

Guidelines to help pupils' literacy rate

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SOME teachers have no idea at what level their pupils should be able to read or write by certain ages, sparking new guidelines to help identify under-achievers.

While New Zealand's top pupils are among the smartest in the world, up to 150,000 are estimated to be failing academically as part of the under-achieving "tail".

At a dyslexia conference in Wellington yesterday, Education Ministry literacy team leader Denise Arnerich said early identification of dyslexic pupils and effective teaching were the biggest factors in boosting the academic performance of struggling learners.

But many pupils were not getting the opportunities they deserved because of variable teaching, inequitable access to support programmes and confusion about what children should be capable of by certain ages.

One teacher told officials: "Before the project, I really had no idea what to expect in literacy from students in years 7 and 8."

Ms Arnerich said the ministry had drafted guidelines for teachers on expected literacy targets for pupils according to year levels, to help pick up those falling behind.

It comes as the National Government prepares to introduce national numeracy and literacy standards for school pupils in a bid to lift achievement.

"We need to know what to notice, what to expect and where it isn't happening," Ms Arnerich said.

"Some of our students are not accessing support in some instances and are not getting quality teaching outcomes."

A major focus on literacy by the ministry aimed to:

- Make classroom teaching more effective by helping teachers identify pupils' literacy progress.
- Offer immediate support to pupils when achievement was not meeting expected targets.

Dyslexia Foundation chairman Guy Pope-Mayell said up to 70,000 schoolchildren were thought to have learning difficulties associated with dyslexia.

Though buoyed by Ms Arnerich's comments, he said it was getting action in classrooms that would improve children's academic fortunes.

"We've been hearing that from the ministry for a while now. They continue to talk the talk, but what we're wanting them to do is walk the walk."