

## 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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**Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand**

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## **Dyslexia foundation pleased with progress made by Ministry**

The Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand says progress made by the Ministry of Education to address dyslexia in schools is exceeding expectations, but stresses the government must now ensure additional funding is made available to fully deliver on the planned initiatives.

The Ministry of Education has been working collaboratively with the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand and others to better understand and address dyslexia in schools after announcing in April it recognised dyslexia and was committed to implementing a whole range of initiatives to increase the level and quality of assistance given to students with persistent reading and writing difficulties.

“Since our initial meeting with the Ministry of Education in June a great deal of progress has been made,” Chair of the Trustees of the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand Guy Pope-Mayell said.

“The challenge laid down by the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand, on behalf of it’s members and the 70,000 children affected by dyslexia in New Zealand Schools, has been heard and acted upon.”

Pope-Mayell says the Ministry’s work programme does appear to be practical, empowering for schools and parents, and action orientated.

“Dyslexia in New Zealand is not being buried or lost in academic debate. What can be done about dyslexia is being signalled and the Ministry says that it is now working on how this can be implemented effectively.”

Key Ministry of Education initiatives include:

- Commitment to identifying dyslexia early.
- Developing early intervention and assessment tools.
- Professional development for teachers.
- Material for parents to develop more understanding about dyslexia.
- Dedicated online website resources for teachers and parents to provide information and links to further expertise about dyslexia.

Guy Pope-Mayell says these moves signal the start of a strong partnership between parents, teachers and students which is critical.

“Trust between these parties must be developed and nurtured if dyslexic student’s needs are to be met and harm to their self esteem avoided.”

“The planned initiatives need to be supported and embraced by all. Schools will hopefully start to factor the Ministry’s direction into their planning for 2008 and from this we will see real change for our children. Parents should be encouraged and feel empowered to discuss their child's learning needs with teachers and most critically, the government needs to deliver the funding that will allow this to all happen.”

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