

Media release

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION FOCUS ON LOWER DECILE SCHOOLS FAILS TO DELIVER SACS LIFT

Huge inequities persist between high and low decile schools in applying for special assistance at NCEA exam time for students with learning differences, according to latest NZQA figures.

The figures, released to DFNZ under the Official Information Act ahead of Dyslexia Advocacy Week 16-22 March, provide topline data on application for special assessment conditions (SACs) in 2014. SACs, whereby students are granted accommodations such as reader or writer assistance, computer use, or extra time, are critical to NCEA success for students with learning differences such as dyslexia.

An urgent need to address inequities between high and low decile schools was a key finding of last year's joint NZQA and Ministry of Education review of SACs, sparking an MoE announcement last March that it would target 250 mainly low decile schools to ensure eligible students applied for SACs in time for 2014 exams.

Despite this, the 2014 figures show only 17 students across decile one schools received SACs for external NCEA exams, just 10 more than the previous year.

Guy Pope-Mayell, DFNZ Chair of Trustees, says students at low decile schools remain at an enormous disadvantage when sitting NCEA exams.

"This is a complete fail for MoE's alleged focus on lower decile schools. Overall, only 0.33% of NCEA students at decile one schools applied for SACs for external NCEA exams, compared with 5.8% of NCEA students at decile ten schools.

"In other words, students at decile 10 schools are 17 times more likely to have a SAC application made than those at decile one schools. This perpetuates what amounts to systemic discrimination against students at lower decile schools, where SACs can make all the difference between achieving or not achieving NCEA qualifications," Pope-Mayell says.

One positive was an increase in school based evidence applications, up 60%. A greater focus on and acceptance of school based evidence such as existing student data and simple tests, as opposed to an expensive independent expert's report, was a second key change stemming from last year's review.

Overall, 2014 figures show an 18.7% increase in total SAC applications for external NCEA exams, from 3773 to 4479. This raised the average to approximately 3% of all students sitting NCEA external exams, from 2.5% in 2014. While this movement is in the right direction, it falls substantially short of what is needed.

"If the decile 10 average of 5.8% SAC applications was applied across all schools, well over 8000 students should have received SACs. If the top ten schools average of 11% SACs was applied, the number would be well over 16,000. With the actual SACs figure at only 4479, we can conclude that at least 10,000 students who need SACs are missing out on them," Pope-Mayell says.

"From what we know about the impact of SACs on NCEA results, that's 10,000 students who would most probably have achieved NCEA when they would have otherwise failed, or achieved a higher endorsement level and had their belief in their abilities boosted.

“In addition, in 2013 there were 114 schools that had no students with SACs. The data provided suggests there has not been a huge dent in that number this year.”

At the other end of the scale, the top ten schools by total SAC approvals were:

- St Kentigern College. Decile 10. Approved external NCEA SAC candidates, 99 out of total 854 external NCEA candidates, or 11.6%
- St Andrew's College. Decile 10. Approved external NCEA SAC candidates, 98 out of total 632 external NCEA candidates, or 15.5%
- Diocesan School for Girls. Decile 10. Approved external NCEA SAC candidates, 80 out of total 536 external NCEA candidates, or 14.9%
- Burnside High School. Decile 8. Approved external NCEA SAC candidates, 70 out of total 1428 external NCEA candidates, or 4.9%
- Kings College. Decile 10. Approved external NCEA SAC candidates, 68 out of total 329 external NCEA candidates, or 20.7%
- Hutt Valley High School. Decile 8. Approved external NCEA SAC candidates, 62 out of total 898 external NCEA candidates, or 6.9%
- Mt Albert Grammar School. Decile 7. Approved external NCEA SAC candidates, 61 out of total 1664 external NCEA candidates, or 3.7%
- Christ's College. Decile 10. Approved external NCEA SAC candidates, 59 out of total 430 external NCEA candidates, or 13.7%
- Middleton Grange School. Decile 9. Approved external NCEA SAC candidates, 58 out of total 629 external NCEA candidates, or 9.2%
- Green Bay High School. Decile 8. Approved external NCEA SAC candidates, 57 out of total 634 external NCEA candidates, or 9%

For Dyslexia Advocacy Week (16-22 March) www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz/daw2015/, DFNZ has a twin focus on getting it right in the classroom and the courts. In the classroom, this is about improving the dyslexic student's experience and achievements by ensuring that legal rights to inclusive learning and accommodations are delivered on. In the courts, getting it right is about ensuring dyslexic youth are not entrapped in a system that treats them unfairly as adults.

This twin focus stems from the simple fact that the teenage years can be the breakpoint for those with learning differences. For those who struggle at school, the effectiveness of inclusive learning, accommodations and interventions will determine whether these youth break through to harness the creative strengths that dyslexia can bring or break down and act out.

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For further information, please contact DFNZ Chair of Trustees Guy Pope-Mayell, 0275 449 496, guy@dfnz.org.nz

ABOUT DYSLEXIA FOUNDATION NEW ZEALAND

DFNZ's mission is to increase the awareness, recognition, understanding and acceptance of dyslexia as an alternative way of thinking. DFNZ is focused on action-oriented activities to champion change for dyslexic individuals, and on providing information, tools and resources to inspire others to do the same.

Since inception in November 2006, DFNZ has built its reputation on successful advocacy and action. From lobbying the Government for dyslexia to be officially recognised, achieved in 2007, through to working closely with the Government on the inclusive education agenda, the landscape of dyslexia has been fundamentally changed. DFNZ remains fully engaged with the education agenda. In parallel, it has activated a second agenda of youth justice and is backing calls to raise the Youth Court age from its current level of 16 years.