



Teens with learning difficulties missing out after rule changes

JO MOIR

STUDENTS needing the most help sitting exams are the ones missing out after the New Zealand Qualifications Authority changed its rules.

It has been revealed teenagers with learning difficulties applying for Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) do not qualify for reader-writer aides, more time or a separate space to sit exams if their reading or writing ability is not what it should be for their age.

This comes on the back of a review of SAC last year that identified a \$400-\$700 fee for an independent expert assessment as a barrier for students in disadvantaged communities.

The fee was replaced with an alternative free assessment based on a teacher's observation.

Labour's education spokesman Chris Hipkins said schools should

not have to fight for help for those students struggling the most.

"You have to question what the point is. This means the kids who are most in need of support are the least likely to get it."

Each year-level at school has a corresponding curriculum level; for example, a year 11 student likely to be sitting NCEA level 1 exams is expected to be achieving at curriculum level 6. The change means those teenagers struggling academically do not make the cut for SAC funding.

NZQA deputy chief executive Richard Thornton said if a student was not at the appropriate curriculum level to be assessed for NCEA then SAC was not provided.

About 10 per cent of the 550 students at Porirua College would qualify for SAC but principal Susanne Jungersen said they did not receive assistance because they were lagging behind academically.

"Our kids come in one or two curriculum levels below where they should be. By the time they're year 11 they may only be at curriculum level 4 or 5," she said.

While scrapping the independent test was good news for Porirua students, "now we've been given another insurmountable barrier".

"It's a massive loss for these kids who have good cause to get help."

Dyslexic Foundation chairman Guy Pope-Mayell was shocked by the requirements, which were brought to his attention by a South Island school principal.

The school had three SAC applications declined despite the students having been assessed by independent experts.

NZQA responded to the school, saying they did not qualify because their literacy and numeracy were not up to scratch.