

Worldly take on dyslexia

By BRONWYN TORRIE - Manawatu Standard Last updated 12:00 21/11/2009

A Marton woman will travel the world to research schools specialising in teaching dyslexic students, thanks to former British prime minister Sir Winston Churchill.

Margaret Stewart, 50, was one of 13 Kiwis to receive a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust fellowship this week, worth \$5000.

Churchill, who was thought to have had dyslexia, believed world peace and greater international understanding could be promoted through ordinary people travelling to other countries and experiencing other cultures.

Mrs Stewart, a Resource Teacher: Learning Behaviour (RTL) will venture to Hong Kong, China and the United Kingdom next year to see how schools identify, and teach students with, dyslexia.

"We've got a different system and a different point of view," she said. "We don't have and hopefully never will have specific dyslexic schools like they do in the UK."

The Ministry of Education has granted her sabbatical leave for the second term of the school year to travel.

Upon her return, she will write a report with "hands on and practical ideas to support teachers who support students."

That will benefit not only the region but the entire country.

Mrs Stewart has been involved in schools for decades.

She started out as an unpaid teacher aide and then trained and qualified as a teacher in the early 1990s.

She then specialised in teaching children with learning and behaviour difficulties.

"I just like to make sure the students who have difficulties get every opportunity that they can."

The trust was established in 1965 by the Government and the public with the intention of funding travel for short-term research trips.

Since then, the trust had funded up to 25 fellowships each year worth up to \$10,000.

DYSLEXIA FACTS

Your child may have dyslexia if after a year at school they often display a number of these difficulties:

Unsure of the sound a letter or combination makes, eg. h or sh

Poor sense of rhyme

Often mixes up letters or figures eg. b/d/p/q or n/u or m/w, or 15 for 51.

Great difficulty spelling simple, common words, eg "duck" or "like"

Highly disorganised – often doesn't know what day it is

Finds learning sequences difficult, eg months

Extremely messy handwriting – letters are poorly formed

Very poor reading, even of very familiar words

Difficulty with things like tying shoelaces, getting dressed quickly, clumsiness, confuses left and right.

Source: Information from the Ministry of Education.