

Media release
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ONGOING SILENCE ON SAC FUNDING AS DFNZ RELEASES PLAIN ENGLISH SUMMARY OF SAC REVIEW

Funding remains a key pressure point in new plans to target low decile schools to make applications for NZQA Special Assessment Conditions (SACs), says Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand.

The NZQA and Ministry of Education this week released a long awaited review of NCEA Special Assessment Conditions – whereby students are granted accommodations such as reader or writer assistance, computer use, or extra time. The review found students at decile 10 schools were seven times more likely to have a SAC application made than those at decile one schools. Some 35% of schools made no SAC applications at all.

Guy Pope-Mayell, DFNZ Chair of Trustees, says the review maps out a raft of ambitious changes that will put additional pressures on schools and the RTLB network (Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour) to implement – but no funding has been announced.

DFNZ today released a plain English summary of the review recommendations, following further analysis of the report, liaison with Ministry of Education to obtain further details and discussions with principals and RTLBs.

The DFNZ summary, prepared as part of this week's Dyslexia Awareness Week activity, is as follows:

1. High schools must now proactively identify and assess all NCEA level students that they suspect are dyslexic or that learn differently – so that they can apply, where appropriate, for NZQA Special Assessment Conditions (SACs) such as reader or writer assistance, computer use, or extra time
2. At the same time, NZQA is now focused on having schools provide alternative evidence as the primary tool to support SACs applications, rather than supply an educational psychologist report paid for by parents
3. This will require schools to invest significant time and resources into alternative evidence, using teacher observation and assessment information on each individual student's capabilities
4. For low decile schools, and particularly the 35% mainly low decile schools now being targeted as never having put in a SAC application, this will create enormous pressure in learning how to identify relevant students let alone assess them to the alternative evidence level
5. For high decile and private schools which already have the highest percentage of SAC applications, this also means having to invest more time and resources in this area. In these schools, it is currently the norm for parents to pay for an educational psychologist's report for SAC applications. While some parents may still want to do this as it may provide additional information that could be of value to their child's education, the bottom line is that they don't have to – the onus has switched to schools to follow the alternative evidence model

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6. Where high schools struggle to activate this, the RTLB (Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour) service is being tasked with making this happen. It is anticipated that the number of SAC students in all schools will, over time, start to resemble the same percentage seen in those schools that are already proactive. This is conservatively 8-10%, which would translate to around 12,500 applications – a three-fold increase.
7. The RTLB network is already under-resourced and underfunded. There are only just over 900 RTLBs in New Zealand and they currently only work with students from year one up to year 10. More RTLBs will need to be deployed to deal with NZQA level students (11-13) years and they will have to be trained to provide the level of detail NZQA requires in an alternative evidence application.
8. All these changes have to happen in a very tight timeframe, to meet the SAC application deadline of April 17. This date, announced as part of the SAC review, is only a one week extension on the original deadline of April 10. A further extension is available upon request to May 5.
9. The 'elephant in the room' on all this is where the money is coming from. So far, no statement on how these changes will be funded has been made
10. NZQA also says it has streamlined the SAC application process to make it quicker and easier to use. However, it will still take around two hours per student for a school to infill forms for a straightforward application, with typing and handwriting speed tests and additional assessments requiring significant extra time on top of that
11. With the level of engagement now demanded, high schools will naturally start to explore SAC provisions for years 9 and 10. They will also place a greater importance on getting information about a student's learning profile and what accommodations have worked for the student from primary schools in the transition process
12. The Ministry of Education says it will work with RTLBs, NZQA, and schools to make better use of the National Standards achievement data to identify students who may require SAC in the future, transferring information about students as they move through school and particularly as they leave year 8 and transition to secondary school
13. This means primary schools will have to invest increased time and resource into identifying and supporting students and ensuring base-line accommodations are aligned with the high school process
14. Clearly, the Government will also need to provide extra funding to accommodate this widening of the SAC model to earlier years

Dyslexia Advocacy Week is designed to provide parents with explicit knowledge about their child's rights, including access to SACs, and how these can be accommodated in the classroom. And to highlight simple, practical steps for teachers and schools to make this happen. The full SAC Review and other Dyslexia Advocacy Week resources are available from the DFNZ website

www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz/dyslexiaadvocacy/allow_competence.html

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