working definition.

"The working definition is a starting point for our work and is intended to help the ministry, educators and parents understand what dyslexia is and how it can be identified and addressed. It sets a direction for action," she said.

The work programme also includes:

- a pamphlet for parents as part of the Team-Up programme, available from late 2007. Team-Up is a high-profile information programme targeting families and communities, to increase their involvement in and support of their children's learning at primary and secondary school and in early childhood education;
- developing more effective assessment tools and professional development processes to ensure that students with difficulties associated with dyslexia can be identified as early as possible; and
- a resource for teachers with strategies for meeting the needs of struggling readers and writers, including those with dyslexia, to be started in 2008.

“This is relatively new territory for education agencies internationally. We are focusing on ensuring our work to address dyslexia is based on robust research and evidence, and we’re working closely with experts in this field. We’re also looking at what other countries are doing, and are mindful of the benefits of working in partnership with parents and caregivers. This approach will ensure that we focus on achieving the best results for our learners,” Mary Chamberlain said.

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