

Media release
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PROBLEM MUST BE NAMED BEFORE LEADERSHIP CAN SUCCEED, SAYS DFNZ

The Government's multi-million dollar investment into school leadership is a welcome structural change but underachieving children must be clearly identified before leadership can be applied, says Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand.

Prime Minister John Key today announced the Government will invest an extra \$359 million over the next four years to lift the achievement of New Zealand students at school. The money will fund four new roles in schools – Executive Principal, Expert Teacher, Lead Teacher and Change Principal, and is designed to support teachers and principals to lift student performance in every school.

Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand Chair of Trustees Guy Pope-Mayell says the announcement outlines a major structural change in schools. But naming the underachievers is critical to identifying what specific leadership is needed.

"Raising achievement is a warm fuzzy that no-one would disagree with. And this level of cash injection is clearly welcome. But the gaping hole in this announcement is any clue as to what type of leadership is envisaged to lift achievement," Guy Pope-Mayell says.

"The elephant in the room here is learning difference. People shy away from this label in case it is seen to pander to niche interests. But in fact the overwhelming majority of those in the long tail of (under)achievement can be described as having learning differences or preferences – from dyslexics to Maori and Pacific Island students.

"These students all fail to flourish in traditional classroom environments but benefit from personalised teaching, multi-sensory and experiential learning, and the opportunity to present alternative evidence of achievement instead of standard written material," Guy Pope-Mayell says.

"There is no question that leadership is a gamechanger in schools. But until we face the fact that expertise in dealing with learning differences and preferences is what is needed to clear this long tail and lift overall achievement levels, then we cannot choose the best people to lead this change."

DFNZ says it is critical that the external panel filling these new school roles has recognised expertise in addressing a range of learning differences and preferences. It has welcomed the Government's intention to work with key sector groups to further develop and finalise details of the new approach.

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