Dyslexia is both widespread and a potential root cause of serious social issues. One in 10 New Zealanders has dyslexia, including 70,000 schoolchildren. That's 76,000 kids who need some specialist help to keep up with their classmates in basic areas of learning.

Dyslexia has become a ticking time bomb in society. Failure at school becomes predictable, failure at life is the obvious consequence. No wonder as a society we are beginning to realize that the consequences of not keeping up with the class are too difficult to bear. As a society, we are beginning to realize that the consequences of not keeping up with our peers are too difficult to bear.

Failure leads to self-esteem, and low self-esteem feeds alienation, depression and even criminal behavior. Shockingly, it is estimated that up to 50% of young people who come before the courts have some sort of identifiable learning difficulty. Why politicians are the only people in society who can't see the problem.

This destructive chain reaction from disruption to dysfunction is being set off in every classroom in the country, and it has created an education system that is failing to provide the learning that is the right of every child. A chorus of important voices now warning of serious consequences is the recent report to the ministry of education. The report notes that compulsory schools sector noted that "one of the most pressing issues our education system faces is supporting students considered to be at risk of education and social failure." In a survey of Wellington teachers by the NZ Council for Education Research, just over half said they had identified students with learning difficulties.

Dyslexia is a different way of thinking, and it's not just confined to reading and writing. In fact, dyslexics impact across a wide range of vectors, from literacy and memory issues to time management and information processing speed.

With little relief in sight, schools are often forced to take matters into their own hands to assist students with learning differences. To support them, Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand has recently launched a new guide to help New Zealand schools understand dyslexia and take simple steps to improve life for their students, some as simple as using coloured paper to make work sheets easier to read. Developed with the help of dyslexia experts both here and overseas, it's a programme of changes called D4U. For Dyslexia, www.4D4Schools.org.nz. It costs nothing to join but is expected to provide immense value in giving schools permission to act, and to make changes.

The foundation is proud of the work that has been done on D4U, and schools cannot turn the tide by themselves. They need proper funding and resource. The foundation has been in the media quite a lot, and in the past six months has been part of the discussion about the issue.

One of the biggest issues is the need for proper funding and resource for schools to support students with dyslexia. The foundation has been in the media quite a lot, and in the past six months has been part of the discussion about the issue.

In the absence of an upper chamber in Parliament, the media perform the essential role of scrutinising public figures, a role that doesn't always suit Winston Peters...

Watchdogs for the greater good

Bob Jones

I'm constantly surprised how much people ask me why Winston Peters loathes the press so much. My surprise lies in their ability to see so much in Winston Peters that he can't hide it. But trust me, they almost always do and say things not in his best interest.

I'm not sure if the press Winston's rage extends to radio or television, perhaps it's not on live TV and can't be edited or misquoted. Is he justified? The answer is an overwhelming yes. Anyone in public life would endorse.

Winston Peters, who is often described as a hardliner, stood for ACT, I understand that within some people he would emerge from his journalising role and put forward his ideas for legislation changes. I well recall his moral and political stance and he was a strong advocate.

Periodically I remind him of his work on the foreign aid issue, his stance on the rights of women and perhaps even his ideas for the future of our country. It always seems to bring him back to his senses.

In 1997, shortly before an election, he was exposed to a serious health crisis. Roger Douglas reformism may have been under way but he was in the thick of it.

Conversely, the anti-smoking legislation and the Electoral Finance Act would have never passed without his leadership.

In the mid-1990s Jim Bolger suggested reintroducing an upper chamber and was ridiculed, but he had a point. In the absence of a second chamber, Winston Peters' role in Parliament is limited. Besides, he is often described as a hardliner, which is ironic considering the amount of power he wields.

How much longer can he put off the media from doing their job and getting the story out there?