

MEDIA RELEASE

18 June 2008

Government challenged to front up with dyslexia-specific funding

A huge missed opportunity, says Dyslexia Foundation

The Dyslexia Foundation today challenged the Government to put up or shut up after it last night failed to deliver a specific funding package to address dyslexia in New Zealand schools, something which has been promised since November last year.

Minister of Education Chris Carter spoke at the official launch function for Dyslexia Awareness Week (16-22 June) in Wellington. However, instead of announcing the expected funding package for a Dyslexia Work Programme for New Zealand schools, he made a generic commitment around improving accessibility to information about dyslexia. This was followed with a statement saying he supported the Foundation's own work.

The Foundation has been lobbying hard for specific funding for dyslexia since the Government first promised it last year, and Chair of Trustees Guy Pope-Mayell says the Minister's apparent reluctance to earmark specific funds is a tough blow for New Zealand's 70,000 dyslexic school children.

"One in ten of our children struggle with dyslexia and this is something that desperately needs addressing. On top of failing to front up with funding, a flimsy press statement registering 'support' for the Foundation's work really just adds insult to injury. "

The funding commitment, specifically for Ministry of Education work programme to address the needs of dyslexic students in the classroom, was made by the Minister at a meeting with the Foundation on 19 November last year. This followed the Ministry of Education's formal recognition of dyslexia in April last year, as well as assurances from then Minister of Education Steve Maharey that professional development for teachers would be funded in 2008.

"If the Ministry has some concrete and meaningful funded work underway we need to know the specifics now," Guy Pope-Mayell says.

"This is a huge missed opportunity for the Minister to not only deliver on his promise, but to take what would seem to be a welcome opportunity to meet the needs of New Zealand teachers who are calling for this type of funding," he says.

Nationwide survey results released late last week showed an overwhelming majority of education professionals wanted specific Government funding for dyslexia students.

The survey, conducted by The Nielsen Company on behalf of the Foundation, showed 95% of respondents thought specific funding should be allocated, and 99% believed this would also have benefits for non-dyslexic children.

Guy Pope-Mayell says addressing dyslexia also offers significant social gains.

"Addressing dyslexia can improve a child's self-esteem and mitigate damaging experiences of failure, making this a critical catalyst for educational and social change.

“We know that dyslexia-related learning disabilities flow through to social issues such as youth depression, suicide and crime, with 50% of children before the courts estimated to have dyslexia or another identifiable learning disability.

“Unlike many areas of social dysfunction, this is one where the Government has the power to act. Early intervention is the key, and we need a work programme that will enable dyslexic children to become engaged in education right from the get go.”

More information about Dyslexia Awareness Week (16-22 June) and the Dyslexia Foundation is available on www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz

ends

For more information please contact:

Guy Pope Mayell, Chair of Trustees, Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand. 0275 449 496