

MEDIA RELEASE

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Survey shows NZ teachers want specific Government funding for dyslexic students

Results released today from a ground-breaking survey of attitudes to dyslexia in New Zealand schools show 95% of teachers and educational professionals surveyed believe the Government should allocate specific funding for dyslexic students.

The online survey, conducted by The Nielsen Company on behalf of the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand, also showed 99% of respondents believe that allocating specific funding for dyslexic students would benefit all New Zealand children.

Other results show nearly all respondents have taught at least one dyslexic student; dyslexic students exhibit significant self-esteem issues; the Ministry of Education's dyslexia resources are little used and the Government's recently announced Schools Plus programme is little known at classroom level.

The survey, designed to benchmark attitudes to dyslexia among teachers and educational professionals, provides the first statistical data towards addressing the needs of the 70,000 New Zealand children affected by dyslexia-related learning differences.

Critical issues canvassed included the level of teachers' exposure to dyslexic students; what schools are currently doing for these students and the effectiveness of those interventions; awareness of the Government's role and need for specific funding; and behavioral traits of dyslexic students. The margin of error was +/- 5.25%, with 347 teachers and educational professionals each taking around 20 minutes to complete the survey.

Results show that 66% of respondents teach between one and three dyslexic students per annum and 20% – mostly at secondary level – teach more than six. For the 95% who believe specific funding is necessary for dyslexic students, 54% identify teacher development as the most important expenditure priority, followed by better resources; teacher aid support; learning specific programmes/software; and specialist teachers.

While 59% of respondents say dyslexic students are generally more creative, this positive is overshadowed by the negatives. Some 89% of respondents identified dyslexic students as having less self-esteem than their non-dyslexic peers, and a further 41 percent said dyslexic students exhibit less socially acceptable behaviour.

Guy Pope-Mayell, Chair of Trustees for the Foundation, says the message is clear – specific funding is critical to allow the country's teachers to effectively deal with dyslexia in their classrooms.

"The survey confirms that dyslexia is not a minor issue that can be shuffled to the back of the education agenda. It affects a significant proportion of the future generation of New Zealanders, and needs to be addressed now. The Government promised specific funding for dyslexia in November last year – it's time to deliver."

In May, the Foundation met with Education Minister Chris Carter and proposed a Dyslexia Work Programme for schools that would include support for reading behavioural specialists, work to ensure teacher training includes dyslexia modules, and implementation of a Dyslexia Research and Development initiative.

“Dyslexia is a huge issue in New Zealand, with related education difficulties flowing through to social issues, youth depression and suicide. It is estimated that 50% of youth who find themselves in court are dyslexic or have an identifiable learning disability, and this flows through into our adult prison population as well,” he says.

“Unlike many areas of social dysfunction, however, this is something that is within the Government’s power to address. Addressing dyslexia through the education system can become a powerful catalyst for social change.”

The majority of survey respondents, 77%, have learned to identify dyslexic students from their own experience and personal research, with Ministry of Education resources used by only 16%.

Survey respondents do not appear to rate the Government’s recently announced Schools Plus initiative. Only 34% of respondents are even aware of the initiative, though this is higher at principal level, and of those 34%, just over half believe it will be of any benefit to dyslexic students.

Guy Pope-Mayell says the Foundation believes Schools Plus is fundamentally flawed, offering too little, too late in focusing on underachieving school leavers who are already disengaged and disenfranchised.

“It’s no surprise to us that schools are boycotting this in droves. It’s another sticking plaster on a system that’s not delivering. We see dyslexia as the ‘sharp end of the stick’ in that if you get the learning environment right for dyslexic students early on, it will work for and benefit others. And we estimate the percentage of under qualified school leavers could be reduced by up to half simply by getting the environment right,” he says.

More information about Dyslexia Awareness Week and the Dyslexia Foundation is available on www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz

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Notes to editors

- The survey ran between 16-26 May 2008
- Respondents included teachers, principals, teacher aides and RTLBs (Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour) and RT:Lits (Resource Teachers of Literacy)
- The majority of respondents (77%) had more than 10 years of teaching experience
- The breakdown of school types included 57% from primary schools, 5% from intermediate schools, 10% from secondary, 18% from combined primary and intermediate schools, 3% from combined intermediate and secondary; and 6% from schools with students from years 1-13.

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