

Teachers want dyslexic funding

Results released recently from a ground-breaking survey of attitudes to dyslexia in NZ schools show 95 per cent of teachers and educational professionals surveyed believe the government should allocate specific funding for dyslexic students.

The on-line survey, conducted by The Nielsen Company on behalf of the Dyslexia Foundation of NZ, also showed 99 per cent of respondents believe that allocating specific funding for dyslexic students would benefit all NZ children.

Other results show nearly all respondents have taught at least one dyslexic student; dyslexic students exhibit significant self-esteem issues; the MoE's dyslexia resources

are little used and the government's recently announced Schools Plus programme is little known at classroom level.

The survey, designed to benchmark attitudes to dyslexia among teachers and educational professionals, provides the first statistical data towards addressing the needs of the 70,000 NZ children affected by dyslexia-related learning differences.

Critical issues canvassed included the level of teachers' exposure to dyslexic students; what schools are currently doing for these students and the effectiveness of those interventions; awareness of the government's role and need for specific funding; and behavioral traits of dyslexic stu-

dents. The margin of error was +/- 5.25 per cent, with 347 teachers and educational professionals each taking around 20 minutes to complete the survey.

Results show that 66 per cent of respondents teach between one and three dyslexic students per annum and 20 per cent – mostly at secondary level – teach more than six.

For the 95 per cent who believe specific funding is necessary for dyslexic students, 54 per cent identify teacher development as the most important expenditure priority, followed by better resources; teacher aid support; learning specific programmes/software; and specialist teachers.

While 59 per cent of respond-

ents say dyslexic students are generally more creative, this positive is overshadowed by the negatives. Some 89 per cent of respondents identified dyslexic students as having less self-esteem than their non-dyslexic peers, and a further 41 per cent said dyslexic students exhibit less socially acceptable behaviour.

Guy Pope-Mayell, chair of trustees for the foundation, says the message is clear – specific funding is critical to allow the country's teachers to effectively deal with dyslexia in their classrooms.

"The survey confirms that dyslexia is not a minor issue that can be shuffled to the back of the education agenda.

(cont'd p2)

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It affects a significant proportion of the future generation of NZers, and needs to be addressed now. The government promised specific funding for dyslexia in November last year – it's time to

deliver.”

In May, the foundation met with Chris Carter and proposed a Dyslexia Work Programme for schools that would include support for reading behavioural special-

ists, work to ensure teacher training includes dyslexia modules, and implementation of a Dyslexia Research and Development initiative.

“Dyslexia is a huge issue in NZ, with related education difficulties flowing through to social issues, youth depression and suicide. It is estimated that 50 per cent of youth who find themselves in court are dyslexic or have an identifiable learning disability, and this flows through into our adult prison population as well,” he says.

“Unlike many areas of social dysfunction, however, this is something that is within the government's power to address. Addressing dyslexia through the education system can become a powerful catalyst for social change.”

The majority of survey respondents, 77 per cent, have learned to identify dyslexic students from their own experience and personal research, with MoE resources used by only 16 per cent.

Survey respondents do not appear to rate the government's recently announced Schools Plus initiative. Only

34 per cent of respondents are even aware of the initiative, though this is higher at principal level, and of those 34 per cent, just over half believe it will be of any benefit to dyslexic students.

Mr Pope-Mayell says the foundation believes Schools Plus is fundamentally flawed, offering too little, too late in focusing on underachieving school leavers who are already disengaged and disenfranchised.

“It's no surprise to us that schools are boycotting this in droves. It's another sticking plaster on a system that's not delivering. We see dyslexia as the 'sharp end of the stick' in that if you get the learning environment right for dyslexic students early on, it will work for and benefit others. And we estimate the percentage of under qualified school leavers could be reduced by up to half simply by getting the environment right,” he says.

More information about the Dyslexia Foundation is available on: www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz