

DFNZ media release 19 April 2007

Dyslexia Foundation celebrating Ministry of Education recognition of dyslexia

The Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand is celebrating the news today that the Ministry of Education is now willing to embrace the term dyslexia and is developing initiatives that support the learning needs of dyslexic students.

“The implications of this announcement for over 70,000 children who most often struggle with dyslexia is life changing for them, their families, and their future education,” Chair of the Trustees of the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand Guy Pope-Mayell said.

“Dyslexia will no longer be a hidden disability in New Zealand and all dyslexic New Zealanders can feel proud that their way of thinking has been recognised.”

Pope-Mayell said the foundation applauds the fact that the Ministry’s initiative to undertake an analysis of international research and to examine the various international definitions and science around dyslexia is now completed.

Based on its findings the Ministry has responded by acknowledging dyslexia and will now work on specific initiatives together with the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand and other stakeholders in the education sector to define how this will result in changes in delivery of learning in the classroom.

“New Zealand now has the opportunity to take international best practice to arrive at initiatives for the classroom that will remove the severe disadvantage that dyslexic children presently experience.”

By recognising that they must support the dyslexic child’s strengths in order to make a difference to their learning outcomes the Ministry is opening the door to new classroom strategies that are designed for visual thinkers.

This will validate what leading teachers are already embracing and encourage others to explore what are often simple yet effective techniques.

Pope-Mayell said what is critical now is that teachers receive the training they require so they can easily recognise dyslexia and provide the empathy and learning strategies that allow dyslexic children to naturally engage.

This will require funding. Our understanding from yesterday's meeting with Hon Steve Maharey is that funding will prioritise over time as a direct consequence of the process that has been started with the Ministry's statement of intent," he said.

The Foundation is looking forward to working with the Ministry of Education and others to achieve all of this.

The Dyslexia Awareness Week starts on Monday April 23 and will see a huge range of activities throughout New Zealand all aimed at raising awareness of dyslexia and will now also be cause for celebration. Schools, Dyslexia Solution Providers, Parents and Dyslexic individuals are all involved in a diverse range of activities.

A 0900 Dyslexia (0900 39753) fundraising phone number is available to make a \$20 donation to the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand.

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Media Release

Ministry improves understanding of dyslexia

Although the majority of students successfully learn to read and write, the Ministry of Education is putting greater emphasis on assisting students who struggle in these areas, including those who have been identified as dyslexic.

Dyslexia is a term that is used to refer to a group of students with a range of persistent reading and writing difficulties or disabilities. The Ministry of Education recognises that more needs to be done to identify, as early as possible, these students, and to provide them with effective interventions based on their specific needs.

“As a ministry, we are committed to ensuring that the needs of all students are met. We want to work in collaboration with schools as well as with those with specific relevant expertise to strengthen support for students with serious reading and writing difficulties. This includes working with organisations such as the Dyslexia Foundation,” Ministry of Education Deputy Secretary, Schooling, Anne Jackson said.

“We are implementing a whole range of initiatives to increase the level and quality of assistance given to students with serious reading and writing problems. We are already in the process of developing better assessment tools to identify students with reading and writing problems as early as possible. We are also developing a resource for teachers that outlines strategies for working with students with reading and writing difficulties,” says Anne Jackson.

The Ministry recently completed an analysis of international research into dyslexia, looking at various international definitions of dyslexia - as well as scientific attempts to locate and describe the causes and symptoms associated with it. Dyslexia is a term that is used to refer to a group of students with a range of persistent reading and writing difficulties or disabilities.

Anne Jackson said that the Minister met with the Dyslexia Foundation in Christchurch today. At the meeting they agreed that the Ministry of Education would work with the Foundation, and other stakeholders, to identify how Dyslexia might be understood in this jurisdiction and how that understanding would be applied in the New Zealand system.

“The research shows that children and young people who experience persistent difficulties with reading and writing are a diverse group. Research also suggests that support for students with reading and writing problems needs to build on their personal strengths and needs. So what we aim to do is ensure the literacy initiatives we implement are based on the individual needs of the student and focus on their strengths, not their weaknesses. The Ministry will use this research to support future policies to assist students with reading and writing difficulties,” Anne Jackson said.

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