



Strategies help pupils to learn

By PAM JONES

AT Alexandra Primary School, children who fall within the dyslexic spectrum are not given labels but instead taught strategies for recognising and dealing with both their weaknesses and strengths.

The school is one of several 4D schools in Central Otago and the Queenstown Lakes district, working within a Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand framework that helps schools become more dyslexic-friendly through a range of programmes and philosophies.

Being part of the foundation's 4D programme meant being linked to a range of information and resources, and had helped the school refine many of its programmes over the past two years, Alexandra Primary School assistant principal Angela Scoullar said.

The school now screened all 6-year-old children, and any other children with learning difficulties, using the Lucid Rapid dyslexia screening programme, which gave a "possibility of dyslexia" rating, Mrs Scoullar said.

Children who were screened as possibly having dyslexia were then tracked, and took part in pro-

grammes designed to improve cognitive and academic difficulties, she said.

This included encouraging teachers to take a "multi-sensory approach" to teaching and learning, and allowing children to have more choice in how they sourced and presented information.

"For example they might feel more comfortable doing work on a computer, or they might choose to paint a picture of their answer, or present it in diagrams or bullet-points."

For times when other types of work was required, for example written work, which many dyslexic children found difficult, teachers worked hard to help children develop strategies that worked for them, Mrs Scoullar said.

Dyslexia was also celebrated as a gift at the Alexandra school, as "people with dyslexia do have specific and differing strengths and talents, that need to be celebrated", she said.

The school planned to continue a 4D newsletter, trialled last year, which provided ideas and information for parents and had been well-received, Mrs Scoullar said.

Other links to the wider school

community would also be investigated. The school's inquiry topic this term was about children finding out about their learning style, strengths and weaknesses, and senior pupils would this year study famous personalities who had dyslexia but had overcome their difficulties and become successful people, she said.

Other initiatives and programmes at the school, for example the separate boys and girls year 7 and 8 classes, also supported different learning styles, and reflected the passion of principal Adele Gott and her staff to acknowledge that "everyone learns differently", Mrs Scoullar said.

Children who identified themselves as being within the dyslexic spectrum seemed to enjoy the flexibility offered by the school, she said.

"If you were a person with dyslexia this is definitely the school you should come to," Ari Casbolt (12), of Alexandra, said.

Teacher aide and teacher release time was provided from within the school's budget, with no specific Ministry of Education funding provided for the dyslexic-friendly programmes, she said.



Celebrating differences: Alexandra Primary School assistant principal Angela Scoullar and pupils (from left) Corey Parsons (11), Mikayla Holden (10) and Ainslie Miller (10) use games to develop strategies to deal with their weaknesses and strengths as part of the school's dyslexic-friendly programme.

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